Marriage Salience, Prospect and Attitudes, and Their Determining Role in Premarital Sex among Elite Females in Tehran; Testing A Theoretical Model, 2018

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Introduction

Over the recent years, young people in conservative societies are exposed to some kind of paradoxical forces. From one hand, factors such as delay of marriage, low opportunity for marriage, and access to modern values through new communication technologies and global media, encourage them to experience premarital relationships including intimacy and sex. On the other hand, some prohibiting factors such as social norms and stigma, family values and marital norms (e.g. importance of virginity) prevent youth from experiencing premarital intimacy and sex; this is particularly relevant for females than males, because of dominant gender double standard in premarital sex. A survey among female college students in 2005 showed a high prevalence of premarital heterosexual friendship, while a small prevalence of premarital intercourse (Khalajabadi-Farahani 2008). Therefore, young people in conservative societies are increasingly placed in a strategic position for decision making of premarital sexual relations before marriage. Living apart together is also a common feature of some of these relationships before marriage which also involve sex. While many theories explain premarital sex, most of them are based on liberal societies and there are little theories or even no theoretical explanations for changes in premarital sexuality and relationships and intimacy before marriage in conservative societies with strong emphasis on marriage and family formation.

A previous qualitative study among 30 female college students in 2005 suggested that meaning of marriage including its importance in life, marital prospect and marital values are one of the key factors in female's decision to get involved in premarital sex compared to other factors such as complying with parental values, religion, gender and social sexual norms, sexual knowledge and self efficacy. Hence a theoretical framework was suggested based on the categories of this qualitative study to explain premarital sex (Khalajabadi-Farahani, Månsson et al. 2018). This framework was proposed to be evaluated by a quantitative survey.

Aims

This study aims to assess the association between meaning of marriage and premarital sex first and then to examine and evaluate a theoretical framework in which the role of different factors at various level are considered in predicting premarital sex. This theoretical framework was primarily developed in a previous qualitative interpretative study with inductive approach among female college students (Khalajabadi-Farahani, Månsson et al. 2018).

Study questions:

Some important questions that this study tries to answer are:

- In what ways meaning of marriage (marital salience, prospect or hope, and attitudes) differ between females who choose premarital sex and those who choose abstain?
- Whether marital salience, prospect and attitude determine premarital sex when the role of other factors is controlled?
- What are other predictors of premarital sex and what is their relationship with the meaning of marriage in explaining premarital sex?

Material and Method

We conducted a survey among 1055 female college students in Tehran over the Oct and Nov. 2018 using a stratified cluster sampling and using an online pilot tested questionnaire. The study tool was constructed based on the theoretical framework elements and items derived from in depth interviews. The validity and reliability of the study tool was confirmed. Outcome variable in this study was sexual intention and behavior before marriage and independent variables comprised of socio-economic factors including education and family income, scales of meaning of marriage (marital salience, marital prospect, and new marital attitudes), quality of family relationship, compliance with parental values and religious values, gender attitude, sexual knowledge, peer sexual norms and self-efficacy. These scales were constructed based on the items derived from a previous qualitative study among female college students. These items were answered using 5 point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, bivariate and multivariate analysis, life table and structural equation modeling (SEM).

Findings

Mean age of participant females was 21.2 years (SD=3.32). From among participants, 42% did not have any premarital relationship with the opposite sex, about 36% had only friendship with the opposite sex, but not have sex and 13% reported premarital sexual relations. Interestingly, 9.2% were not willing to report their relationship with the opposite sex. Despite a high importance of marriage, the priority of marriage compared to education was low and females had a low marital prospect or hope relatively. Some new sexual attitude regarding the importance of sexual compatibility for a successful marital life, liberal sexual attitude in which premarital sex was something unrelated with marriage and modern marriage with is not affected negatively by premarital sex was evident among significant minorities of sexually experienced females. Nevertheless, compliance to family values was one of the main prohibiting factors for premarital sex which was even more effective than compliance to religion. Bivariate analysis showed that premarital sexual experience was significantly associated with lower marital salience, greater marital prospect or hope, lower importance of physical virginity and new sexual attitudes. Logistic regression models indicated that after control of the effect of age, determinants of

premarital sex comprise of: new marital-sexual attitudes (OR=1.19, P<0.001), liberal peer norms (OR=1.15, P<0.05), greater marital salience (OR=1.06. P<0.05), Lower compliance with parental values (OR=0.89, P<0.05), greater sexual knowledge (OR=1.18, P<0.001) and pornography access (OR=1.49. P<0.001). These factors can explain 28% of variations of premarital sex among females.

Table 1 Predictors of premarital sex using Binary Logistic Regression

Domain	Predictors	Unadjusted OR	Model		
			OR	*95% CI*	*p-value*
Meaning, motivation of marriage and marital-sexual attitude	Marital salience	0.91 (0.88-0.94)***	**1.06**	**1.01-1.11**	**0.014**
	Marital Prospect	1.20(1.12-1.28)***	1.06	0.967-1.160	0.212
	Sexual attitudes	1.31 (1.25-1.36)***	**1.19**	**1.12-1.27**	**0.000**
Compliance with family values	Compliance with parental values	0.68(0.63-0.73)***	**0.89**	**0.803-0.980**	**0.018**
Gender and peer norms	Peer sexual norms	1.39(1.29-1.49)***	**1.15**	**1.043-1.262**	**0.005**
	Gender attitudes	1.84 (1.65-2.06)***	1.17	1.000-1.370	0.050
Sexual knowledge	Sexual knowledge	1.33 (1.22-1.45)***	**1.18**	**1.06-1.31**	**0.003**
Religiosity	Compliance to religion	0.73(0.68-0.78)***	0.97	0.876-1.068	0.505
Access to porn materials	Access to pornography		**1.49**	**1.182-1.175**	**0.001**
Delay marriage	Age		**1.09**	**1.008-1.175**	**0.031**
Constant		0.00	0.00	-	0.00

Cox و Snell R-Square=0.283, Model characteristics, Chi-square=5.280, Hosmer and Lemshow Test, DF=8, Sig. =0.727

According to the identified factors, Structural Education Modeling was conducted using AMOS to explain premarital sex among female college students.
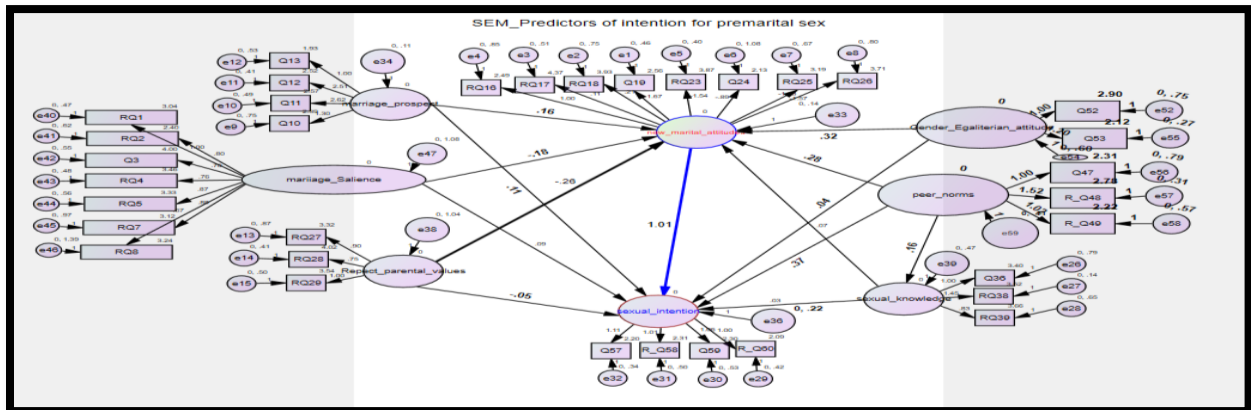
Minimum was achieved, Chi-square = 4033.379, Degrees of freedom = 513, Probability level = .000

Discussion & Conclusion

The finding of this study is consistent with Constitutional Theory of premarital sex and 2nd demographic transition. It seems that changes in social structures such as delay in marriage, lower opportunities for marriage due to expansion of heterosexual relationships and economical difficulties, social autonomy of youth and changes in social norms, access to pornography and modeling sexual behaviors, some new sexual and marital attitudes have developed among youth

regarding the importance of emotional and sexual aspects of marriage. In fact, it seems that meaning of marriage and its implications have been changed in view of sexually experienced girls. This seems have provided some grounds for premarital sex. Although about 80% of girls in the current study did not have experienced premarital sex, but due to the fact that associated factors with premarital sex is predicted to be enforced by time such as rise in individualism and autonomy among girls due to increasing aspiration for higher education among females, the probability of rise in premarital sex is expected to increase in future. As a study on family change also suggested some probable rise in divorce and premarital sex (Abbasi-Shavazi, Askari-Nodoushan et al. 2012).

We can claim that some structural changes in the society resulted in some unwanted product names premarital sex in significant minority of youth which have important implications for marriage and family formation, divorce and sexual health. This is consistent with structural theory employed for explaining the 1960s and 1970s rise in premarital sex in the United State (Beeghley and Sellers 1986). It seems that despite the significance of marriage, it seems that the meaning of marriage is changing from traditional to modern and with new emotional and sexual implications. In addition, changes of attitudes and values towards marriage and premarital sex and individualism are consistent with the 2nd demographic transition theory (Van-De-Kaa 1987) which emphasizes on changes in norms and tendency towards individualism (Lesthaeghe 2010). However, these changes in values are not universal in Iran and have occurred in significant minorities of liberal girls; still normative considerations particularly at the family level are among important determining factors for abstinence. Changes in marital and sexual attitudes are necessary to be considered in explaining changes in marital behavior and sexual behaviors among new generation of youth more than before. However, due to high correlations of many of such factors with sexual behaviors and because of the nature of cross sectional studies, causality is difficult to determine.

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