Original Article

Qualitative study of social determinants of child marriage in Kurdish regions of Iran: Evidence for health promotion interventions

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Abstract:

INTRODUCTION: One of the most thought-provoking problems in the world is child marriage that is affected by various factors. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the social determinants of child marriage in Kurdish regions of Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This qualitative study was conducted using conventional content analysis approach. The participants of the study were 30 Iranian-Kurdish women married under the age of 18 who were selected through purposeful and snowballing sampling. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and face-to-face interviews and continued until the saturation of concepts was achieved. Graneheim and Lundman method was used to analyze the data, and Guba and Lincoln criteria were used to strengthen the research.

RESULTS: In general, findings include 5 categories and 17 subcategories: 1 – economic factors (financial problems and economic benefits); 2 – sociocultural factors (social customs, cultural beliefs, community encouragement, social learning, gaining prestige, and social support); 3 – individual factors (physical characteristics, personality traits, lack of awareness of the damaging consequences of early marriage, and fear of the future); 4 – family factors (dysfunctional family, weak awareness of parents, and harm prevention); and 5 – structural factors (high demand, limited access to educational services, and the lack of supportive social and legal structures).

CONCLUSION: By raising the level of awareness and attitude of girls and their families about the consequences of early marriage, creating the culture of correcting cultural beliefs and social misconceptions, passing appropriate laws, and the use of local and national media to prevent child marriage, this social harm can be reduced.

Keywords:

Child marriage, health promotion, Kurdish girls, qualitative study, social determinants

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Introduction

The family is the most important social unit of a society which is formed by marriage. One of the issues in dispute about marriage is the age of marriage, which has legal, psychological, moral, educational, and social dimensions.[1] The age of first marriage depends on the cultural, social, religious, and ethnic differences of each society.[2]

According to UNICEF, child marriages are referred to as marriages under 18.[3] This affects the lives of both sexes, but girls are more likely to suffer negative consequences.[4,5] Child marriage is one of the widespread human rights violations, which has many social and health consequences.[6] Since most of these marriages occur without the informed consent of children, they are also referred to as early marriages and forced marriages.[7]

High mortality rate, sexual abuse,[8] domestic violence,[9] unwanted pregnancy,[10] suicide,[11,12] illegal and dangerous abortion, low birth weight neonates, sexually transmitted diseases, and depression are the most common consequences of early marriage among girls.[3] Most countries have specific rules on child marriage, but these legal arrangements are not sufficient to prevent it due to factors such as poverty, strengthening social ties, and attitudes, so child marriage continues to exist.[13,14] About 12 million girls marry under the age of 18 annually.[15] Ninety-five percent of child marriages are reported to occur in middle- and low-income countries,[16] so that one out of every nine girls in developing countries marry before the age of 15 and also one out of every three girls marry before the age of 18.[17]

In Iran, as in other developing countries, child marriage is common, as child marriage rates were reported to be 19.6 in rural areas and 13.7 in urban areas. Furthermore, according to the latest census, the highest number of marriages recorded among Iranian women is related to the age group of 15–19 years.[18]

Child marriage takes place for a variety of reasons. Kamal research in Bangladesh has shown that education of women and their spouses, residence, and religion impact on girls' marriage and early pregnancy.[19] Khan and Raeside showed that girls living in the village and being Muslim were more likely to marry before the age of 18 and to have children before the age of 20.[20] In a study conducted by Ertem and Kocturk with the aim of examining beliefs and experiences about early marriage in Diyarbakir, Turkey, they found that girls' parents provide early marriage arrangements to protect their family honor, as well as some specific marriage customs such as cradle betrothal, cousin marriage and berdel (exchange of brides between two families). lead to the early marriage of girls in these areas.[21]

Child marriage is a major challenge that has many different causes and grounds that need to be identified and explained in order to take the right steps in preventing and eliminating unfortunate and devastating effects. Because every culture and country has its own view of marriage and the model of marriage varies across countries and even within one country among ethnic groups, the results of other studies in other countries, and even within Iran, among other ethnic groups cannot be generalized to Kurdish areas due to different social and cultural contexts. Hence, the necessity of studying this phenomenon becomes apparent in the areas under study. Furthermore, most studies on child marriage were quantitative[22-24] and few studies with qualitative approach and from young women's point of view have looked at this issue. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to identify the social determinants of child marriage in Kurdish regions of Iran.

Materials and Methods

The present study is a qualitative research, and a qualitative content analysis was used. Conventional content analysis is used when the purpose of the study is to discover individuals' interpretations of a phenomenon and when existing theories or research literature about the studied phenomenon is limited.[25,26] In this approach, the researcher is immersed in the data and obtains the categories and subcategories from data.[27-29] The research environment in this study was Kermanshah and Kurdistan, two provinces in Western Iran, that are Kurdish in ethnicity and share similar cultural characteristics. Participants in this study were married women who married under the age of 18. Inclusion criteria were being under 25 years of age, marriage experience before the age of 18, willingness to participate in research, willingness to share their experiences, and residence in the two provinces of Kurdistan and Kermanshah at the time of marriage and during this study. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, and in some cases, snowball sampling was used. The researchers continued the interviews until the conceptual saturation was reached, which resulted in no further new categories and themes from interview No. 23, but the researchers continued the interviews for up to 30 individuals to get more assured.

The main method of data collection in this study was a semi-structured interview. The process of data collection and analysis was continued from July 2019 to February 2020. Data were obtained from individual and face-to-face interviews with participants at their desired times and places. Most interviews took place in the morning and evening and at participants' homes, mosques, and cultural places. The duration of the interviews varied from 40 min to 90 min according to the information provided by the participants, and all interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants using a recorder. The subject guide was used during the interview to facilitate interviewing and better access to information. Part of the subject guide included the following: the causes of early marriage, how to get familiar with your spouse, your willingness or unwillingness to get married early, family attitude to early marriage, the status of child marriage in your community, the role of society, and culture in your early marriage.

Graneheim and Lundman method was used for data analysis.[25] Thus, in the first step, immediately after each interview, two members of research team typed and

stored the interviews in Word 2010 software. Second, the text of the interviews was read and reviewed by the researchers several times in order to gain a general understanding of the text of the interviews. In the third step, all the texts were read word by word and very carefully and the codes were extracted. In the fourth step, the codes that were similar in content and meaning were grouped in one category and their relation was determined. In the fifth step, the data were again classified into main categories, but more general and more abstract than the previous ones, and the themes were extracted.

In order to increase the accuracy of the research, the Lincoln and Guba criteria were followed.[30] Since the researchers in the study were native and familiar with their culture and language and had experience in qualitative research, their long-term involvement with the participants and the field of research was maintained. This helped them engage with the data and gain an in-depth understanding of participants' views, interpretations, and experiences. During the study, it was tried to have participants with maximum diversity in terms of demographic and social characteristics. The results of the data analysis were also presented to some of the participants to see if the research had properly expressed their views and experiences, which they approved the results. Thus, in this way, the credibility of the data was obtained. In order to gain confirmability, the researchers adhered to the principle of neutrality throughout the research process. In addition, the extracted codes and classes were shared among all members of the research team, as well as with experts familiar with qualitative research and child marriage, and their comments were used wherever needed (peer check). To control dependability, the researchers wrote the entire research process explicitly and clearly and also recorded the interviews and notes immediately after each interview, and all the research team members monitored the process throughout the study. In order to enhance transferability, it was also attempted to accurately describe all the process steps, participants, and path and field of the study and to include as many direct quotes as possible from the participants.

To comply with research ethics, the following items were considered: permission was obtained from the Iran University of Medical Sciences under code IR.IUMS.REC.1397.1225, to obtain written consent from all participants, to introduce themselves as well as the necessity and objectives of the research by researchers at the beginning of the interview, to observe confidentiality in publishing the research results, to give participations authorization to choose the time and place of the interview, and to interrupt it at any time.

Results

The study participants were 30 women married before the age of 18. Most of the women were under diploma (46.66%), rural (63.33%), and age 16–20 (53.33%), and their marriages were traditional (40%). Furthermore, most of them were married at the age of 16–18 (43.33%) years and had an age difference of 5–10 (43.33%) years with their spouses. The analysis of interviews revealed 5 categories, 17 subcategories [Table 1], and 485 codes which are presented along with quotes and explanations.

Economic factors
The economy has been one of the determinants of early marriage for girls in the study area, which is divided into two subcategories: financial problems and economic benefit.

Financial problems
This subcategory includes the following codes: poverty, escaping from poverty, inability to afford the costs, and preventing from further education due to high costs. In fact, many families have agreed to their children's marriage because of financial difficulties in their lives.

"We were six sisters. My father was a worker who could hardly afford us, so he gave us in marriage when the first suitor came to us" (Participant No. 16).

"My family was very poor, my mom always said "if you stay here long, you'll be miserable", so they gave me in marriage to have me get rid of that condition" (Participant No. 24).

"I was an ace student in high school. Everyone was sure that I would pass the university exam. My father gave me in marriage because of fear of not being able to afford my university" (Participant No. 13).

Poverty and financial problems have always been the cause of early marriage for girls in the study areas and even elsewhere in the world. In fact, many poor families see their daughters' marriage as an opportunity to change the status quo of the girl and the whole family, because daughters' marriages lead to disavow financial responsibility and reduce the burden of living costs on families.

Gaining economic benefits
Younger girls have always had their fans for marriage. The fans who sometimes may spend a lot of money to get these girls married so that in some cases families can change their economic condition and achieve economic benefits.

"My father owed a lot of money. Once one of his creditors came to our house, he liked me and asked for my hand in marriage,

Table 1: Categories, subcategories, and codes obtained from interviews

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Economic factors	Financial problems	Poverty, escaping from poverty, inability to afford the costs, and preventing from further education due to high costs
	Economic benefits	Financial exchanges, to achieve better economic status
Sociocultural factors	Social customs	marriage to sister-in-law after wife's death, blood resolution ("Khoon-bas:" Ceasing bloodshed), making peace, not bringing dowry, strengthening family relationships, bride exchange, and marriage of cousins (their fathers are brother)
	Cultural beliefs	The younger bride adapts to her husband's family conditions sooner; if the girl grows up under her husband's control, she can get along with him more easily; the girl should not be in her father's home for long; the young bride can have more fertility and show the family's capability of fertility; the girl should start her periods in her husband's home; the sooner you give your daughter in marriage, the fewer dependents you have; the girl is for other people, so the sooner she goes the better; when the girl's breasts are raised enough, it is time to give her in marriage; the main duty of a girl is to get married, she does not need education; and a good girl is one who does not stay in her father's house for long
	Community encouragement	Encouragement in the media, encouragement in the mosques, encouragement by the elders
	Social learning	Modeling from neighboring countries, modeling from mothers, and modeling from peers
	Gaining prestige and social support	More Mehrieh*, more acceptance, and more support
Individual factors	Physical characteristics	Tall, big body, and prettiness
	Personality traits	Submissive, curious, and the dream of growing up
	Lack of awareness of the damaging consequences of early marriage	A lack of awareness of physical, sexual, psychological, social, violence, and health problems
	Fear of the future	Fear of parents' death and a bleak future, fear of harsh events of life in the future such as earthquakes, and fear of losing support for the daughter
Family factors	Dysfunctional family	Addict father, living with a single parent, being unattended, living with grandparents, domestic violence, multiple children, and polygamy
	Weak awareness of parents	Illiterate and low-educated parents and weak awareness of parents about effects of early marriage
	Harm prevention	Preventing dishonor, maintaining virginity, preventing nontraditional relationships, and controlling harm in cyberspace
Structural factors	High demand	Prevalence of asking for hand in marriage for very young girls, negative view of society to marriage at an older age, men's greater tendency to have younger girls, and the golden age for marriage
	Limited access to educational services	Lack of school in the area, male teachers and principals for girl schools, and the lack of suitable jobs for girls
	The lack of supportive social and legal structures	Lack of strong laws to prevent early marriage, lack of supervision over law enforcement, and weak civil structures

*A gift (money or anything precious) that groom must give to bride to show his true love

and my father accepted because of fear of being imprisoned by him, while he had a wife" (Participant No. 11).

"My husband was very wealthy. My father gave me to him as a chance to gain more in his factory while he was 23 years older than me" (Participant No. 27).

In general, some families gave their daughters in marriage with men who were either married or had a large age difference in exchange for a change in conditions or economic benefits. There is some kind of violation of the rights of girls in this type of experience, which led to inappropriate marriages (with a large age difference or with married men) without having a control over the terms and conditions, without knowing what physical, psychological, and social consequences it would have on the girls. In fact, on the one hand, adolescent girls were a threat to family economy, saving their families from this threat with an early marriage, and on the other hand, in some families, adolescent girls were a potential opportunity to improve the family's economic situation.

Sociocultural factors
Culture and society have always played a major role in shaping the phenomenon of child marriage, so that the relationships such as social customs, cultural beliefs, community encouragement, social learning, and gaining prestige and social support that lead to occurrence of child marriage.

Social customs
In Kurdish areas, there is a set of social customs such as marriage to sister-in-law after wife's death, blood resolution ("Khoon-bas:" ceasing bloodshed), making peace, not bringing dowry, strengthening family relationships, bride exchange, and marriage of cousins (their fathers are brother) which provides the conditions for girls' early marriage.

"When my sister died, her husband's family said that I had to be his wife, because my sister's children would not grow up under the care of someone else. It happens a lot. My cousin (my uncle's daughter) married the same way" (Participant No. 9).

"A few years ago my brother killed someone in our village. My brother was executed, but the families were always fighting. The village elders said that a girl would be given to them from our side, and that they would give a girl to us from their side in order to finish the fight. They gave me while I was only 16 years old" (participant No. 10).

"In our area, it is not customary that a girl bring a dowry, so families no longer have to worry about buying dowry so they consent to their children's marriage" (Participant No. 5).

"I remember when I was a kid, my aunt called me "my bride"; because they had chosen me for my cousin (our fathers are brother) since childhood. When I got 15, they asked for my hand in marriage and we get married" (participant No. 17).

"My aunt (my mom's sister) and my mom made me married to my aunt's son to get closer to each other. I was really young, but my mom said my aunt would support me" (Participant No. 16).

In fact, a set of social customs common in the areas under study leads to the phenomenon of early marriage. These customs are mostly based on strengthening family relationships. Of course, the custom of not buying a dowry on the part of the girl's family has more of an economic basis.

Cultural beliefs
In the study areas, there was a set of cultural beliefs that influenced girls' early marriage including the younger bride adapts to her husband's family conditions sooner; if the girl grows up under her husband's control, she can get along with him more easily; the girl should not be in her father's home for long; the young bride can have more fertility and show the family's capability of fertility; the girl should start her periods in her husband's home; the sooner you give your daughter in marriage, the fewer dependents you have; the girl is for other people, so the sooner she goes the better; when the girl's breasts are raised enough, it is time to give her in marriage; the main duty of a girl is to get married, she does not need education; and a good girl is one who does not stay in her father's house for long.

"My mother always said that the sooner you get married, the sooner you get intimate with your husband's family" (Participant No. 16).

"Our elders say a girl can get along with her husband if she grows up under his control so they try to pick a younger girl for their sons" (Participant No. 5).

"The old women believe that the girl must have her first period in her husband's home because something like this happened to them" (Participant No. 11).

"My father always said that a daughter is not for a dad but she is for others. So the sooner she leaves the better for herself and for her family" (Participant No. 7).

"When they came to ask my hand in marriage I was 17 years old, I told my family I wanted to study, I would not marry. My mother said," What's the need for a girl to study, the main duty of a girl is getting married, not studying" (Participant No. 12).

Due to the patriarchal structure that has long existed in the areas under study, there are certain beliefs about women that can lead to their early marriage. In fact, some roles have been defined for girls, which getting married is the most important one. There is a view in the community that a good girl is the one who gets married sooner.

Community encouragement
In addition to cultural beliefs, there are some community-based incentives for early marriage of girls. This encouragement is offered in the media and mosques by elders.

"As much as I remember, all the people were encouraging us to get married sooner so that I thought if I had gotten married sooner, I would have been luckier" (Participant No. 3).

"I was a religious person. I used to go to the mosque a lot. There, the mullahs always encouraged us to get married sooner so that we could build our lives sooner" (Participant No. 9).

In fact, in the society under study, media such as TV, radio, and religious institutions are constantly promoting child marriage and referring to it as a praiseworthy job and even a duty.

Social learning
This category consists of subcategories of modeling from neighboring countries, modeling from mothers, and modeling from peers.

"When I had a suitor, my mother and grandmother tried to obtain my consent reasoning that they both had gotten married very young and had a successful life" (Participant No. 22).

"Our village is the border between Iran and Iraq. Most of our relatives in Iraq are get married at an early age. The people of our village have a lot of communication with Iraqis, so they come and pick many of our village girls at an early age" (Participant No. 21).

"When I saw most of my friends getting married early, I got married too" (Participant No. 19).

Since child marriage is common in the study areas and especially in the rural areas and many of these girls were born to mothers who got married as a child and also due to communications with Iraq, they model early marriage.

Gaining prestige and support

This subcategory consists of codes as more dowry, more acceptance, and more support. In fact, young brides can have more dowry and so more acceptance and support from the husband's family.

"In our region when we are younger we can have more Mehrieh that's why many girls prefer to get married sooner" (Participant No. 14).

"When you are very young, you are more likely to be accepted by your husband's family, this will cause you have less stress and tension" (Participant No. 5).

"When you are very young and become a family's bride, they expect less from you and do all they can to support you, especially the mother-in-law does her best to take care of kids and this makes the young bride less bothered" (Participant No. 12).

In fact, because of the cultural and social beliefs in the study areas, there is a more positive view of the young bride and more support for them, which is why some young girls prefer to get married sooner to get this prestige and support.

Individual factors

In addition to sociocultural and economic factors, individual factors such as physical characteristics, personality traits, lack of awareness of the damaging consequences of early marriage, and fear of the future also play a role in the occurrence of child marriage.

Physical characteristics

This subcategory consists of codes such as tall, big body, and pretty. Some participants stated that having such physical characteristics made men want them more, and they had more suitors from childhood.

"I was pretty and my relatives asking me for their sons from the age of 12. I had a lot of suitors. When I was 16, they gave me in marriage" (Participant No. 16).

"I was tall and had a big body. Everyone thought I was old enough so they asked my hand in marriage from my childhood until I got married at the age of 15" (Participant No. 6).

Considering that in the study areas, being tall and beautiful is one of the main criteria for boys to choose girls, girls who have these characteristics are more liked and marry earlier than others.

Personality traits

This subcategory consists of codes of submission, curiosity, and the dream of growing up. Because of the patriarchal cultural and social context in the areas under study, girls are usually submissive and unable to oppose their parents' demands. Some participants also stated that they were curious about having a marital life and wanted to get married as soon as possible, and they had dream of growing up.

"I never did anything in my life contrary to my parents' opinion. I was always obedient to them. When they told me to get married, I didn't say anything while I didn't want to get married at all" (Participant No. 4).

"I wanted to grow up and get married. I was seen less in my father's house. I wanted to get married sooner and taste adulthood. I thought when a girl got married everyone would look at her differently and she would have more respect" (Participant No. 21).

As a matter of fact, having a submissive personality makes girls unable to cope with their parents' demands and wishes, and they are forced to marry even if they dislike such a marriage. Likewise, the lack of fulfillment of desires and wishes in the paternal family causes some girls to marry to gain new experiences and achieve dreams that belong to the adults.

Lack of awareness of the damaging consequences of early marriage

This subcategory consists of the following codes: A lack of awareness of physical, sexual, psychological, and social problems and a lack of awareness of violence. As a matter of fact, since most girls are low educated and this issue is not discussed enough in the media, they have no awareness of the consequences that early marriage can have.

"I got really bothered of pregnancy and childbirth. If I knew with early marriage I would have such physical and mental problems and ruin my life, I'd never get married" (Participant No. 12).

"I was very young. I knew nothing about marriage. I thought the age of marriage wasn't important, but now I realize how different it is. When you get married you have to give up many things and put up with a lot of difficulties" (Participant No. 9).

In fact, the women of this study had no knowledge of the consequences of early marriage before their marriage that's why they accepted marriage blindly.

The girls seemed to accept the marriage without knowing about the early marriage and its consequences, although they had no other choices.

Fear of the future

This subcategory consists of the codes as following: fear of parents' death and a bleak future, fear of harsh events of life in the future such as earthquakes, and fear of losing support for the daughter.

"My dad always used to say "I would like you to get married because if I won't be alive I don't know what will happen to you" (Participant No. 10).

"My mother used to say "I would like you to get married sooner because I am afraid that we will not be able to support you. Then there will be nobody to take care of you. You don't know any kind of job and can't cope with your life." (Participant No. 17).

Since women in the study areas have low socioeconomic status and need a lot of support in order to survive in society, many parents give their daughters in marriage fearing of something bad in the future that they will not be able to support them. This way they remove their worries and feel relaxed.

Family factors

This category includes subcategories of dysfunctional family, weak awareness of parents, and harm prevention. Parents and other family members can have a decisive role in the marriage of girls.

Dysfunctional family

This subcategory consists of addict father, living with a single parent, being unattended, living with grandparents, domestic violence, multiple children, and polygamy. Many participants reported that they grew up in disintegrated families and were forced to accept early marriage in poor conditions.

"My father was an addict. My mom and uncles gave me in marriage saying that few people would be willing to marry an addict' daughter" (Participant No. 7).

"I lived with my stepmom. She wanted me to get married sooner to get rid of me, so when I had a suitor, she convinced my dad to give them a positive answer" (Participant No. 8).

"I grew up in a family full of violence and misery. There were so many family members, so no one was thinking about my future. When I had my first suitor they gave me in marriage" (Participant No. 14).

Since marriage takes place in the family context, family atmosphere can play a decisive role in the type of marriage, so child marriage is more common in families with poor conditions.

Weak awareness of parents

Most cases stated that they had illiterate and low-educated parents who did not have a good understanding of early marriage and thought that their daughters would be happier with early marriage.

"My father had elementary education. My mother was totally illiterate. They knew nothing. They thought if I got married sooner I would be happier" (Participant No. 11).

"My family didn't know what problems I might have by getting married early. It is true that my mother had gotten married herself as a child, but the situation is very different now" (Participant No. 17).

Therefore, low education of parents and lack of awareness of the consequences of child marriage had a major role in child marriage.

Harm prevention

This subcategory includes codes of preventing dishonor, maintaining virginity, preventing nontraditional relationships, and controlling harm in cyberspace. Some participants stated that their families provided marriage conditions for their daughters to maintain the family's honor and reputation.

"I was naughty. I had just gotten a cell phone. I was on my cell phone all the time. My family gave me in marriage early because they feared I would do something that dishonor them" (Participant No. 23).

"My husband was my boyfriend. When my family found out this, they said the relationship had to be formalized. Then my husband came and asked my hand in marriage while we were both under 18 years old." (Participant No. 3).

"In our region, a virgin girl is considered as a holy and pure girl. If a girl, God forbid, is not a virgin for any reason, she won't have any rights to live normally. Thus many families want to give their daughters in marriage sooner to keep her virginity" (Participant No. 29).

In the study areas, virginity has a high value for girls as in other parts of Iran. If the girl is not a virgin, her living conditions become difficult, which is why many families try to protect their daughters and protect their honor and they see the early marriage as a solution to preventing this social harm.

Structural factors

This category consists of the following subcategories: high demand, limited access to educational services, and the lack of supportive social and legal structures that actually refer to the existing structures that facilitate child marriage in the community.

High demand

This subcategory consists of the prevalence of asking hand in marriage for young, negative view of society to

marriage at an older age, men's greater tendency to have younger girls, and the golden age for marriage.

"I had suitors from the age of 13. Most men in our area want to marry very young girls" (Participant No. 12).

"My mother always used to say "if you don't get married before you are 18, you will no longer get a good husband because most girls have good suitors only when they are under 18" (Participant No. 4).

"When a girl gets older and gets married late everyone has a bad view of her. They say she has something wrong with her that she is still in her father's home so all the girls try to get married sooner" (Participant No. 1).

In fact, the high demand from men for young girls for marriage causes many of these girls to marry very young.

Limited access to educational services
This subcategory consists of codes as following: lack of school in the area, male teachers and principals for girl schools, and the lack of suitable jobs for girls.

"Because our village did not have a high school, I had to leave education. When a person doesn't study, why does she stay in her father's home anymore?" (Participant No. 16).

"I was very eager to study. I had to go to the neighbor village where some of its teachers were male. My family was against it. I left school and decided to get married sooner" (Participant No. 6).

"I neither studied to say that I wanted to finish my education and then get married, nor had a job to say that I was busy with my job; so I didn't see any necessity to get married later." (Participant No. 25).

In fact, due to the cultural and structural limitations in the area under study, many girls are forced to drop out of school, and this dropout is a prelude to early marriage, and because they have no education, they may not have a suitable job. As a result, they accept the early marriage.

Lack of supportive social and legal structures
This subcategory consists of codes as lack of strong laws to prevent early marriage, lack of supervision over law enforcement, and weak civil structures.

"I didn't want to get married, I didn't know anything about marriage, but my family forced me to get married. My aunt (mom's sister) tried to stop it, she even talked to a lawyer but she could do nothing because the law does not give the girls any rights." (Participant No. 16).

"In Iran, there are a lot of marriages under the legal age every day and nobody says anything about it." (Participant No. 11).

"In this country, if a girl doesn't want to marry, there is no place for her to seek refuge." (Participant No. 30).

In Iran, there are no strong laws to prevent child marriage, and there are few laws that there is not enough supervision over their enforcement, and even civil organizations are not strong enough to support girls who do not want to marry in childhood, and in this way, child marriage is facilitated.

Discussion

The results show that economic factors are important determinants of occurrence of child marriage in the study areas, which is in line with previous studies in this area.[15,31] In fact, many families view their daughters' marriage as a solution for reducing their living costs, and since young girls have a lot of fans for marriage, some families use them as a means of earning economic benefits and make money by their early marriage.

Social and cultural factors consisting of social customs, cultural beliefs, community encouragement, social learning, and gaining prestige and support were other determinants of occurrence of child marriage, consistent with most of the research conducted in this area.[21,32] In Pandey's 2017 study, the cultural belief that young brides adapt to husband's home conditions earlier than older brides was one of the determinants of girls' early marriage.[33] Cislaghi *et al.* 2019 also reported social norms as one of the main factors of child marriage in rural areas of Cameroon.[34] Not bringing dowry on the part of the girl's family was one of the common customs in the study area that paved the way for child marriage, which was not mentioned in previous studies. This custom made families no longer concerned about providing dowry because it takes time for many families with financial problems to provide dowry, and it may take years for them to obtain the dowry.

The encouragement of the community was another determinant of child marriage, which was mentioned less in previous studies. Gage's research, 2013, has shown the impact of social media and advertising on child marriage and their attitudes to marriage.[35] Child marriage, despite all its negative consequences, is constantly encouraged and promoted in Iranian society through the media, religious clerics, and elders, and this is what keeps it going.

Social learning was another cultural determinant of child marriage, a new finding in this study. These girls were born to mothers who got married as a child and also most of their peers got married in childhood. In addition, there are communications between them and Iraq. Thus, they learn child marriage through modeling them.

Gaining prestige and support was another determinant of child marriage, which was another new finding in this study. Young brides get more attention and support in the areas under study, and many families provide them with benefits such as more Mehrieh; therefore, some girls accept marriage in childhood in order to get this attention and support.

Another determinant of child marriage was individual factors consisting of personality and physical characteristics, lack of awareness of the damaging consequences of child marriage, and fear of the future, which was one of the new findings in this study and added to previous research that in addition to economic and sociocultural factors, individual factors can also play a role in child marriage. In fact, having a big physique makes children look older and gives the impression to others that they have the conditions to become women and have children. Pretty girls are always very popular in today's society. Moreover, they have suitors from childhood. Fear of the future is another new finding in this study. Women in the study areas have a low socioeconomic status so that they always need the support of a man to continue living. This causes families to fear that something happens in the future and they cannot support their daughters. Hence, they give their daughters in marriage in childhood so that they would not have any problems in the future.

Family factors consisting of dysfunctional families, weak awareness of parents, and harm prevention were other determinants of child marriage. In a study by Montazeri *et al*., conducted among Ahwazi women in Iran, family structure was reported to be one of the major factors shaping child marriage.[18] In fact, in families with no coherent structure, girls are more likely to experience harms, one of which is their forced marriage as a child; some families, however, give their daughters in marriage sooner to save them from bad conditions of family and to protect them from harm within the family.

Harm prevention was another influencing family factor in child marriage. In Taylor *et al*. research, parents gave their children in marriage soon to avoid having sexual relations outside of marriage.[36] Virginity is so important in the community under study, and a girl who is not a virgin before marriage is found guilty so that she will have no chance of a normal life again; due to this and the development of new technologies, many families give their daughters in marriage sooner to maintain their daughters' virginity and to avoid having sexual relations outside of marriage.

Structural factors consisting of high demand, limited access to educational services, and the lack of supportive social and legal structures are other key determinants of child marriage.

High demand as one of the facilitating factors of child marriage in this research is one of the interesting and new results. Very young girls are particularly attractive, so they have many suitors from childhood; this makes it easier for them to get married as a child.

Another structural factor in early marriage for girls was limited access to educational services, which adds to previous research. The relationship between education and early marriage is a reciprocal one. On the one hand, girls who do not study and are less educated are more likely to get married in childhood, and on the other hand, getting married causes children to stay away from school and education. Most previous research has emphasized the latter aspect and considered early marriage as an obstacle to continuing education.[37-39] In the areas under study, especially in rural areas, girls had limited educational facilities so that many of these girls could only study to a certain level and had to leave education.

The lack of supportive social and legal structures was another facilitator of child marriage in this study, which was one of the new findings of this study. Despite widespread worldwide efforts and passing various laws to prevent child marriage,[40] these efforts have not been implemented in Iran for cultural and religious reasons, so that no firm rules on child marriage have been passed and few existing laws are violated in many cases because there is no supervision over these laws enforcement. Furthermore, there are no strong civil organizations to support children in preventing their early marriage, so children have no choice but to surrender.

This study, for the first time in the Kurdish areas of Iran, studies the causes of child marriage qualitatively and from the children's point of view, so it can help to clarify the hidden aspects of the problem and pave the way for further research in this area. The indigenous researchers of this study, the deep involvement in the studied subject, and conducting the interviews in the native language (Kurdish) have created a suitable atmosphere so that the participants could safely and confidently share their information with the researchers. However, the study also had some limitations, including access to samples, most of which were in rural areas that did not have access to a suitable road and that researchers had to walk a long distance to conduct interviews. Other limitations were the unwillingness of some participants to be interviewed and audio-recorded. The researchers described their research goals and the whole process of conducting the research to build trust and used a female researcher familiar with qualitative research for interviewing.

Conclusion

The results showed that child marriage is affected by various factors such as economic factors, sociocultural factors, individual factors, family factors, and structural factors. At the individual level, therefore, it can be prevented by raising girls' awareness of the consequences of early marriage and providing them with the opportunity to continue their education. At the family level, parents' awareness should be increased and their attitudes toward child marriage should be changed, as well as more support should be provided for girls with a single parent or bad parents and for economically disadvantaged families. At the social level, trying to correct people's cultural beliefs about girls' marriage, removing the wrong social customs and replacing them with appropriate ones, using different media to encourage families to prevent child marriage and establishing this as a culture, as well as passing appropriate laws to prevent child marriage and more supervision over enforcement of them need to be done.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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