Effect of Social Transition on Youths' Interests in Spouse Selection

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ABSTRACT

Marriage age has raised and its rate has dropped in recent years. This problem has become one of the major distresses for Iranians at all societal levels. In the present study possible efficacy of youths, their parents and social factors in spouse selection were investigated. In this cross-sectional study, data of 211 youths between 2012 and the end of 2014, who had come for marriage counseling in three offices in Tehran, were used. Two validated questionnaires on spouse selection were asked and data were analyzed. The results showed significant social transition in spouse selection among both youth and their parents, which needs more attention to prevent massive problems in coming future.

Keywords: Spouse selection, Idealism, Personality, Marriage

INTRODUCTION

Marriage has been one of the most vital social institutions or even the greatest and most essential of all institutions in human society since ancient times (Nambi, 2005). Social and economic events as well as changes in cultural attitudes shape marital behavior, which then affect family life and other interactions (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Marriage effects on various scopes of life, including physical health and longevity, mental health and happiness, and economic well-being (Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Marriage might be the most studied social tie (Umberson & Montez, 2010). Likewise, many of our behavior and actions, spouse selection could be affected by many factors like personality, family and society. It is one of the main issues for most of the parents even long time before puberty of their children. Marriage usually covers sexual fulfillment and emotional needs of human being.

Theorists interested in marriage and romantic relationship development have suggested that similarity plays a key role in the process of spouse selection and surely, personality is one of the keys in this theory. Personality refers to individual dissimilarities in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving (Kazdin, 2000). In other words, it can be defined as uniformity in a person's way of being in long-term regularity in their certain ways of perceiving, thinking, acting and reacting as a person (Harris, 2007). The significance of personality in human life has been recognized and shown since the Greek physicians Hippocrates (460-370 BC), and Galen (129-200 AD) (Flaskerud, 2012). The ancient Greek classified personality of people based on the four humors, which is an effect of an excess of one of the four bodily fluids. For them, the excess level of fluids determined a person's character. The four humors included choleric (yellow bile), melancholic (black bile), sanguine (blood) and phlegmatic (phlegm) (Flaskerud, 2012). Long time later, other clarified different classification of personality and this subject has not been closed yet. In 1950s, two cardiologists Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman, after a long study of healthy men between the ages of 35 and 59, developed a new classification of personality as titled type A and B. They found "Type A" behavior doubles the risk of coronary heart disease in otherwise healthy individuals (Friedman & Rosenman, 1960). Based on this theory, individuals with

“Type A" personality is ambitious, rigidly organized, highly status-conscious, sensitive, and impatient (McLeod, 2014). Studies have illustrated that personality type has great influence in all aspects of human life. Moreover, another issue, which come across and could have positive as well as negative effect, is perfectionism. Perfectionism is a personality trait described by a person's motivation for flawlessness and setting extremely high performance standards, along with a highly critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations (Stoeber & Childs, 2010).

On the other hand, even though the personality of each person could be different even among twins, it also could be affected by different factors and by passing the time personality might be reformed. Studies have shown that family and society are two important factors, which always can interfere with personal decisions and shape the manners (Plomin & Daniels, 2011). Therefore, a combination of such a personality with social-family factors might affect spouse selection as well. For example, several studies have linked financial instability to relationship dissolution and divorce (Burstein, 2007; Greenstone & Looney, 2012; Halliday Hardie & Lucas, 2010; Kalmijn, Loeve, & Manting, 2007; Lewin, 2005; Torabi, Baschieri, Clarke, & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2013). Economic situation can act as a double sword. The notion that economic factors affect the decision to marry and other aspects of marriage has been long considered. Adam Smith (1776) believed how poverty could serve to discourage marriage in the working class while Gary Becker (1974) had the opposite idea (Grossbard-Shechtman, 2003). Overall, in low economic and tradition society, marriage is one of the keys to improve family income, which have been seen in many countries. In a same time, in developed societies, low economic situation acts as a gear in marriage due to general expectations from grooms and even brides these days. Therefore, growing up in different society will affect personality and shape peoples' attitudes.

Based on both national and global centers, marriage rates are near their lowest levels in history (Sterbenz, 2014). As marriage rates have decreased, cohabitation in western society has become more common. According to the 2009 American Community Survey conducted by the Census Bureau, the proportion of 30 to 44 year olds living together has almost doubled since 1999 (Kreider, 2010). Although in Islamic countries due to culture and power of families, this kind of living style is not as common as western countries, soon it might be a big challenge for ourselves as well. Like other developing countries, Iran is passing its transient stage from tradition to modernity. Transition from tradition and eastern life style to the western life style has made social changes in all social aspects such as marriage and choosing a spouse. By changing the traditional trend, change in the girls’ expectations due to their higher education, employment achievements in one side, and increased cost of housing on another side, the marriage age has been increased in Iran. Increased statistics of divorcement and reduced number of annual marriages has caused main concerns in the society. One of the most noticeable changes in marital patterns has been the increase in the age at first marriage. This is reflected in an increasing proportion of younger adults who are never married (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). In Iran based on the latest official documents, almost 12 million single above 30 years old have not married yet (Mahzoon, 2014).

The present study has been done in order to find out that the interests of youth for marriage and their golden dream in spouse selection. These findings might help us to make better policy to prevent the drop rate of marriage in our society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present cross sectional study, data of 211 youths between 2012 and the end of 2014, who had come for premarital counseling in three offices in Tehran, were used. After signing the consent form to participate in this study, they have been asked to fill both Ahvaz Perfectionism Scale (APS) questionnaire (Najarian, Attari, & Zargar, 1999), and Movahedi Spouse Selection Questionnaire (MSSQ) which was tested and validated previously (Movahedi, 2010). APS has been previously created and validated for Iranian population by Najarian*et al.* and has been extensively used since 1999, was used to measure perfectionism (Najarian *et al.*, 1999). APS was created based on Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Maudsley Obsessive-Compulsive Inventory (MOCI), and Irrational Beliefs Test (IBT). This questionnaire is a self-report scale consists of 27 items. The items of this scale have four alternatives ranging from Never, Seldom, Sometimes, and Often. Except for items 11, 16, 17, and 23, which get scores in reverse method, the rest of items are scored according to 1, 2, 3, 4 amounts and total score of APS is 76. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale is 0.90, which shows its high reliability.

MSSQ is a set of 100 gender-based questions about the characteristics of desired spouse which was developed based on Greene's questionnaire (Greene, 2008) with Likert scaling system (Likert, 1932). It includes demographic information of volunteers such as age, gender, education, birth rank, household dimension, and a collection of questions about qualifications for spouse selection. Qualifications for spouse selecting covered five different areas of personal interests including financial and economic situation, educational and cultural situation, religious believes, beauty and physical properties, manner and behavioral characters, and not mentioned items (other) in 87 questions. 16 out of 87 questions were gender based, and volunteers were filling their suitable questionnaire based on their gender. Scoring of the spouse's preferences of this questionnaire has 5 alternatives ranging from "none", "low", "average", "high", and "very high" which scored with "0", "1", "2", "3" and "4" respectively. The total score of this questionnaire was 435, and people who scored above 218 was considered as a person with a high perfectionism view for spouse selection. For evaluating the validity of author-made spouse selection questionnaire, a pilot study on 30 students of Islamic Azad University of both genders has been done (Movahedi, 2010). The reliability of this questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha value of 71 questions, which was common for both genders, was 0.95 and 0.94 for male and female respectively. For 16 gender-based questions, value was 0.88 and 0.87 for male and female respectively, which showed high consistency in the validation scale of the questionnaire.

Demographic variables as well as type of personality and perfectionism were considered as independent variables while spouse selection was considered as the dependent variable in this study. The results of the two groups of male and female volunteers were compared to using independent sample t-test. Relationship between variables was examined using the Pearson's correlations. Multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to examine predictors of both personality and perfectionism with spouse selection.

RESULTS

The average age of volunteers of the present study was 29.18±8.29 and 34.62±7.36 years, for female and male respectively. No significant differences were found concerning family income in both genders ($p>0.05$). As Table 1 shows, no significant difference was observed in educational degrees of volunteers' parents.

Based on the present study, which is illustrated in Figure 1, despite the significantly higher influence of mother's points than fathers in spouse selection are and marriage in both genders, this effect is much higher among girls as compared to boys.

Table 1. Comparison of educational level of volunteers' parents in both genders

Relative	*Diploma & Less (%)*		*P*	*Bachelor (%)*		*P*	*Master & Above (%)*		*P*
	Female	*Male*		*Female*	*Male*		*Female*	*Male*	
Father	33.1	30.1	>0.05	53.8	56.9	>0.05	13.1	13.0	>0.05
Mother	64.4	66.1	>0.05	23.7	24.0	>0.05	14.4	10.2	>0.05

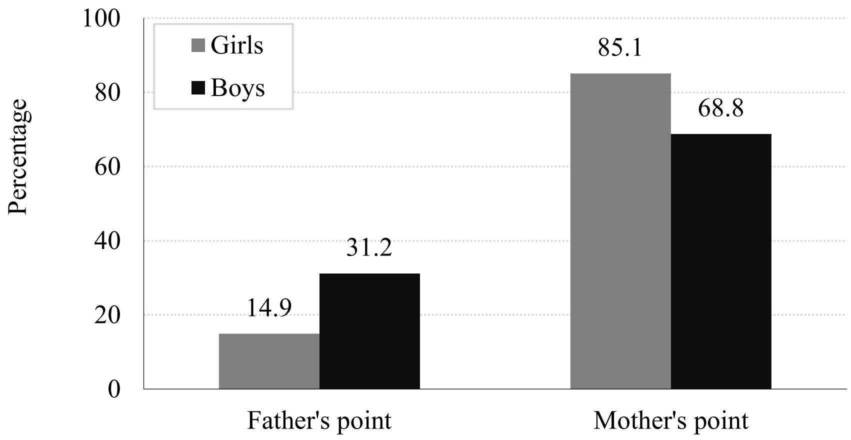

Figure 1. Comparison of the importance of parents' point of view in spouse selection

As Table 2 shows, despite the general belief on age differences between girls and boys for marriage among parents, youth showed significantly different belief with their parents. Based on the results, both genders have similar ideas on age difference for marriage, and surprisingly about 60% of boys believed that girls could be older than boys too.

Table 2. Comparison of both volunteers and their parents on age differences between girls and boys in different gender

Age Difference		*Girls*		*Boys*	
		Pro (%)	*Con (%)*	*Pro (%)*	*Con (%)*
Girl should be younger than boy	Youth	85.8	14.2^a	80	20^a
	Parents	96.6	3.4	99.1	0.9
Girl could be older than boy	Youth	57.2	42.8	59.1	40.9
	Parents	37.1^a	62.9^b	12.2^a	87.8^b

^{ab}Values with the same superscript are significantly different at $p<0.05$.

Based on MSSQ results, as Figure 2 illustrated, both volunteers and their parents showed high level of idealism on spouse selection in both genders. As Figure 3 shows, both genders showed similar levels of perfectionism based on APS test ($p<0.05$). In addition, similar level of personality type was observed ($p>0.05$). Significantly higher level of perfectionism and Type A personality among the volunteers was found ($p<0.05$).

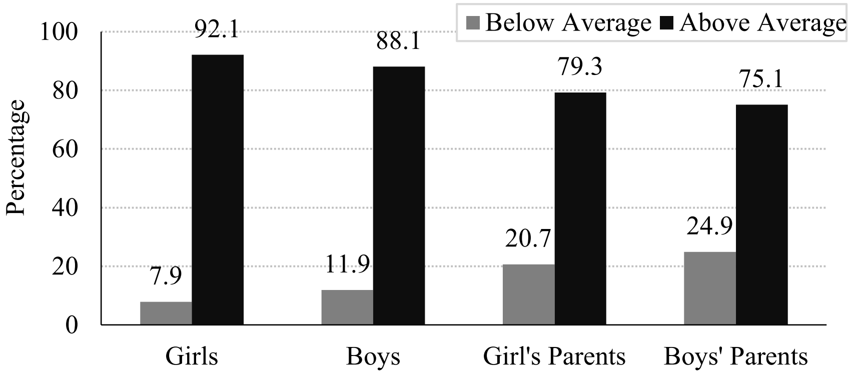

Figure 2. Frequency of idealism on spouse selection among volunteers and their parents

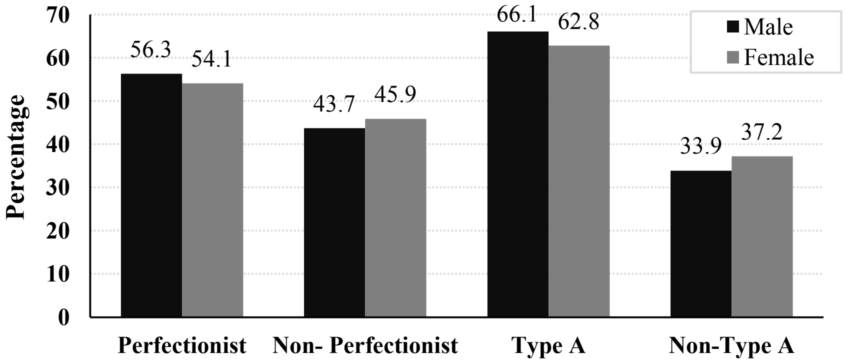

Figure 3. Comparison of the frequency of perfectionism and type of personality among volunteers

As Table 3 shows, parents of female volunteers showed significantly higher scores than girls' parents on financial, educational, and social level characters for their son in law, while male parents significantly scored higher than females' parents for beauty and physical properties, as well as religious beliefs (P<0.05).

Table 3. Comparison of the importance of different factors in spouse selection based on the family's point of view of volunteers

Factors	*Important (%)*		*Relatively Important (%)*		*Unimportant (%)*	
	Female	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
Financial	69.1^{a}	58.8^{a}	27.2	29.7	3.7	11.5
Educational	72.2^{a}	47.1^{a}	24.5	28.8	3.3^{c}	24.1^{c}
Social level	80.4^{a}	38.3^{a}	19.6^{b}	41.4^{b}	0.0^{c}	20.3^{c}
Beauty and physical properties	5.3^{a}	56.2^{a}	16.8^{b}	35.1^{b}	77.9^{c}	8.7^{c}
Religious beliefs	50.3^{a}	71.2^{a}	37.1^{b}	21.6^{b}	2.6^{c}	12.6^{c}
Manner & behavioral characters	100	97.9	0.0	2.1	0.0	0.0

^{abc} Values with the same superscript are significantly different at p<0.05.

The present study revealed surprising results on the financial interests of males. As it is shown in Table 4, male showed a similar interest on financial issue of their spouse. On the other hand, religious believes showed as relatively important for girls while it was highly important for males. Also male volunteers showed higher but non-significant interest for educational level of their spouse as compared to female ones.

Table 4. Comparison of the of importance of different factors in spouse selection based on volunteers' point of view

Factors	*Important (%)*		*Relatively Important (%)*		*Unimportant (%)*	
	Female	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
Financial	72.1	70.8	23.2	20.7	4.7	8.5
Educational	32.2	40.1	64.5^{b}	54.8^{b}	3.3	5.1
Social level	70.4^{a}	58.3^{a}	29.6	35.4	0.0^{c}	6.3^{c}
Beauty and physical properties	41.3^{a}	76.2^{a}	36.8^{b}	22.1^{b}	21.9^{c}	1.7^{c}
Religious beliefs	20.3^{a}	81.2^{a}	57.1^{b}	17.6^{b}	22.6^{c}	1.2^{c}
Manner & behavioral characters	100	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

^{abc}Values with the same superscript are significantly different at $p<0.05$.

As indicated in Tables 5 and 6, this study failed to find any significant relationship between perfectionism and the main factors for spouse selection as well as personality type "A" with above-mentioned factors in both males and female volunteers.

Table 5. Correlation and Regression between main factors in spouse selection with perfectionism based on different genders

	Female							*Male*						
Variable	*Pearson Correlation Coefficient*	R^2	*F*	*B*	*t*	*P*	*OR*	*Pearson Correlation Coefficient*	R^2	*F*	*B*	*t*	*p*	*OR*
Financial Level	0.012	0.0	0.03	0.902	0.142	0.89	1.097	-0.123	0.014	1.897	0.81	-1.38	0.172	0.564
Educational & cultural situation	-0.013	0.0	0.017	0.828	-0.11	0.91	0.941	0.015	0.00	0.029	0.768	-0.17	0.869	0.933
Religious believes	0.007	0.0	0.006	0.976	0.069	0.95	1.088	-0.034	0.001	0.132	0.884	-0.37	0.719	0.823
Physical properties	0.125	0.016	1.996	0.482	1.413	0.17	1.711	0.09	0.006	0.795	0.766	0.892	0.376	1.495
Manner & behavior	*-	*-	*-	*-	*-	*-	*-	0.132	0.018	2.207	0.968	1.484	0.15	0.0
Other	0.16	0.022	2.846	0.347	1.687	0.09	1.892	-0.102	0.012	1.309	0.532	-1.15	0.256	0.663
Total Score	0.142	0.021	2.507	0.866	1.585	0.12	3.31	0.072	0.006	0.621	0.901	0.787	0.433	1.695

* Lack of any correlation was due to 100% similarity in answers.

Table 6. Correlation and Regression between main factors in spouse selection with Type "A" personality in different genders

	Female							*Male*						
Variable	*Pearson Correlation Coefficient*	R^2	*F*	*B*	*t*	*P*	*OR*	*Pearson Correlation Coefficient*	R^2	*F*	*B*	*t*	*p*	*OR*
Financial Level	0.015	0.0	0.025	0.899	0.155	0.879	1.116	0.058	0.004	0.395	0.712	0.629	0.532	1.305
Educational & cultural situation	-0.006	0.0	0.004	0.829	-0.056	0.995	0.967	-0.032	0.002	0.121	0.777	-0.347	0.731	0.856
Religious believes	0.039	0.002	0.176	0.967	0.417	0.676	1.678	0.013	0.0	0.019	0.866	0.134	0.896	1.078
Physical properties	0.065	0.005	0.508	0.569	-0.713	0.479	0.737	-0.084	0.006	0.861	0.845	-0.926	0.357	0.636
Manner & behavior	□-	□-	□-	□-	□-	□-	□-	-0.097	0.009	1.136	1.01	-1.067	0.288	0.0
Other	-0.133	0.008	2.167	0.518	-1.473	0.145	0.535	-0.114	0.006	1.604	0.557	-1.267	0.209	0.623
Total Score	-0.002	0.0	0.0	0.898	-0.012	0.992	0.993	0.026	0.002	0.075	0.912	0.274	0.787	1.204

* Lack of any correlation was due to 100% similarity in answer

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DISCUSSION

Marriage is an important issue, which affects society in many aspects. Obviously, individuals choose to be married for a multitude of reasons the companionship of a partner, the desire to raise children in a two-parent household, and the legal protections associated with joint assets. The dropping of the marriage rate in the last decade has become a vital concern for many countries including Iran. In Iran, the number of marriages has dropped drastically while divorcement has increased tremendously in the last decade (SCI, 2015). Moreover, the number of annual child's births has fallen which affected on Iranian population average age. Two decades ago, Iran has the youngest population in countries while it is going to be an old population in coming decades (Didban, 2015). Around the world, there have been dramatic changes in marriage and divorce patterns over the past fifty years. In the United States, a pronounced trend toward delayed marriage emerged during the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1950s, the first-marriage rate for women was approximately 160 per 1,000 unmarried women. This rate declined only slightly over the next twenty years (Grossbard-Shechtman, 2003).

It is literally impossible to blame one factor for this worldwide problem. Like many other issues, marriage is a multi-factorial issue and a few of reasons might be blamed for this situation. Financial issue in marriage was one of the important factors since ages (Opdyke, 2009). Usually, both financial status and to some extent educational level of grooms had been always important factors in marriage especially for girls and their parents. It is even important for remarriage as well (Thibaudeau, 2013). Surprisingly, in the present study, significantly higher rate of these two interests were observed among family of boys. In traditional society, usually they prefer to have higher levels of education for boys, but in Iran, it seems for a few reasons this phenomenon has been changed. First of all most of the Iranian college students are girls and based on the latest reports, more than 60% of college students are female (DanaKhabar, 2014). Moreover, increasing of the age of marriage makes girls and their parents to be worried and show more leniency, which the present study observed this issue. On the other hand, economic situation also has become a big dam in front of boys for marriage and affected their point of views. The easiest solution for a boy would be a girl who already has a supportive economic situation. Therefore, in the present study no correlation and regression were found between financial situation and perfectionism or type of personality. This finding is along with previous study (Movahedi, 2010), and global trend. For instance, in western communities like America, significant difference in the view of men during the past 40 years has changed (Jayson, 2010). Increased luxury orientation in the society during past decades as well as various economic pressures due to global inflation (Shah, 2013) and more importantly, boosting consumerism culture, have caused living costs to be increased in the society and this required cooperation of members of the family to cope the living costs. In addition, mismanagement of governments in coping with economic sanction along with Iran-West conflict has boosted inflation in Iran.

In the present study, the importance of education for both groups, besides increasing social level of educated people might be due to financial issues as well. Girls with higher education have a better chance to have a job with higher salary, which is a great temptation for both parents and their sons. Therefore, it was not a surprise to see that close to two third of boys believed their bride could be older too. It is also another sign of Iranian social interests' transition in last two decades.

According to the current study, non-significant higher perfectionism among boys, and type "A" personality among girls might be due to social transition in recent decade. The present results are similar to findings of Chew & Chong Chee-Leong (1991), which has been conducted on 290 people of master students of the National University of Singapore, and girls has indicated significantly higher rate of type "A" personality as compared to boys (Chew & Chee-Leong, 1991). Despite the similarity of the present results with study of Behpajouh *et al* (2008), which has been done on 100 female and 103 male students in Iran, it was in contrast with study of Masson *et al.* (2004), on Belgian students. That study was conducted on 268 boys and 348 girls of Universtie de Liege, using the Test for Ability to Study and Evaluation (TASTE) and Multidimensional Perfection Scale (MPS). They found girls indicated higher percentage of perfectionism (Masson *et al.*, 2004). This difference might be due to the dissimilarity in the type of questionnaires in Masson study comparing with the current one.

The present study also failed to find any correlation between perfectionism, and type of personality with spouse selection criteria in both genders. It might be due to results of spouse selection, which both genders showed high level of expectations. This finding is similar to the results obtained from similar studies by Gyuris *et al* (2005) that they did not find any correlation between selecting the spouse and personality type (Gyuris, Bernáth, & Bereczkei, 2005). The insignificant relation between personality and spouse selection might be due to possible less compatibility of the questionnaires with Iranian population. The author-made spouse selection questionnaire was considered specifically for Iranians, while personality type questionnaire was based on western standards, which can effect on the correlations. Therefore, it is possible that the current questionnaires in different cultures would not be practical. On the other hand, as it has mentioned previously, it seems

More than 80 percent of the population in both girls and boys interested to have all the criteria for their future spouse. This result is quite horrifying because the average age of both male and female volunteers was about 30s and having such a fantasy dream for their spouse in this age could be an alert for Iranian society. Living in fairy tales would affect increasing the age of marriage, which makes big problems, especially for girls of the society. Unfortunately, the existence of idealism among the parents would make this conflict much worse (Howard & Reeves, 2014). A similar study conducted by Botwin*et al.* (1997) on 118 non-married boys and girls and 216 couples conducted in California State, USA. According to their findings, factors such as social situation and acceptability, personal nature and its reciprocal affection for selecting the spouse are very important (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997). Similarly, in this study, there was a significant difference in the importance of social situation between girls and boys. Unlikely, in the study by Regan and Berscheid (1997), US girls have not considered significant importance for the social and economic situation of their future spouse (Regan & Berscheid, 1997). This difference in outcomes of studies might be resulted from social difference as well as the age gap between these studies. Moreover, the presence of free and open relations in the USA directed them for having the living partner who had better perception and interest from him (Regan & Berscheid, 1997).

Iran has been considered generally as a religious country. Based on the current study, religion as well as manner & behavioral characters were two important factors for spouse selection in both genders. Although girls scored religious believes mainly as a relatively important factor, most of the boys considered it as an important factor. This difference is based on gender attitudes on marriage. Girls are afraid to be a spinster and in a same time as they live in their fairy tale story, they have this false idea that after marriage they can make their husband a religious man. Similar pattern in point of view of parents was observed, which shows the effect of both family and society in this issue. The results of this study were supported by previous studies (Nasirzadeh & Rasoulzadeh-Tabatabaee, 2009). Belief and religion is the most necessary element and must be considered for spouse selection, because couples will live with each other through their whole life, therefore they will be influenced by beliefs, thoughts and ethics of each other. The importance of religion and fidelity to the religious beliefs may be studied by several dimensions. First, it is mostly believed that people who have religious and fidelity are more tender and logic to deal with them because of their divine piety. On the other hand, decency, purity and chastity are inseparable part of religiousness, for this reason, religious people, whether girls and boys, have more chastity than faithless people do. Even in the western countries, religion is accounted as one of the factors keeping the family and a barrier against ill-fated marriages (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). Although, most physical properties of a spouse, such as beauty are important, they play less role after a while. For example, beauty may be lost after years by aging, but good morality is effective until the end of life. As the boys have a better chance and more time in seeking their bride, therefore this factor was significantly more important among boys than girls.

CONCLUSION

As an assumption, according to the present study, Iranian population due to social transition stage, are changing rapidly in many aspects which spouse selection is one of them. Family and society have influence dour youth taste in spouse selection. Financial status still plays an undeniable role in spouse selection and sadly, it has become an important issue for male too. In order to overcome the dropping rate of marriage which can massively affect both personal and society in all facets, cultural view should be modified at the society level. Instead of optimistic dreams for marriage and living in fairy tales, both parents and youth should think more rationally and humbly toward each other.

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