Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal
IEEPJ
University of Hormozgan
Online ISSN: 2588 - 4395
Homepage: https://ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir

Meta-analysis of the Sociological Factors Influencing Singleness among Iranian Young Adults (A Case Study of Individuals Aged 25 to 40 in Tehran)

Mohammad Nemati[1] | Taghi Azad Aramaki[2]✉ | Alieh Shekarbeagi[3] |

1. PhD Student in Sociology, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: mohammad1367nemati@gmail.com
2. Corresponding author, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: azadarmaki@gmail.com
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: a.shekarbeagi@iauctb.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received 28 March 2022
Received in revised form 15 Jun. 2023
Accepted 05 Aug. 2023
Published online 01 December 2023

Keywords:
Singleness,
Sociological Factors,
SEM,
Iranian Young Adults

ABSTRACT

Objective: Evolutionary psychology posits that humans tend to naturally choose mates based on traits that signal reproductive fitness. Nevertheless, contemporary Iranian society is witnessing a trend towards delayed marriage and a growing individuals' inclination towards singleness. This research aimed to explore this phenomenon by conducting a structural equation model focusing on singleness in Iran, particularly seeking to comprehensively understand the sociological factors influencing the decision of young adults aged 25 to 40 in Tehran to remain single.

Methods: To explore this subject comprehensively, a mixed research approach, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative methods, was employed. In the qualitative phase, an extensive review of published articles in the relevant field was conducted. Additionally, a subset of the sample population, consisting of 384 individuals, was analyzed using Cochran's sampling method to validate the qualitative findings. The research outcomes, derived from both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions, illuminated a multitude of factors influencing the inclination of Iranian youth toward singleness.

Results: These findings, obtained through thorough analysis, underscored the significant impact of various factors, including social, economic, political, and cultural influences, as well as the personal characteristics of unmarried individuals and their level of education.

Conclusions: These factors collectively contribute to the prevalence of singleness.

Cite this article: Nemati, M., Azad Aramaki, T. & Shekarbeagi, A. (2023). Meta-analysis of the sociological factors influencing singleness among Iranian young adults (a case study of individuals aged 25 to 40 in Tehran). *Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal*, 5 (4), 300-309. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22034/5.4.300

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Publisher: University of Hormozgan.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22034/5.4.300

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[DOI: 10.22034/5.4.300]

Introduction

The conditions of modernity promote the examination of the dialectical relationship between the local and the global, thus leading to the globalization and transformation of personal identity (Callero, 2008). The establishment of extensive social connections directly influences the alterations in the private aspects of individuals' lives. Throughout the various stages of one's life, the reorganization of psychological processes becomes necessary, resulting in the emergence of different lifestyles (Bolognani, 2014). Modernity influences social relations by providing specific paths and directions that are appropriate for different social situations, thereby creating a new world (Giddens, 2020). The mentality of individuals is shaped by processes such as "globalization," "de-traditionalization," and social reevaluation. In new societies, living conditions are increasingly influenced by individuals' own actions, which are directed towards managing or challenging the risks and opportunities they have created. The family, as the fundamental unit of society, plays a crucial role in the social and cultural growth and development of a society (Kellermanns et al., 2008). It is constantly influenced by both external and internal factors, causing it to undergo changes in its structure. This phenomenon is observed in various cultural and structural realms within a country, including Iran and the rest of the world. In Iran, there has been a general abnormality in terms of the age of marriage or the decision to remain single, as young people easily disregard the traditional norms surrounding marriage due to the influence of globalization and Western cultures (Lashkari & Jahanbakhsh, 2023). Consequently, they have formed a new identity for themselves and have questioned the previous structures of the family, leading to the creation of a new familial structure. This research aims to examine the factors that contribute to the choice of single life and celibacy.

Giddens (2020) argues that men and women can experience happiness together and assume the responsibility of raising children without the institution of marriage. By introducing the notion of the "pure relationship," Giddens (2020) asserts the shift away from the traditional view of the family as a unit of production and economics. Instead, he highlights that contemporary couples base their relationships on emotions and intimacy. In this modern era, the pure relationship emerges as a novel form of marital bond, prioritizing the quality and satisfaction of the individuals involved. The desirability of such a relationship is derived solely from the essence of the

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connection, minimizing the influence of external obligations on its continuation. Unlike in the past, a pure relationship is not reliant on external and economic factors, but rather appears to exist in a state of autonomy. Therefore, Giddens' emphasis on marriage has shifted, moving away from external and predetermined requirements (Giddens, 2020). Instead, it has evolved into a form of communication, serving as the catalyst for its establishment and perseverance. This unique emotional satisfaction arises from cohabitation and close companionship with a desirable spouse. According to Giddens, the model of marriage and the formation of an intimate bond, known as the pure relationship, transcends gender. It is directed by the individual will of both men and women. Unlike the past, the decision to marry or enter a new relationship is not solely based on the man's will. Women now have an equal standing in this regard, with a will focused on their own individuality. Thus, voluntary participation in this relationship stands as one of its fundamental characteristics (Lawal, 2023).

The determinism that governed gender relations in the past, leading to the selection of partners based on societal norms, has largely vanished. The logic underlying Giddens' model of connection is not rooted in economics or external factors. Consequently, one's social position no longer determines their role in family and marriage relations (Lawal, 2023). As a result, Giddens (2020) places great emphasis on the principle of "emotional democracy" as the foundation for a desirable family in the modern world. This principal advocates for equality between men and women in the formation of bonds (ibid: 104). Giddens views the pure relationship as terminable at will, sustained only as long as it remains beneficial to the individual. Restricting and making divorce more difficult is not an effective solution to the crisis of collapse in the modern world. In fact, it is likely to have the opposite effect, discouraging people from entering into marriage. Giddens considers divorce to be a gender-neutral entity, just like marriage, placing the decision to end a pure relationship within the hands of both parties (Giddens & Pierson, 1998).

Cohabitation, an alternative to official marriage, has been seen as a contributing factor to moral decline in the West. It involves a man and a woman living together for a temporary and unspecified period, with minimal moral restrictions and no limitations imposed by Sharia law (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 2019). Cohabitation is essentially a form of marriage and sexual activity without the formal registration of the marital bond, often referred to as "white marriage" (Sassler & Lichter, 2020), while this phenomenon is not new globally, it has caused cultural shock in Iran. It is

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considered a societal plague and a significant issue that undermines trust among members of society. The erosion of trust in social relationships and the increase in various moral deviations at the societal level have also affected family institutions and human connections, leading to a significant deterioration in the quality of interpersonal communication. Young people in Iran, especially in major cities like Tehran, mistrust each other due to the prevalence of extramarital and familial relationships. In these urban areas, there are numerous locations where sexual relationships can be easily established, leading individuals to become distrustful of the opposite sex and reluctant to enter into more serious relationships. The resulting social fear prevents them from starting a family. From Giddens' perspective, social relations are subject to the influence of modernity, and the undeniable impact of modernity extends to all types of relationships, including kinship ties, personal relationships, and other similar elements (Giddens, 2020). According to Giddens, in the contemporary era, kinship ties have been scrutinized and it cannot be argued that kinship still plays the same role as money does in regulating the daily lives of the majority of people (Dawson, 2010). The analysis of the place and connections of relatives in the context of modernity no longer serves as the foundation for trust and sincere relationships to the same extent as it did in the past (Giddens, 2016).

The modernization approach, influenced by the Western concept of development and progress, emphasizes characteristics and elements such as industrialization, urbanization, modern education, modern healthcare, technology, mass media, transportation, and communication. The introduction of these elements into any traditional society leads to changes and structural transformations. These structural changes are primarily explained through modernization indicators, including industrial growth, urbanization, education, income and consumption, transportation and communication, and various forms of new technologies (Zahedi et al., 2013). Therefore, when explaining the structural changes in the family, the modernization theory focuses on the changes in the social, economic, and political structures of society. Similarly, William Good (Cherlin, 2012) proposes the concept of a global revolution in family patterns, highlighting the extent to which modernization influences family and marriage patterns and arguing that the process of modernization affects the family and its dimensions at individual and social levels. The modernization approach to the study of family changes is based on the belief that the institution of

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the family undergoes changes and transformations under the influence of modernization elements, both in terms of its structure and functionality. Throughout the modernization process, traditional family values lose their vibrancy. Ultimately, modernization is a form of social order that liberates the social action system from the realm of predetermined rules or obligations and actions.

According to Giddens, modern society is a society that has surpassed hegemony and has emptied local arenas of action, opening its doors to uncertain and ambiguous futures (Shekarbeygi, 2017). The internet and satellite technology have become sources of confusion, instability, and disorganization, resulting in identity inconsistencies within global society. Based on the previous research findings and the field observations conducted by the authors, the present investigation has been undertaken with the objective of conducting an inquiry to elucidate the sociological factors contributing to singleness in Iran, more specifically among the younger demographic aged between 25 and 40 in the capital city of Tehran. Based on this, the hypothesis of the research states that cultural factors, social factors, economic factors, political factors, personality traits, responsibility of people in the family and unsuccessful associations of people significantly predict the tendency to singleness (celibacy). The research model is presented in Figure 1.

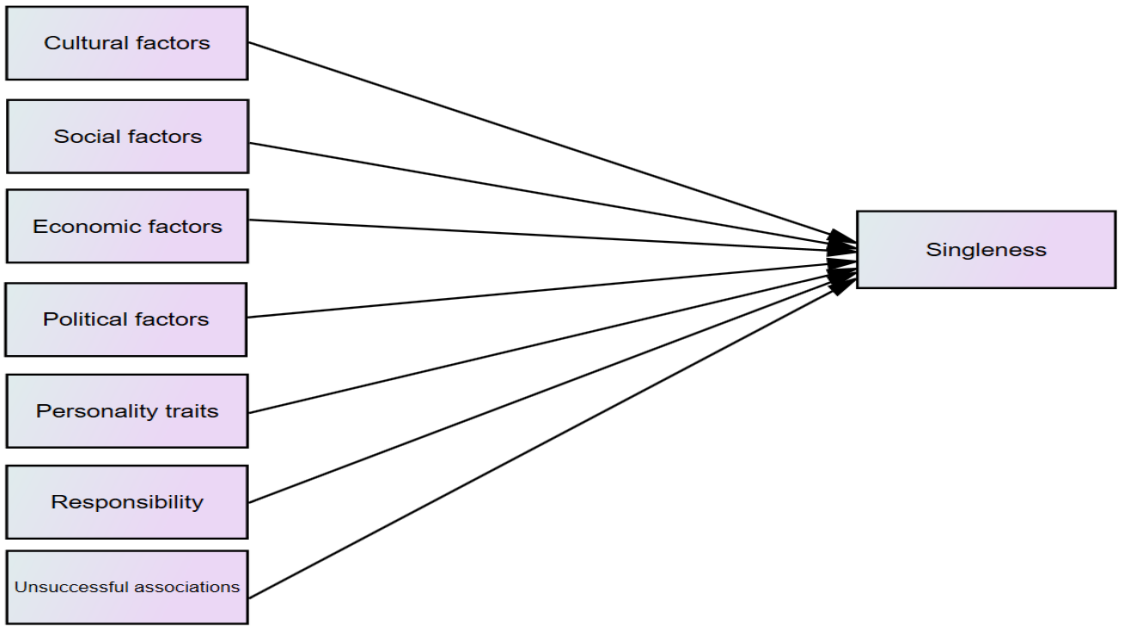

Fig 1. The research model

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Material and Methods

The current research is a correlational study that has tested the research hypotheses using the structural equation modeling method and research model was examined using PLS software The statistical population of this research was young people aged 25-40 in Tehran, 384 of whom were selected by random sampling and answered the questionnaire. In order to comply with ethical considerations, before answering the questionnaires, the participants completed the informed consent form. The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire, which was based on descriptive codes obtained from interview texts in the qualitative part of the research and based on 41 sub-themes and 7 main themes including: the culture governing individuals and society, the economic conditions of society, political factors, social factors, personality traits, responsibility of people in the family and unsuccessful associations of people have been compiled. The reliability of this questionnaire was obtained with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 70%. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha of questionnaire factors are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha of questionnaire factors

Variable	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	Status
Cultural factors	0.82	0.749	Suitable
Social factors	0.87	0.83	Suitable
Economic factors	0.87	0.77	Suitable
Political factors	0.94	0.92	Suitable
Personality traits	0.85	0.80	Suitable
Responsibility of people in the family	0.81	0.74	Suitable
Unsuccessful associations of people	0.83	0.84	Suitable

Results

The proposed model was analyzed by PLS software. Table 1 shows beta coefficients, T values and the significance level of factors related to the tendency to singleness. The analyzed model is also presented in Figure 2.

Table 2. Beta coefficients, T values and the significance level of factors related to singleness

Variable	Beta	T value	p
Cultural factors	0.75	32.51	0.001
Social factors	0.82	31.70	0.001
Economic factors	0.82	33.23	0.001
Political factors	0.80	27.50	0.001
Personality traits	0.77	18.02	0.001
Responsibility of people in the family	0.70	3.95	0.001
Unsuccessful associations of people	0.81	28.54	0.001

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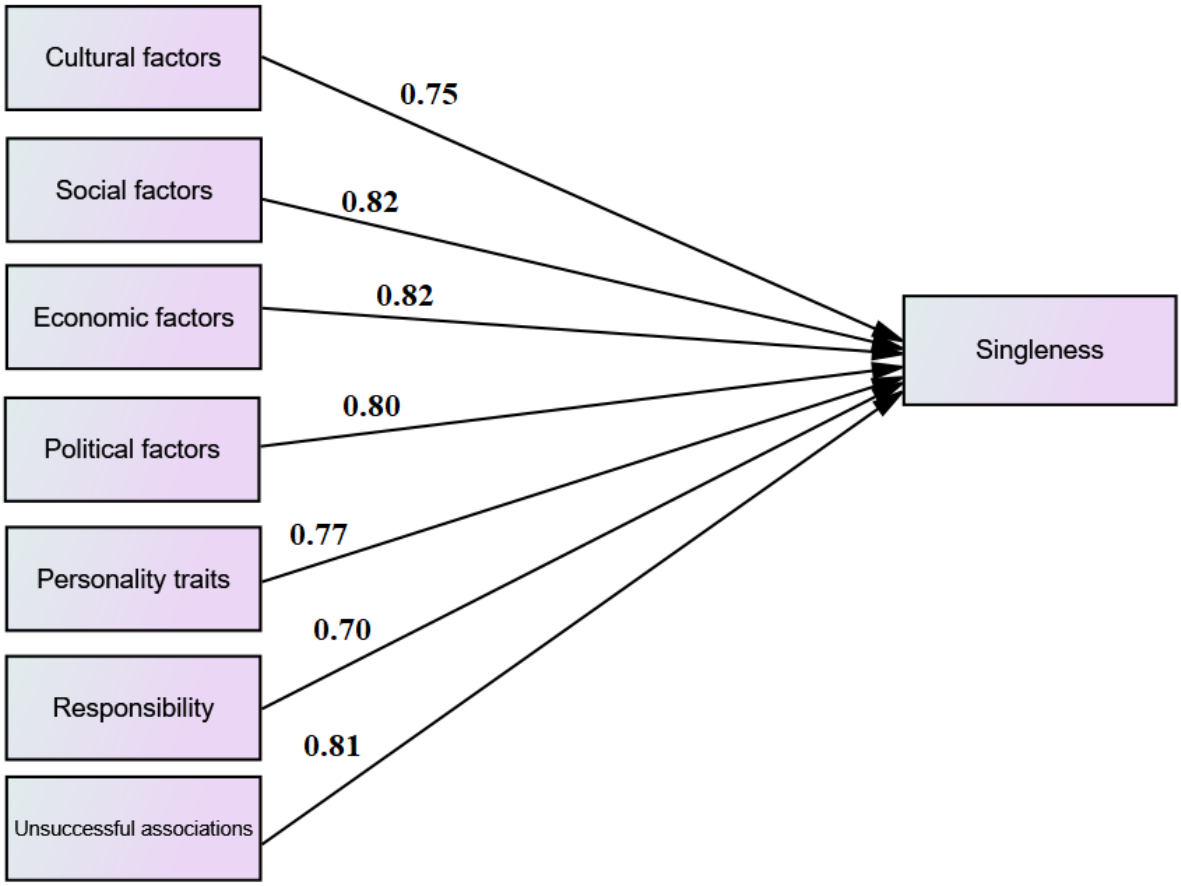

Fig 2. The analyzed model

Based on the findings, cultural, social, political, economic factors, personality traits, responsibility and unsuccessful associations significantly predict the tendency to singleness within the examined group.

Discussion

The findings of the study demonstrate that the incorporation of novel communication technologies within Iranian society and families has resulted in significant transformations within the social and cultural domains. Conventional patterns and traditional values have lost their efficacy within the community compared to previous eras. Conversely, economic development strategies and the shift

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towards competitive capitalism, which have engendered precarious economic conditions, have led to a rise in the average age of marriage. Consequently, there has been an increase in the inclination towards premarital relationship patterns, with many young individuals adopting concealed patterns wherein sexual relations are established with mutual consent and often with the intention of seeking pleasure. These obtained results align with earlier investigations (Aghajanian et al., 2018; Danesh et al., 2019; Lashkari & Jahanbakhsh, 2023; Zahedi et al., 2013).

In contemporary times, marriage is no longer obligatory. Young individuals acknowledge that they can lead fulfilling lives without entering into matrimony, and they harbor apprehensions regarding the potential costs and damages that may arise post-marriage. When an individual perceives that the traditional approach of acquainting oneself with a potential spouse through marriage is unsuitable, and simultaneously witnesses the failures of those in their immediate surroundings in their own relationships and marriages, they consequently establish stringent criteria for themselves and adopt a novel lifestyle.

By utilizing the findings obtained from research conducted on the factors influencing the choice of remaining single and the inclination towards celibacy, it becomes evident that various factors contribute to the occurrence of this phenomenon. These factors range from the advent of modernity to the advancements in communication, cultural, and political technologies, each of which exerts its own distinct influence. The influence of modernity has permeated into the diverse fabric of people's lives, particularly in countries such as Iran, resulting in an abundance of changes within families. As can be gleaned from the theories put forth by Giddens and other scholars in the realm of new technologies and modernity, the new structure (modernity) challenges the traditional structure and prevailing traditional culture through various cultural assaults. This has given rise to unique modes of social interaction, novel forms of family formation or cohabitation, as well as phenomena such as white marriages and other types of interpersonal relationships.

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[DOI: 10.22034/5.4.300]

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

M.N, T.A and A.S contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Funding

The authors did (not) receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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