

THE RETREAT FROM MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES IN FAMILY RESEARCH

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THE RETREAT FROM MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD: EXAMINING THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DECLINING RATES

EDITED BY

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FOREWORD

Early in 2024, the global population finally surpassed 8 billion. This moment sparked considerable debate among demographers and sociologists, as it again raised concerns about the growing population and the consequences, thereof. Such concerns were hardly new, however, as researchers in the 1960s and 1970s had expressed considerable alarm about increasing population size. On the global scale, it appeared that fertility rates were rising at a rapid rate, while mortality and morbidity rates were on the decline. Within accompanying increases in longevity, the general sentiment was that the world was on a reckless path of population growth which would only end with horrible consequences (e.g., starvation, global war). Of course, the feared explosion of population growth, while statistically possible, did not come to pass. It is ironic, to say the least, that many contemporary researchers are now expressing concerns that the global population may soon be headed in the opposite direction – shrinking, rather than increasing, due to massive shifts in fertility patterns.

The fears expressed in the 1960s and 1970s about rapid population growth were based upon prevailing marriage and fertility patterns of previous decades, wherein the majority of individuals generally saw marriage and childbearing as both desirable and necessary to their sense of accomplishment as adults. However, these same decades were also the time in which substantial variations in marriage and fertility began to transpire. Divorce, once regarded as almost a taboo thing to do, became increasingly viewed as acceptable, thus lending to increases in separation and divorce rates. Cohabitation, wherein adults could live together without being legally married to one another, was also once regarded as immoral and unacceptable by societal standards, quickly became not only permissible, but was eventually viewed as an integral part of a lasting relationship. And, of course, fertility rates also began to shift significantly during the 1960s and 1970s, as the “baby boom” period came to an end and the “baby bust” period, as made evident by sharp declines in fertility rates, began.

Family sociologists have long posited that, as a social institution, the family is subjected to all prevailing changes in society. As such, the structure of the family, along with its accompanying norms, does not remain static and unchanging. Instead, the family is a very dynamic entity which has long been regarded as the original social institution. William J. Goode, the prominent family researcher, proposed that the family will necessarily change as societies, themselves, change over time. He contended that, as societies modernize, populations will begin to shift toward living in urban areas, educational attainment will become a primary goal of young people, and geographic mobility (due to employment) will become increasingly the norm. All of these changing factors, Goode argued, will make the nuclear form of the family become the more “efficient” form, and that the

extended family, while still present, will become less central to the lives of most individuals. His predictions about family and modernization can certainly be seen in the many changes in family structures and norms which have occurred around the globe over the past century. Seemingly, societal modernization has become synonymous with declines in marriage and fertility, while also being associated with increases in cohabitation, childlessness, and singlehood.

There are, of course, many variations in these patterns which need to be recognized. In regard to childbearing, most modernized nations have clearly experienced substantial declines in fertility. Many countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, have undergone dramatic decreases in their respective fertility rates, leading their governments to offer incentives to young couples to bear children. These incentives, along with other similar campaigns, have largely proved to be ineffective. In other countries, such as Nigeria, Uganda, and Angola, their respective fertility rates are among the highest in the world and are associated with massive population increases. Similarly, while many countries have experienced declines in the proportion of families headed by two parents, many have seen tremendous increases in the numbers of single parent families. In addition, many cohabiting couples (whose lifestyle choice was once regarded as highly individualistic) have children. Such cohabiting households, wherein there are two adults and children, are seemingly indistinguishable from traditional married-couple families.

There is little doubt that societal change and modernization have affected the structure and norms of the family, as posited by William J. Goode. However, our understanding of the many factors which have brought about these contemporary patterns is still limited and absolutely warrants further study. In the same vein, we also need to know more about how these evolving patterns are likely to shape family structures and norms, as time moves forward. In this volume of *Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research*, we have assembled a collection of researches whose works will advance our knowledge in those very areas.

The first part of the volume contains studies which examine the reasons, views, and values toward marriage. In "Challenges and Choices: Unveiling the Motivators Behind Delayed Marriage in Iran," Milad Bagi examines the patterns of marriage postponement in Iran during the period from 1984 through 2022. The findings confirm that young adults are postponing marriage at substantial rates. Among the reasons for men doing so are those related to economic security and stability, such as finding a job, financial concerns, and housing. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to view finding the right partner, educational attainment, and conducive circumstances as their reasons for postponement. In "Understanding the Cognitive and Emotional Processes of Singles from the Perspective of Attachment Theory," Lucija Šutić, Karmen Korda Orlović, Matea Šoštarić, and Margareta Jelić examine the role of attachment dimensions (avoidant and anxious) on maladaptive cognitive and emotional processes in single young adults. Fear of intimacy and low motivation for new relationships were found to be significantly associated with both avoidant and anxious attachment among college students. These complicating factors are regarded as contributing to the appeal of singlehood among young adults.

Yiqing Gan and Wenjing Qin pursue an examination of how Chinese individuals define the purpose of marriage in “Transforming Marriage Purpose in Contemporary China: The Role of Cohort and College Education.” Using data from the Chinese General Social Survey, they find that post-materialistic purposes of marriage have gained prominence among young adults, and that college education is associated with a less traditional view of marriage. Given the rise in educational attainment in China, it appears likely that marriage rates there will continue to decline. In “It’s About Survivors, Not Sex: Exploring Future Aspirations of Undergraduate Survivors of Sexual Assault,” Ioana Podarita and Christina L. Scott examine the impact of sexual violence upon the marriage aspirations of Gen Z. They find that the experience of sexual violence is associated with lower self-esteem and lower optimism toward marriage. Sexual violence was found to affect both females and males, alike, and raises concerns for better social support for victims of sexual assault.

The second part of the volume focuses upon the reasons, views, and values toward parenthood. In “Reasons, Views, and Values Toward Becoming a Parent: A Mixed-Method Examination,” Brittany Stahnke, Morgan Cooley, and Amy Blackstone examine the most prevalent reasons as to why individuals in their sample prompted them to become parents. Among the primary reasons were the love for children, a desire for a family, an interest in creating life, and a basic desire to parent. While such reasons proved to be quite influential, the findings suggest that many parents do not really put much thought into their choice. Karen Benjamin Guzzo and Sarah R. Hayford, in “Subjective Evaluations of Personal and Public Well-Being and Expected Future Childbearing,” assess how individuals’ expectations for having children are influenced by factors such as satisfaction with their own lives, their understanding of challenges facing young people, their beliefs about problems in their community, and their predictions about future COVID-19 outbreaks. Using data from the American Trends Panel, they find that individuals who are more dissatisfied with their own lives are less likely to expect to have children.

In “Understanding the Lowest-Low Fertility of Contemporary China: The Multidimensional Reproductive Beliefs Among Chinese Youth,” Ting Li explores the multifaceted nature of reproductive beliefs among young adults and attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation on China’s ultra-low fertility. Li finds that the birth aspirations of young adults are often affected by a wide array of factors, including those at the macro and micro levels. Many of the prevailing factors of previous generations, such as son preference, are slowly fading but remain salient influences upon fertility plans. Zheng Mu, Mengxin Shi, Yu Zhao, and Chan Zhang examine how marriage and fertility intentions are not necessarily as intertwined in China as previously thought. In “(De)Coupling of Marriage and Fertility Intentions: Evidence From a Survey of College Students in China,” they find that educational performance has a substantial bearing upon students’ marriage and fertility intentions. Women, in particular, are shown to view childbearing as a meaningful individual actualization and to not adhere to traditional standards concerning marriage and childbearing. In “‘I’ll Take One for the Team’: Individual- and Couple-Level Decisions About Sterilization,” Sharon

Sassler, Amanda Jayne Miller, and Katharina Geppert examine the complicated decision-making which precedes the choice to be surgically sterilized. Not surprisingly, many more men had contemplated having a vasectomy, as compared to the number who actually did so. A variety of factors influenced such decisions, including the timing of marriage, monetary costs, and nervousness about the procedure. The role of a partner's encouragement and prompting was also shown to have substantial bearing upon the choice to obtain a vasectomy, underscoring the manner in which such decisions are made both individually and jointly.

The chapters in the third part of the volume examine the diverse nature of marriage and parenthood. Karel Karsten Himawan and Christina Claudia examine the complicated nature of being unmarried in Indonesia. In "Single But Not Singular: Exploring the Diverse Realities of Singleness in Indonesia," they find that marriage postponement is influenced by both situational and dispositional factors. With the traditional boundaries of Indonesian culture, social stigma is often attached to those remaining unmarried, yet these norms are beginning to change. Singleness, they find, should not be viewed as a homogeneous category. In "Navigating Romance: The Enduring Challenges of Black College-Educated Women," Sarah Adeyinka-Skold and Austin Lee probe the barriers to relationship formation among heterosexual, never-married Black college-educated women, along with how they differ by age. For such women, a variety of structural and cultural barriers limit relationship opportunities, with these barriers being more acute for middle-aged women. Many of the women in their sample utilize different strategies to make singlehood more acceptable and enjoyable. Their work underscores the need to better understand the many factors which influence singlehood.

Margaret Gough Courtney examines the fluctuations in marriage and cohabitation in the United States, wherein the former is becoming increasingly more common. In "Trends in Cohabitation and Marriage By Experience of Economic Vulnerability in the United States," she uses data from the Current Population Survey to estimate trends in cohabitation and marriage, along with how economic vulnerability and social welfare participation may be associated with these trends. Economic vulnerability is shown to be a salient predictor of cohabitation, yet the need to consider multiple measures of such are demonstrated. In "Moving Together or Living Apart: Cross-border Couples Between Hong Kong and Shenzhen Under the COVID-19 Pandemic," Xinyu Shi and Jing Song examine how young cross-border couples decided to move together or live apart when the pandemic led to the closure of the border. Among women, individualistic desires, self-development, or relationship satisfaction were factors when couples decided to live apart. Among those who remained together, it was more frequently the woman who was forced to quit her job. Their findings indicate that gender and relationship dynamics are undergoing change within China. Finally, in "Gendered Employment Realities in Dual-Earner Couples: A Framework for Understanding the Differential Effects of Earning Levels for Evaluations of Mothers and Fathers," Ziding Shen and Jody Clay-Warner propose that women's retreat from parenthood may be associated with the disadvantage they face in parenting evaluations, relative to men, in dual-earner couples. They find that

perceived conflict and devotion are positively associated with parenting evaluations, and that working women are regarded as experiencing more work–family conflict.

The valuable research provided by the authors in this volume both reveal many intriguing factors affecting the retreat from marriage and childbearing, around the globe, but also raise many additional questions which warrant further investigation. The declines in marriage and fertility rates, particularly in the global north, have generated considerable debate about the changing nature of the family as a social institution, and also raise concerns about population changes which may yield considerable impacts upon other social institutions. The central factor among all of these issues – change – is going to continue to affect marriage and fertility patterns around the world. We gratefully acknowledge and offer our most sincere appreciation to all of the contributing authors in this volume, along with the many reviewers and the helpful staff at Emerald Publishing. Thank you, one and all!

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Zheng Mu

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PART 1

REASONS, VIEWS, AND VALUES TOWARD MARRIAGE

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CHAPTER 1

CHALLENGES AND CHOICES: UNVEILING THE MOTIVATORS BEHIND DELAYED MARRIAGE IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

The postponement of marriage in Iran poses serious concerns as childbearing happens only after official marriage and within the family. The present study follows two primary objectives: first, investigating the marriage postponement at the macro-level during 1984–2022; second, elucidating the reasons for delayed marriage through micro-data analysis. We analyzed information from 3,891 who have experienced delayed marriage. The findings at the macro-level indicate a noticeable postponement in marriage, particularly among people aged 20–30. The percentage of married women aged 25–29 has declined from 90% in 1984 to 60% in 2022, while for men, this reduction has dropped from 76% to 30%. At the micro-level, the findings reveal that women and men have married 5 and 5.3 years later than their ideal age, respectively. Economic challenges, such as finding a job, financial problems, and housing concerns, were cited by 54% of men as reasons for delaying marriage. Conversely, women commonly cited reasons such as difficulty in finding the right partner, lack of conducive circumstances, and continuing education and studying. Overall, it can be argued that the postponement of marriage often stems from adverse economic conditions rather than cultural norms. Thus, the government must

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prioritize addressing youth unemployment and economic challenges, alongside implementing socio-cultural initiatives.

Keywords: Delayed marriage; Iran; economic challenges; education; women

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been a notable global trend toward delayed marriage, with the mean age at first marriage increasing by approximately two years across both genders during the first two decades of the 21st century (United Nations, 2016). Since the early 21st century, Iran has also experienced a continuous rise in the mean age of marriage. This decrease in marriage rates is particularly concerning compared to Western societies because, in Iran, children are typically born only within official marriages due to religious laws prohibiting cohabitation and non-marital births (Bagi, 2022a, p. 36).

Marriage in Iran, like other demographic phenomena, has been affected by the economic, cultural, and political developments of the last few decades. Following the 1979 revolution and the adoption of pronatalist policies, the government actively encouraged population growth, promoted early marriage, and offered incentives for it. Consequently, marriage rates surged in the immediate aftermath of the revolution and continued to rise for several decades. In the decade before the revolution, an average of approximately 150,000 marriages were registered annually, while three years post-revolution, this number exceeds over 300,000. However, demographic shifts, including the passage of the baby boom generation (1980s birth cohort) from the marriageable age, cultural transformations, particularly increased educational attainment for both genders, and economic challenges over the past two decades, have contributed to declining marriage rates and delays in marriages. Consequently, the decline in the total fertility rate, which had fallen below the replacement level in 2006, has persisted and has dropped to reach 1.65 children per woman by 2023 (Rezaei, 2024). Abbasi-Shavazi (2000) showed that the largest share of fertility decline in Iran was due to delayed marriage. It is also expected that Iran's population face rapid aging due to persistently low fertility rates and increasing life expectancy. The aging trend is accelerated by the baby boom generation reaching old age, projecting Iran to experience one of the fastest rates of population aging (Bagi, 2024; Mehri et al., 2020).

The concern over these consequences has prompted the government to actively pursue strategies aimed at increasing marriage rates through the implementation of various policies and programs. Since the revision of population policies in the early 2000s, a total of 11 laws, policies, bills, and executive plans have been formulated and ratified to bolster marriage rates. For instance, the Youth Marriage Facilitation Law (2005), the Youth Marriage Reserve Fund Bill (2005), the Family Formation Policy (2005), the Marriage National white paper (2014), and Comprehensive Family Policies (2016) are some of the programs designed to facilitate marriage. In a recent initiative in early 2021, the Iranian Parliament

allocated a budget of 19 trillion tomans ($\approx$ 475 million US\$) for the “Family and Youth Population Protection Law.” The aim was the augmentation of marriage rates and encouragement of childbearing (Bagi, 2023). Several provisions of this law are as follows: Encouragement and promotion of marriage at a younger age by religious missionaries, inclusion of marriage and family formation topics in university curricula, granting higher marriage loan amounts to individuals who marry at a younger age, prioritization of married individuals for employment in the public sector labor market, mandate for the Ministry of Health to promote the positive effects of a short interval between marriage and the first birth, removal of all instructions and guidance related to contraception and abortion from health centers, prohibition of the distribution of contraceptives in health centers, and healthcare providers are prohibited from promoting contraception or performing fetal screening (Islamic Parliament Research Center (IPRC), 2021). Despite these concerted efforts, recent statistics indicate a continued decline in fertility rates and a rise in the mean age of marriage (Fathi, 2020; National Organization for Civil Registration (NOCR), 2024). For instance, the number of marriages and births in 2022 declined by over 8% and 4%, respectively, compared to 2021. Additionally, the number of births registered in the first nine months of 2023 hit its lowest point in the last decade (NOCR, 2024). Moreover, reports are suggesting a waning interest among young people in embarking on family formation (Rezadoust & Mombeni, 2011, p. 105). In explaining the reasons for this phenomenon, researchers have highlighted several factors, including economic pressures, the expansion of education particularly among women, cultural and value shifts, urbanization, and the rise in youth unemployment (Bagi, 2022a, p. 37).

Therefore, population policies in Iran have been heavily criticized by economists, social scientists, and demographers. There is no consensus on the potential success of these policies. Importantly, people’s responses to these policies are not always straightforward. According to Davis (1967), individuals’ reactions to population programs and governmental policies are shaped by personal aspirations rather than national objectives. Depending on the resources available to them, individuals may respond differently, such as by opting for celibacy or delaying marriage.

In general, it can be argued that the delay in marriage is no longer just a personal concern but a significant social issue. Youths, compelled to remain at home due to societal norms such as the prohibition of cohabitation and sexual relations outside of marriage, alongside those who choose not to marry, have transformed celibacy into a widespread concern within Iranian families (Hosseini et al., 2019). Consequently, comprehending and acknowledging the delay in marriage has become crucial for policymakers, sociologists, and demographers aiming to grasp the broader ramifications of this phenomenon on societal structures. Understanding and addressing the obstacles to marriage is crucial, as their removal can significantly influence fertility rates in Iran. Furthermore, marriage represents a stage of embracing independent living, shouldering responsibilities, and alleviating familial concerns about their children’s future. In religiously conservative societies such as Iran, marriage serves as a deterrent from sin and illicit sexual relations. Studies indicate that a

significant factor driving early marriages for girls in Iran is families' apprehension about their daughters' relationships. The importance of femininity, fear of dishonor, and the possibility of sexual activity prompt families to arrange marriages for their daughters at a young age (Eftekharzadeh, 2015; Enayat & Zare, 2023; Rahimi et al., 2023).

The present study holds significant importance in several aspects and differs from prior research in various ways. First, most previous studies on marriage were conducted on a cross-sectional and regional basis. Due to these diverse timeframes and locations, comparing regions and periods became nearly impractical. Also, this study aims to initially assess macro-level changes and then delve into micro-level analysis to understand the factors contributing to delayed marriages. We study the reason for delayed marriage among recently married people, while previous studies have explored reasons for marriage postponement among already-married individuals. Although the experiences of these people are valuable, their experiences belong to the past. It should be noted that for effective short- and long-term planning, understanding current societal conditions is crucial. Analyzing the causes of marriage delay among recently married people offers more precise insight into current societal conditions and marriage obstacles. Additionally, this research utilizes data from a national survey, encompassing all ethnic groups in Iran. Consequently, the knowledge derived provides a comprehensive understanding of Iran's various regions because they exhibit distinct demographic landscapes.

Accordingly, this study encompasses three primary objectives. First, it seeks to analyze marriage trends (1984–2022) at a macro-level, spanning various periods and generations, to discern the pattern of postponement of marriage in Iran. Second, it aims to delve into the delay in marriage at the individual level, drawing upon data obtained from the comprehensive National Marriage Survey conducted during 2018–2019. Third, it endeavors to pinpoint the underlying reasons for the delay in marriage as reported by the individuals themselves. These comprehensive analyses are poised to shed light on the phenomenon of delayed marriage in Iran, offering insights at both the micro- and macro-levels. Furthermore, by gaining a deeper understanding of the multifaceted aspects contributing to this trend, policymakers and researchers can develop more effective strategies to address this societal phenomenon.

2. BACKGROUND

Marriage holds a significant social status in Iran and enjoys support from governmental bodies, religious institutions, and the general populace. This elevated importance of marriage stems from the fact that cohabitation and sexual relations outside of marriage are both legally and religiously prohibited in Iran (Bagi, 2022a, p. 36). Consequently, marriage assumes a pivotal role in shaping familial dynamics (Sayyah & Hoseini Mojarad, 2011; Tayebnia et al., 2023, p. 101), and any shifts or alterations in its trends and patterns evoke concerns across various societal strata, potentially heralding changes in the broader social fabric.

However, Iran's economic, social, and political landscape has undergone substantial transformations over the past decades, with profound implications for its population dynamics, particularly in the realm of marriage. For instance, the legal marriage age stood at 18 for women and 20 for men before the 1979 revolution (Modiri et al., 2021). Following the revolution, demographic policies underwent revision, accompanied by the implementation of pronatalist measures by the government (Abbasi-Shavazi & Hoseini-Chavoshi, 2011). Consequently, the legal marriage age was decreased to 9 for women and 15 for men. Subsequently, in 2007, the minimum marriage age was established at 13 and 15 for girls and boys, respectively. Nonetheless, marriages below these stipulated ages are permissible with the consent of a guardian, subject to expediency considerations, and judicial approval (Modiri et al., 2021).

Due to changes in population policies and socioeconomic conditions, we have observed fluctuations in marriage rates over time. Before the 1979 revolution, the general marriage rate stood at 3.5 per 1,000, rising to 8.3 per 1,000 by 1986 (Amani, 2001). Subsequently, the general marriage rate in Iran experienced a steady increase over two decades since 1986, peaking at its highest recorded level of 12.2 per thousand in 2007. However, the number of marriages has been declining as the baby boomer generation (1980s birth cohort) passed marriageable age. Specifically, while the number of marriages had risen to 890,000 in 2010, it declined to approximately 524,000 by 2022 (Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI), 2023). Correspondingly, the general marriage rate also decreased, reaching approximately 6.1 per thousand by 2022.

Despite the decline in the number of marriages, it's essential to acknowledge that marriage remains prevalent in Iran, reflecting a positive aspect of Iran's demographic landscape. Remarkably, over 90% of Iranian men and women have entered into marriage by the age of 50. For instance, statistics from 2016 reveal that approximately 95% of Iranian men and around 90% of Iranian women aged 45–49 are ever married (SCI, 2024b).

Furthermore, some traditional marriage behaviors persist in Iran, with one notable example being the prevalence of consanguineous marriages over time. Various studies have consistently shown that approximately 30%–40% of marriages in Iran are consanguineous (Hosseini & Bagi, 2016), although there are discernible variations among different ethnic groups (Bagi & Sadeghi, 2023). Another entrenched tradition is the occurrence of early marriages for girls. Statistics indicate that 890,000 girls under 18 were married during 2006–2015, including some below the age of 10. Experts suggest that in recent years, there has been a slight increase in the number of early marriages. The latest data on vital events reveal that approximately 21% of marriages registered in Iran involved individuals under 18 in 2021. Notably, there are significant regional disparities in this regard. For instance, this percentage stands at about 40% in Sistan and Baluchestan provinces, while in Tehran, it is merely 7% (NOCR, 2024).

The persistence of these behaviors can be attributed to the influence of traditional cultural elements and the Islamic value system. Islam emphasizes marriage as sacred. It encourages the preservation of marriage and family stability and views divorce as a permissible but undesirable act. Arranged marriages and

marriages in the lower age are supported, with families pivotal in partner selection. However, significant changes regarding marriage and marital unions have been observed in Iran. For instance, the absolute celibacy rate has risen. This rate increased from 1.52% to 2.26% for men between 1966 and 2016. This increase has been even more pronounced among women, rising from 0.84% to 3.73% (Beladi Mousavi, 2017). Marriages occur at later stages, with the mean age of marriage in 2016 reaching 27.4 for men and 23 for women. Moreover, the incidence of divorce, which stood at 18,021 cases in 1976 and escalated to 137,200 cases in 2010, has continued its upward trajectory, reaching 204,301 cases by 2022. Consequently, the crude divorce rate between 2010 and 2022 has experienced a 27% increase, rising from 1.9 to 2.4 per thousand (SCI, 2023).

Additionally, the pattern of relationships between boys and girls before marriage has changed, and their role in making decisions about marriage and choosing a spouse has increased (Torabi et al., 2013). Various studies indicate the occurrence of cohabitation and sexual behavior outside of marriage among youth in Iranian metropolitan cities like Tehran (Azadarmaki et al., 2012a, 2012b; IPRC, 2014; Karimian et al., 2016; Khalajabadi Farahani, 2013; Khalajabadi Farahani et al., 2013; Khalajabadi Farahani & Mehryar, 2011; Qaderzadeh et al., 2017), and this could lead to further changes in the trends and patterns of marriage in the future. Part of these transformations is attributed to generational differences. Traditional behaviors related to marriage are less common among younger cohorts compared to older cohorts. Bagi (2022b) demonstrated that the influence of parents and relatives in choosing a spouse has diminished among younger marriage cohorts. However, in the 2010 marriage cohort, 27.1% of marriages were still decided by parents. Divorce is also more prevalent among the new generations, and they have more positive attitudes toward divorce (Bagi & Hosseini, 2021). Furthermore, the new generations perceive marriage as outdated more often than their predecessors (Bagi & Karimi Aram, 2023).

Overall, the characteristics of marriage in Iran reflect a blend of traditional and modern behaviors. Traditional practices such as high universal marriage, consanguineous marriage, and early marriage persist alongside evolving trends. Notably, we observe shifts in certain indicators, including the changing role of women in spouse selection, a rise in the mean age of marriage, and increasing divorce rates. These changes, particularly evident in the past decade, have sparked extensive debates among demographers, social thinkers, planners, and policymakers. Understanding why individuals postpone or forgo marriage is one of the crucial questions that researchers across various disciplines are actively exploring.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two of the most influential theories about marriage timing are the specialization economic model of marriage developed by Becker (1974, 1981) and marriage timing by Oppenheimer (1988, 1997). According to Becker's marriage theory, individuals considering marriage are assumed to compare the expected utility of this