

Power & Leadership in Iranian Family; A Sociological Approach

Seyed Kamaledin Mousavi¹

Abstract

People usually associate power with military force, multinational corporations, as well as elevated political positions. However, marriage and family are not exempted from power struggles too; couples often encounter power issues. Present article discusses power in families with focussing on power between married partners or conjugal power. The paper also highlights some of the questions like, what are the sources of conjugal power? what are the decision-making areas? what are the analytical models of power relation among Iranian families? and tries to find out answer of these questions. At the beginning, it discusses some classic theories and studies about decision making in marriage and family life and then look at what new generations of social scientists say about conjugal power. Finally, taking advantage of document and comparative analysis as the main methods used in this paper, it tries to examine the structure of power relations in Iranian contemporary family.

Keywords: Family life cycle, Patriarchal system, Family roles, family structure, Power pyramid in the family, analytical model of cultural context, making decision in the family.

Introduction

Power and authority in human relations is accounted as one of the clearest facts of our daily life, all of us experience it and live with it. In social institutions such as family, the form of power distribution among its members particularly between spouses leads to so many individual and

social consequences. According to some sociologists, study of family power structure makes us better recognize the structure of power relations in macro-level i.e. society. In order to recognize this structure in family interrelations, sociologists and social psychologists have found some theoretical approaches, by which we try in

1. Ph.D. in Sociology from Kiev National University

this paper to analyze models of conjugal power in Iranian contemporary society. Conjugal power - as we focused on it in this article- denotes the key role of one of spouses in the process of decision-making. There are some well-known decision-making areas in the family like, which usually bring contradictions and lead to power politics between spouses. Some of these areas are:

- work engagement of wife out of home;
- communication with friends or relatives;
- caring of children;
- Spending family budget;
- quality and frequency of sexual relation of spouses;

Sine the family issues are not alienated from socio-cultural climate of society, above list can be increased or decreased in different countries.

Theoretical approaches

Economical factor or "resources" is key factor for decision making within family according to some sociologists specially Russians; they stress, "who earns and brings home more money, receives more power in decision-making process". According to Albert Krawchenko of Moscow University, as the income relied on skills, specialty and education level, men usually capture higher status at power pyramid since they make more money under higher education and professional position with contrasting to women [1, 345].

Such an idea has been seen in American sociological literature during 1960s and 1970s before the rise of feminist movements. For the first time American sociologists P. Blood and D. Wolf in 1960 studied decision-making mechanism

within family based on "social exchange theory". They stressed that one of spouses -either wife or husband- who endowed with more income may deserve decision making under acquired "resources" like education and occupation. Despite effectiveness of "resource theory" to explain conjugal power in some occasions, specially in mono-earning families (husband-based income), it exposed too many critics by feminist movement. The "recourses" according to feminist sociologists, unequally distributed among males and females, where women usually receive less wage, have less opportunities and after parturition they relied economically more on their husbands. stressing that men gain more profits from marriage, Jessie Bernard, an American feminist sociologist says that the social institutes of marriage and family are more convenient men than women [2.37].

In that case, Dare Gillespie the other feminist sociologist believes that "marriage is not as a free contract between equal persons" [3,449].

There are some other points of view about "resource theory" that should be considered:

1st- Gender affects on resources of women. Blumberg, Colman and other sociologists believe that at initial months of marriage there is more equal relationships between spouses but following parturition tips the balance, due to damping of physical attraction of women and increasing their dependency to husbands [4, 225].

2st- For the time being, masculinity-paternity ranks higher socio-cultural position in the most countries (including Iran). In traditional communities due to this socio-cultural context (domination of masculinity-paternity norms), the

authority of males soars high even if they share less resources. On the other hand, if traditional norms have more potentials it would obviously give men power despite of accessing to resources by either spouse. On the contrary, if the egalitarian norms in society were powerful, then men would have less authority in family even with more earnings. At the same time, in a transitional period in which neither paternity traditions nor egalitarianism has any formal authority the resource theory can be more effective and applicable i.e. either of spouses earns more deserves more power in decision-making process in family.

Considering socio-psychological aspects of conjugal power, some sociologists pointed out to "love-need" of one spouse to another one during the family life cycle. The spouse who receives more love, finally he/she rules more powerfully. For example, at the beginning of marriage husband may do best to satisfy his young wife, while love and attraction toward wife are powerful then she derive influence for decision-making. On the other hand, as long as each spouse has less dependency or economical and emotional tendency toward the other one, he/she seems to have more control over another one, the partner who has more dependency on love and affection, he/she will be influenced more by the other partner.

Francisca Canisian, American social scientist pointed out in his work "love & power in individual and social spheres" that since women-comparatively- show more tendency to make relationship with others and more need to love and affections, then they practice weaker authority for

family leadership and control components. However, Canisian refers that although men have more authority in family power pyramid but they have less power and capacity in personal, individual and affectional relations. In this era, women are more able to persuade the other party so as men feel they are under control. Canisian says that: "since love defined as female/winner game and it is the territory in which the women determine rules and expectations then men exposes himself under control, because discourses over sincerely and lovely relationships deduced as a test on behalf of husband which he feels to fail but his wife does it with success" [5, 260].

In matrimonial life, wife sometimes uses her strength in the fields of private and closed relationship to make power balance by indirect affectional and emotional expressions and techniques. That process of interpersonal monopoly of power at micro-level by women is highlighted in works of American sociologist D. Lipman-Bluman entitled "gender role and power-1984" which explains that private relationship is under wife's control, conversely social and political sphere is under husband's control [6, 284-297].

Confirming the ability of women to use micro-politics in family relations, some leading Russian sociologists believe that women traditionally meet expectancy under specific strategies. Wife acts secretly and implicitly persuade his husband by trick and well-done behaviors. she conducts as a shadow cabinet in government since apparently she is not president but all underlying decisions and initiatives made under her control [1, 346].

In 1983, F. Blumstein and P. Schwartz studied 300 American couples dividing them into four groups who had different styles of partner life: registered spouses, non-marriage spouses, homosexuals and libidos. As a result, they found that marriage commitment influences on the form of authority distribution among spouses. According to Blumstein and Schwartz, in coordinative units (registered spouses) resources, assesses and facilities - better than in other groups- guarantee powership and stability of relationship between partners i.e. registered spouses - less than other forms of partnership- rely on economical, materialistic or egalitarian factors in their relations [7, 31]. Domination of a common sense i.e. "we" in these families make the spouses not to be worry about their position in the pyramid of conjugal power.

By the way, the theoretical approaches mentioned above, help us better understand and analyze the structure of conjugal power in Iran.

Conjugal Power in Iranian families

The focus of present paper is the sociological analysis of power relationship model in Iranian family. In this regard, there are some points over Iranian family power structure:

- 1- Patriarchal system as dominant socio-cultural context of Iranian society;
- 2- Role of religion, tradition and civil law in reinforcement of that system;
- 3- Strength of patriarchal system in rural living families;
- 4- Appearance of a new tendency toward egalitarian model of relations in urban living

families;

Review of general characteristics of power relations in Iranian families at macro-level, illustrates theory of socio-cultural context (Blumberg, Coleman, Gray and etc.) which experiences more coordination to daily life in Iran- in view of outhor- in comparison in comparison to other cited theories. It is important to note that Iran like some other countries witnessed an old paternity model of relations where men are focused by society. Arian tribes and Indo-European ancestors immigrated to Iran in the end of second millennium B.C. had patriarchal model in their interrelations. That model remained stable until present time with minor changes i.e. male values, attitudes and roles positioned at priority level during past three millenniums. Furthermore, in Zoroastrism and Islam (religions of old & new Iran) "men priority" in community and family was stressed, therefore male & female careers formulized in family and community. Men leadership formally is constituted in Iran by civil laws so as other members of family should obey him. According to civil law, wife is bound to obey husband as: wife nationality should comply with husband, place of residence for family, communication and wife's contact outside of home with friends and relatives, time and frequency of sexual relationships and work engagement outside of home. Although women in some cases furnished with independent decisions like religious functions, investment of own properties and making economical contract with people of her discretion. In fact, most of the fields of decision making in family are delegated to husband except kids'

maintenance. It should be noted that provisions for family in Iran from early time till now mainly, related to religion and tradition, which initially resulted in easy adoption, and internalization by people then refrained from criticism and reforming risks of current relationship model.

Power relations in rural families

Leadership and management by husband as well as monopoly of decision making in the family are more powerful in rural set up comparing to Tehran and other cities. Iranian rural community strongly adopted patriarchal system, rely on religion and traditions. Husband - father is in charge of family management forever who organizes division of labor of family members and controls the tasks. Rural woman internalizes values and norms from childhood leading her to optimum motherhood for future, therefore she is satisfied with limited courteously in the sense of decision-making for family affairs and She adopted sociability outlined by the motto "marriage should last to the moment of death under any circumstances" means that rural girls on account of sustaining hardship and miseries during matrimonial stage should tolerate any circumstances and all initiatives shall be framed for the sake of family requirements under husband leadership.

According to scientific conclusions on rural issues, even working at home has no linkage to power level contrarily to it sometimes she experiences regressive trends on side of decision making and work engagement out of home. In this regard, some Iranian sociologists stress on a "reverse correlation" between the level of women

work engagement out of home and her position in family power pyramid [8, 67]. Rural women contrary to urban ones invested with less influence of power, therefore manifestations of patriarchal system in rural community undermines resources of spouses and "resource theory". Rules of religion and customs in villages tip the balance in favor of men but it is significant to say this socio-cultural context is more pronounced in field of family reinforcement and marriage commitment effectiveness. Effective sense of marriage commitment in village encourages women to spend more energy for family improvements so that discrimination may sense in less range. Thus, theory of "sociocultural context" primarily, and "marriage commitment" secondarily more than other theories contribute to account conjugal power in rural living family in Iran.

Power relations in urban families

Family power structure slowly changes in urban environments it represents repelling of husband-oriented system and approaching to egalitarian model i.e. significant decisions are gradually made by both spouses or with share of children equally. This trend exposed to progressive curve during recent decade in urban districts under variety of facts particularly due to increasing the level of literacy in urban area from 48 % in 1976 to 80 % in recent census[9]. Higher level of literacy in cities led to higher level of awareness, increased expectations among wives and children, so that they ask more participation in family decision-making process. A lot of Iranian professionals and experts acknowledge that literacy and education as

key factors contribute to make up public knowledge, democratization of family interrelations and participation of all family members in sharing decision making [10-53].

According to one of the latest sociological researches, 54.5% of respondents in urban families believed that key decisions in the family should be taken jointly by husband and wife or by the couple together with their children. Meanwhile, 35% of respondents introduce the husband as the main decision maker in the family. In accordance with results of the study, traditional families with low average income, also group with 55 years and above mainly defend decision making of the husband as a main factor, but middle class families and youth age group protect the jointly decision-making in family [11,173].

It should be mentioned that 30 years ago, Iranian families had different view points. In this regard, Dr. Asadi and Dr. Tehranian in 1974 studied 24 provinces of the country showing that the majority of respondents of urban and rural districts only protected husband as the only decision maker of the family [11,174].

Further, the new trend which appeared in conjugal power relation in urban cities now seems to face some considerable barriers. Socio-cultural norms of father ruling in family at present time still plays important role in organizing daily life, family roles and statuses. In some fields of decision making including wife work engagement out of home, sexual relations, family planning and spending budget of family..., even now the main decision maker is man, although in some cases including upbringing children, relation with friends

and relatives or etc..., role of women in decision making seems to be better than previous times. In urban living families, most of men do not like their wives to attend in work out of home. In research carried out in 1996 by the writer of present paper on the topic "dependency ratio and its socio-cultural factors in Tehranian families", majority (66.3%) of male respondents' manifested their opposition to woman work engagement out of home. The main reason for this opinion (39.8%) was the probable scattering of family warm association [12, 148-152].

In fact, most of Iranian cities are large with million-residence from rural districts. A significant part of urban living families due to continuous immigrations remained with its previous traditional norms in which the men are the absolute governor of the family. For example, in Tehran with 9 million population, the majority of respondents in my research mentioned above,(i.e. more than 75%) believed that working out of home should be undertaken by the husband and inside home works shall be dedicated to the wife, and this is the division of work and responsibility which we faced it in functionalistic theory of Talcot Parsons. In this regard, the structure of conjugal power among those urban families who have more tendency toward traditional and immigrant based culture seems to follow the analytical model presented in socio-cultural context theory. But among those urban families such a tendency is weaker, then the conjugal power structure may be better explained via "resource theory" and in some stages of family life, or by the "love-need" theory. Moreover, we can point out the fact that today in big cities there

are families where woman having rich parents has key role to play in decision-making (effectiveness of recourse theory). The other point in this subject referred to the fact that today in big cities the majority of youth freely select their interesting wives. Since in initial stage of family life cycle there is acute love between men and women, such a relation may result to find a type of egalitarian relation between them and in most cases; more power belongs to women in comparison to men. Husband due to more love of her wife tries to satisfy her through comeent, but after the birth of children and increasing need of wife for more support from her husband, the power of men in family reach to its culmination. While children grow, we see the lowering need of wife and declining role of husband in decision-making process.

Thus, increase-decrease of love or need between spouses during family life cycle causes some fluctuations in conjugal power structure in urban families, the fact that can be better analyzed through "love-need" theory.

In this regard, hypothetical diagrams 1 and 2, show the dynamism of power and leadership in Iranian families during different stages of life cycle.

Conclusion

In the present essay while considering some theories including Theory of Resource, Theory of love and need, Theory of socio-cultural context, marriag commintment and feminist theory, we discussed power structure in matrimonial life and pointed out to those factors that related to this

point especially in Iranian family. Available facts and the results of the sociological researches show in general that Iranian families – particularly in rural ones- are under men governance and management, such a phenomenon roots in social and cultural context of society and its main parameters like tradition, religion and law. Classification and typology of power structure in families with regard to urban and rural environments showed that there are some differences between these two group of families. In urban living families a new tendency appeared towards creating of equal and egalitarian relations between men and women as well as all family members partnership in important decision making shall be observed in this case. Although some latest researches approved such a new tendency, but due to several reasons we cannot pointed out to "redistribution" of power in urban family of present time.

Nowadays, in cities we face with both traditional and modern tendency toward distribution of power in family, which contrast with each other. Both concepts- traditional view point (the husband as the major role of decision-makers in family), new point of view (couple as main decision maker) are also attended in active basis in society, and each of them have its protectors among different social groups.

With regard to the multiplicity of youth population in our country and the importance of egalitarian attitudes, we can logically expect that in Iranian urban family, the flexibility of conjugal power will increase in the next generation.

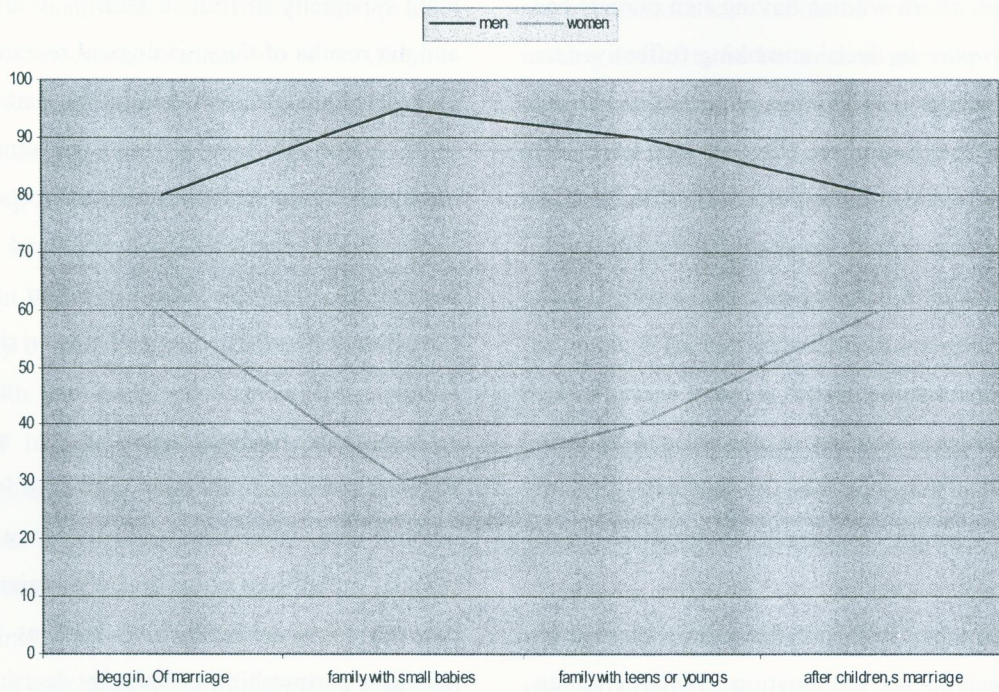


Figure 1 Dynamic of conjugal power in the village

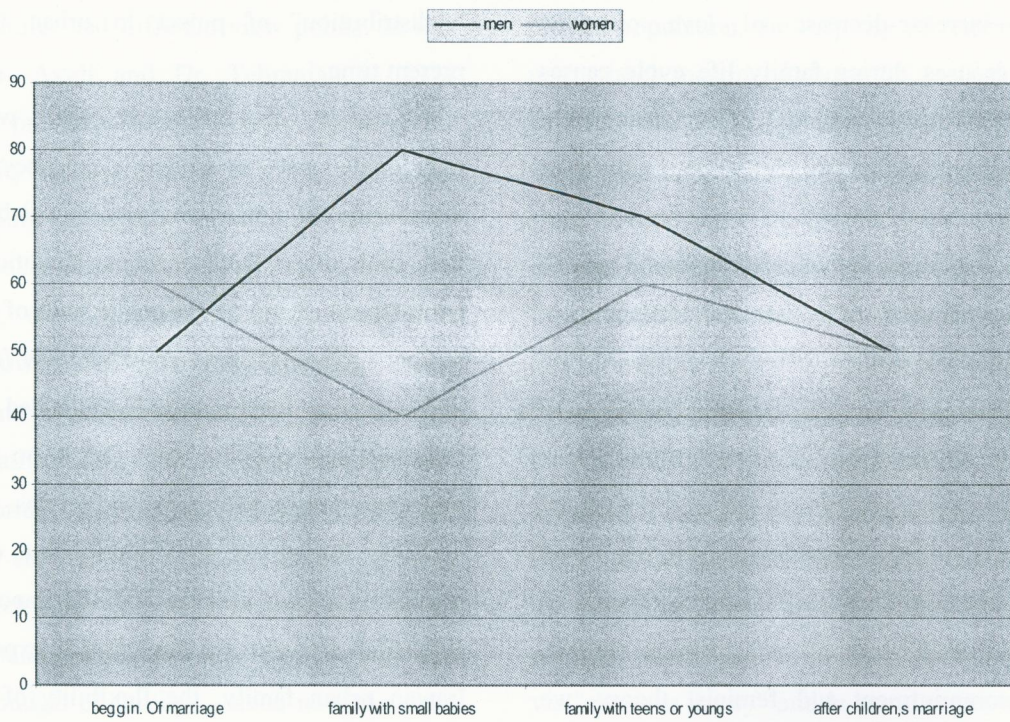


Figure 2 Dynamic of conjugal power in the city

References

1. Dobrenko, V.I. and Krawchenko, A.I., 2000. *Sociology*. Vol. 2. - Moscow: centre.
2. Centre of social values. 1995. *Family on the Threshold of Third Millennium*. - Moscow: CSV.
3. Gillespie, D.,. Who Has the Power? The Marital Struggle // *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1971.- № 33. - P. 445-458.
4. Blumberg R.L., and Marion Tolbert Coleman. 1989. A Theoretical Look at the Gender Balance of Power in the American Couple" // *Journal of Family Issues*. - №10,- P. 225-50.
5. Cancian, F.M. Gender Politics: *Love and Power in the Private and Public Spheres // Gender and the Life Course*. ed. A. S. Rossi.- NY: Aldine, 1985.- P. 253-64.
6. Lipmen-Blumen, J. *Gender Roles and Power // Marriages and Families*, 5th ed., ed. M.A Lamanna, and A. Riedman.-CA. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1994. -P. 284-297.
7. Blumstein Ph., Schwartz P. *American Couples: Money, Work, Sex // Marriages and Families*, 5th ed., ed. M.A Lamanna, and A. Riedman - CA. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1994.- P. 284-297.
8. Vosoughi M. 1992. *Rural Sociology*. -Tehran: Keyhan.
9. Statistical centre of Iran. 2000. *Statistical Abstract*.-Tehran: SCI.
10. Mirzai M. 2002. *Speech about Applied Demography*. -Tehran: Tehran University.
11. Mohseni M. 2000. *Study of Socio-cultural Believes, Attitudes and Behaviors in Tehran*.- Tehran: Zohd.
12. Mousavi S.K. 1996. *Study of dependency ratio and its socio-cultural factors in Tehranian families*.- Tehran: Azad university.