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Review Article

**A STUDY OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING THE GROWING
PRESENCE OF GIRLS IN IRANIAN UNIVERSITIES FOR
CONTINUING THEIR HIGHER EDUCATION:
A REVIEW****Abdolreza Gilavand**

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Abstract:

Introduction: Since during the few past decades we have been witness to the unprecedented increase in the presence of girls in Iranian universities for continuing their higher education, the current study seeks to study this issue through literature review.

Materials and Methods: This study has been conducted in the form of a simple literature review. Research data are collected via searching the published papers in trusted Iranian and Foreign websites based on the following key words "girls, continuing education, university and Iran".

Findings: Generally speaking, the factors affecting the increase of the presence of girls in Iranian universities for continuing their education can be sought for in the following elements: economic motives (getting a job, acquiring financial independence, skill and economic vision acquisition), political motives (further participation in political affairs, having the ability to comment upon political affairs, acquiring vital and sensitive positions), acquiring superior social status (acquiring higher scientific degrees, more popularity, nobler stature, better social position and credit, inclination toward marriage (interest in student marriage, having more freedom to choose their favorite husband, having more options to choose the husband, enhancement of the consciousness for choosing the husband), university campus attractions (lesser family supervision, being away from the hometown, acquiring new experiences in life, promoting one's social communications and relations, enhancement of one's self-trust), knowledge acquisition (uprooting illiteracy, promotion of one's knowledge, profession and scientific skill acquisition, interest).

Discussion and Conclusion: The growing number of educated girls could possibly give rise to new economic, social, cultural and political movements and this needs to be taken into earnest consideration in national policy making.

Key Words: Girls, Continuing Education, Universities, Iran.

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INTRODUCTION:

Human life is of various dimensions and, for this reason, every individual human being's development in each of these dimensions appears to be necessary for the betterment of life. Formal education in different eras in each society has been recognized as one of the common ways through which the citizens can develop their abilities and talents in different fields. Women are not exception to this rule and seek to achieve better life by taking different educational courses. Historical studies have revealed that the first University of the World was founded in Iran more than 1,700 years ago, and in 2017, this university was officially registered in the List of World Heritage Sites UNESCO under the title of Jundishapur (or Gondishapur) University (1). The history of ancient Iran also shows that Iranian women, in contrast to other nations, have been of a higher position and could have had the opportunity to acquire political, social, and military positions based on their personal merits and potentialities. Studies have shown that women in Iran are encountered with numerous obstacles in their path to the managerial positions (2). Universities are a place for training of professional and committed work-forces for the society in different fields (4-3). The perception of organizational justice is of a positive impact on the effectiveness of the performance of employees and organizations and their satisfaction. (5). Feminism is a school that challenges women's inferiority, and this opposition calls for a critical examination of the current and past position of women and challenging masculinist perspectives that consider women inferiority to be natural, universal, and unavoidable. Feminists contend that women are more deprived than men are. They believe that education is a means for raising social status of the women. Moreover, women and girls are struggling after gender equality in all areas, based on Bourdieu's social field theory, Merton's resistance theory, theory of goals and means, progression theory, and so on and so forth. As members of humankind, women are naturally of sense of curiosity and desire to know and discover the facts, and in this way, they are struggling to fulfill their primordial need for knowledge through existing education. As a wife and a mother in the family, woman is seeking to increase her skills and capabilities in order to do her commitments in the best way. In contemporary Iran, in the past, men were the pioneers in the field of learning and education, and in the classical and seminary schools, and later in the new educational system, and modern academic centers and schools, male students were the only inmates. Because of certain objective obstacles and cultural and social difficulties, girls were banned from the schools, and were only literate in reading the

Qur'an. However, the situation gradually changed due to the possibility of supervision of the activities of the educational centers and the facilitation of families' communication with academic and educational environments, and easy access to schools and universities the ground was set for the widespread presence of women in universities and educational centers at different levels, from primary, secondary and higher education. Given the traditional and religious context of Iranian society and as a result of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, and due to the Islamization of universities and higher education institutions, the trust of traditional and religious families to universities was increased, and the conditions got better for girls who had little possibility for attending universities. After the termination of Iran-Iraq war in 1988, upon the spread of the culture of modernity, the public space in Iran underwent through dramatic changes. Urbanization started to grow once again, and economic development turned to the statesmen's major plan. The capital's houses were replaced by luxury apartments and towers, and the enhancing burden of inflation and the tumultuous economic pressure were imposed to the families. Men were no longer able to provide a living for the family, and women should have helped their husbands. On the other hand, the national media aired programs in promotion of women's employment and education in various forms, particularly TV shows and series, and encouraged women for more social engagement and more activity via certain negative portraits of women who were kept at home and used as housewives and maids. On the other hand, Tehran as a model distributor influenced all subcultures and transmitted patterns of behavior and life through TV, and thus modelled the youth in other provinces. It was in this way that over the course of several years, everything turned Tehrani from speaking to clothing and almost all girls got interested in leaving the houses. Since then, modernity did gradually reveal its cultural effects and the promotion of women's independence from men's income, opposing the definitions of traditional family, and so on and so forth, brought girls closer to universities. On the other hand, by the establishment of various universities, and due to the increasing number of students and graduates with bachelor degrees having a university degree was no more helpful in winning job opportunities, and in the end this led boys to lose the motivation needed to continue their studies and instead struggle and spend their youth time to get a job. These together paved the way for girls to have a successful presence in the university entrance exam. Of course, the military service system has been an influential factor in this process. Those boys who did not enter the university

were forced to start their military service and had less opportunity to invest in this field (academic education). Given the abovementioned points, it can be concluded that girls' growing motivation and enthusiasm for social presence in recent years has led to their turning to absolute majority in universities. Iranian society has undergone through significant social, cultural and educational developments in past decades, particularly after the Islamic Revolution. One of the most important of these developments is the development of higher education at various levels and degrees, which has been accompanied by the nationwide participation of women. Expressed otherwise, with the expansion of the higher education system, the number of accepted students and educational courses has also increased. The remarkable point is that by looking at the number of people admitted in different years, the number of women admitted has increased dramatically in recent years. Therefore, this research analyzes the factors involved in the increase of the presence of girls in Iranian universities to continue their higher education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

This study represents a simple literature review that has been conducted in 2018 to examine the factors that increase the presence of girls in Iranian universities for continuing their higher education. Research data have been gathered through searching the published articles in the most trusted Iranian and foreign websites, including (SID, MAGIRAN, PubMed, Scopus, ISI) and based on the following key words "Girls, Continuing Education, University and Iran" without linguistic and historical restrictions. In the initial search, 41 related studies were detected, 13 papers among which \ were completely related and relevant and they were used in the current research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS:

The National Youth Agency (2001), in a study entitled *Status and Attitude of Iranian Youth*, shows that 77 percent of young people enter the university to earn a degree, 65 percent enroll in the university to find a job and 77 percent believe that university education can bring them social position and 33% enroll following the pressures forced by family and friends (6).

Naqavi (2002) in his research entitled *A study of the contexts of women's tendency to higher education in 70s* has alluded to the following factors: women's interest in political participation, the development of communication and information technology, employment, acquiring social stature (7).

Vedadhir (2002) in a research entitled *An Analysis of the phenomenon of excessive interest in having a university degree in society* considers the increasing number of the admission of the girls in the university as one of the consequences of the excessive social interest in university degree. He also suggests that going to university for women is a means for obtaining social status and having access to new positions. He also sees women's growing presence in institutions of higher education as one of the consequences of the development of society and the transformation of values (8).

The Office for Cultural and Educational Planning (2002) in a research entitled *An analytical study of the increase in the participation of women in higher education*, regards the growing demand of women to enter the university as a sign of their deep knowledge of their social capabilities and capacities and their serious will to improve their social and economic status. (9).

Gholami (2004) in a research entitled *Assaying key motives of girls for entering university* claims that the most important motive for girls to enter university is economic persuasion. In this survey of the students it is revealed that escaping from "poverty" and gaining financial independence from the male (spouse) are the key incentive for women to enter the university (10).

Mohammadi Roozbehani and Taromi (2005) in their research under the title of *motivating factors of entering the university* based on priority have respectively referred to social status, social environment of the university, occupational motivation and academic interest as the main motives for applicants to enter the university. According to this research, for female applicants, social status, university social environment and occupational motivation are more important than they are for male applicants (11).

Ghanei-Rad and Khosrow Khavar (2005) in a study entitled *An Overview of the Cultural Factors Involved in the Growing Presence of Girls in Universities* argues that the girls' willingness to continue their education, besides being motivated by their individual expectations, is rather of social and cultural implications and is hugely influenced by their family background as well as their interest in symbolic participation in building the future (12).

Safiri (2006) in a study entitled *Women and academic education* deals with the reasons why women are interested in university education. He is of the belief that choosing university is associated with such

motivations as employment and income, social status and marriage. Upon the entrance of girls to the university, the desire for the opposite sex increases in them and as a result women's freedom for choosing their desired husband increases too. Safiri believes that women's entrance to the university like any other social phenomenon is a twofold phenomenon that can be considered as an opportunity and in some aspects a threat. (13).

Torabi Mehrabani (2008) in a research has assayed the necessity of empowerment of students and detected a significant relationship between occupational motivation and new identity in society through entering universities (14).

Fatehi et al. (2009) in a research entitled *An analysis of relative increase of girls entering university*, speak of the increasing awareness of women rights, promotion of social status, social participation, increasing the level of women's expectations, the attractiveness of the university, the excessive interest in university degree and having more options for choosing one's husband (15).

Maleki (2010) in his research under the title of *economic, social and cultural factors affecting the girls' entrance to university* refers to the following factors: university attraction, job earning, increasing options for choosing as husband and gaining social status. (16).

Zahirinia and Behroozian (2014) in a research entitled *a study of the factors and motives that affect girls' entrance into university* showed that the economic-political motives (an important factor for boys) and the socio-economic and social base, marriage and attractiveness of the university environment among girls is comparably a more important factor for continuing university education (17).

Gilavand (2017) has conducted a study with the aim of comparing the motivations for choosing dentistry by tuition-based and tuition-free students in Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences in Ahvaz. Three factors of "Independent surgery office (occupational independence), suitable social status and high income earnings" have been identified as the most important motivations for choosing dentistry by the female students (18).

DISCUSSION:

No doubt, women's education will have certain benefits for a person, family, and ultimately the development and advancement of the community, because the more educated one is the more helpful

s/he is for the children, the families and the community at large. The third Article of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran obligates the government to ensure the full rights of individuals, including men and women, and to establish a just judicial system in which all people are equal before the law and they feel secure because security of the people of the society is one of the most basic features of the legal system of Islam. It also emphasizes the elimination of discrimination and the creation of just opportunities for men and women in all material and spiritual fields. In this article the women's participation in determination of their political, economic, social and cultural destiny has been noted. The general facilitation of higher education, general education and physical education for men and women in all levels is considered among the government's duties. In the Article twenty of the Constitution all citizens including the men and women are claimed to be of equal protection by law and they are equally entitled to enjoy all human, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Article twenty first of the Constitution concerns women's rights and the government is obligated to guarantee the women's rights in all respects observing the Islamic norms. (19). Generally speaking, according to the conducted studies, one can summarize the influential factors involved in the increase of the presence of the girls in Iranian universities for continuing their higher education as follows: economic motives (earning a job, acquiring financial independence, skill acquisition, economic vision), political motives (more active participation in political affairs, having the ability to comment upon the political issues, earning vital and sensitive offices), acquiring distinguished social basis (earning higher scientific degrees (excessive interest in university degree), winning more popularity, acquiring higher social stature, earning better social status, interest in marriage (interest in student marriage, having more freedom in choosing the future husband, having access to more options, increasing the personal knowledge for choosing the husband), environmental attractions of the university (lesser family supervision, being away from the hometown, earning new experiences in life, increasing the social relations and interactions, increasing the level of self-trust), acquiring knowledge (overcoming the illiteracy, promotion of general information and knowledge, skill acquisition and so on and so forth).

Moreover, the influential factors involved in the enhancement of the presence of girls in Iranian universities for continuing their higher education can be expressed in other words too:

1- The movement from tradition to modernity that has led to numerous social transformations and paved the way for the colorful presence of women in different social domains and since the women needed professions for their new engagements they applied for academic education.

2- Generation gap and disinterestedness towards the cultural elements of the past generation and the absence of mutual understanding among the girls and parents convinced the young women that they no longer need to follow their mothers' lifestyle and thus they decided to go to university and learn the requirements of the new life style.

3- Gradual increase in marriage age caused the interval time between the earning diploma and marriage to be prolonged and consequently the girls have free time to apply for university education before their marriage.

4- Among other reasons of the girls' enthusiasm for presence in university, one can refer to their interest in earning independent identity from male identity, i.e. independence. Girls believe that the roots of male domination should be sought for in financial issues and argue that by taking university courses and earning academic credentials the path becomes tiled for acquiring sufficient income to stand on their feet and announce their independence from the men and turn to an independent social entity.

5- One of the key factors in this regard that should not be neglected here is the true interest of part of girls in knowledge acquisition.

CONCLUSION:

The Iranian presidential deputy of women affairs states that by now 56 percent of the total students of state universities are women. Meanwhile 53% of students in medical sciences, 58% of students in humanities, and 69% of students in basic sciences are female. Moreover, 34% of the faculty members of universities of medical sciences are female insofar as by now 8% of the female faculty members are professor, 5.13% of them are reader (associate professor) and 21% of them are assistant professor. The presented statistics provided by the authorized officials endorse the ever-increasing presence of girls in universities. The increasing number of the female students should be studied in many respects because this ascending process is consequential in other domains like family, culture, politics and economy. It affects the traditional structure of family, labor division among the couples, normal educational patterns and the factors considered in choosing one's future husband. Moreover, we will be witness to the increase in the marriage age. Educational difference after marriage can be one of the reasons of divorce. In cultural domain, the current definitions of the

relationship between two sexes, social roles, life styles, and even more generally identity are exposed to major changes. The educational development of girls will be followed by the increase of the number of women who seek for job about which there are of course various analyses including the idea that some believe that even if women hold higher education degrees they are still unable to earn a job due to norms governing the work market and thus they have to accept inferior positions like secretary of the office and this is a type of hidden unemployment. However, some believe that in view of the restrictions of the labor market if the existing amounts of job opportunities are given to women there will be a true crisis in male employment that in turn can have fatal consequences. The economic side-effects of the presence of girls in universities cover wider range of issues including financial independence of women, oscillation in current occupational patterns (labor market in many fields was not hosting any female element and now by the presence of women the relations should redefined accordingly). Moreover, there should be a definition of a comprehensive pattern of participation in providing the family costs according to the norms. Being affected by this phenomenon the patterns of political participation including election, factions and NGOs will experience major changes and we will be encountered with newly emerged political movements and demands. Of course the scientific domain and research will be affected by this phenomenon too and there might be new concerns that have considerable differences with current concerns.

Given the research findings the following suggestions can be given:

- Some believe that the solution lies in rationing which is of course away from justice. We recommend the policy makers to be sensitive of the gender issue in their planning. Gender equality in universities does not imply giving 50 percent to each gender rather it refers to paying enough attention to the social emergencies and needs because some disciplines and fields are in urgent need of female professionals while some others need male professionals.

- The most important factor involved in the comparative increase of the number of female students against the male has been the high school system, because the applied changes in this system have caused the male students to be interested in technical disciplines. Then it is suggested that female students to be also informed and conducted towards the technical disciplines which of course suit their physical conditions. This is impossible unless the necessary policies are adopted.

- Male students suffer more problems and difficulties during their education as compared to female students. The majorities of these difficulties is economic and are related with the parents' expectations. Therefore, it is suggested that the existing disciplines to become more applied so that the students to be able to earn an income and experience as well and reduce their problems.

- The increase in education increases the girls' expectations which are logical and the officials are obligated to be accountable before them and answer their questions and provide the ground for their economic, social and political participation.

- It is predicted that given the women's expectations if these policies are not adopted in gradual fashion in near future we will be witness to the women's new movement for the revival of their true rights.

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