Phenomenological representation of biosociality in female-headed households

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Abstract

Aim: The number of Female Headed Households heads of households in Iran is currently increasing; And the general consensus on the issue of their vulnerability has led many studies to unravel their issues. One of the most important, especially in Iran, is the social relations of these women and the expectations that society has of them. The purpose of this research is to study the lived experience of these women in their social relationships. **Methods:** This research was conducted by phenomenological method. The research fild was the city of Mashhad and the participants were female-headed households in the winter 2022 who were selected by purposive sampling method with maximum distribution. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which in the 21st case ended with theoretical saturation. Data analysis was performed by Colaizzi method. **Results:** Female-headed households make changes in their social relationships in the four dimensions of living body, relationships, social space and time before and after household heading. For one group the body is somthing that carries the honor and for another group is a tool to protest the status quo. Lived relationships also fluctuate in a wide range from social distance to complete freedom. They all agree that the social environment is insecure and unreliable for them. Some have a positive attitude towards the past, some have a negative attitude, some try to forget the past and live in the present and some surrender to their destiny, and finally some try to change their lived-world according to their current situation. **Conclusion:** It is necessary for the support systems of these women to take their social relations seriously and pay attention to all four dimensions of their physical life, social space, communication and time.

Keywords: *Female Headed Households, Phenomenology, Social relations.*

Introduction

One of the manifestations of human civilization is living in the context of the family, a context that allows him to define desires and instincts such as love for the same kind and satisfying sexual instincts in a socially friendly framework. In a sense, civilization creates limits on the way to satisfy human impulses. On the other hand, while it replaces the power of the collective with the power of the individual, it also protects his assets and his family as well (Nagla, 2018). Although, throughout the history of human family life, due to some reasons, such as natural adversities, moral incompatibility of spouses, death of one of them, and breach of contract, it could not provide him the satisfaction of the ideal he was looking for. Each of these factors had the potential to break the social bond of marriage. A situation in which one of the spouses has to take care of himself and possibly his children. Therefore, being the head of a household means separation and failure in marriage, celibacy and widowhood. However, in the literature related to "guardianship", we do not encounter the term "male head of household" (Zare & Safari Dashtaki, 2019). Today, there are various definitions of the term "female head of household". In one definition, female head of the household refers to women who are in charge of the family without the regular presence or support of an adult man, and the responsibility of the economic management and major and vital decisions of the family rests with her (Atafi, Shekarbeigi, and Ahmadi, 2021). In other definitions, female heads of the household include widows, divorcees, single and single girls, wives of addicted men, prisoners, immigrants, disabled and disabled (Gholami, Ahmadi, and Mohammadi, 2019).

Right now, all over the world, we are witnessing the growing trend of women who are introduced to the society as "female heads of households" (Ghaderi & Rezaei, 2019); who head over a third of the world's households (Roshani et al., 2020). According to the forecasts of the United Nations Population Fund, it is estimated that 30% of all households in developing countries are headed by women (Julica, 2019). This figure reaches 50% in urban areas, Latin America and parts of Africa (Valery, 2016). In Iran, according to the population and housing census (2015), more than two million five hundred and sixty three thousand households are run by women. This group of women heads 12% of Iranian households (Hemmati & Karimi, 2018). Therefore, the research gap is, what changes in the social relationships of female heads of the household before and after the headship are achieved? A phenomenological study of these four lived dimensions of women heads of the household will provide more possibility to get closer to conceptualizing the lived experience in their social relationships.

Method

This research was conducted by phenomenological method. The research fild was the city of Mashhad and the participants were female-headed households in the winter 2022 who were selected by purposive sampling method with maximum distribution. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which in the 21st case ended with theoretical saturation. Data analysis was performed by Colaizzi method.

Results

The result of examining the narratives of the interviewees led to the identification of four components in the biosocial field, which are: lived body, lived relationships, lived space and lived time. The participants' perception of their social life was directly related to their phenomenological experiences. Interview listeners first of all

believed that their way of being in society is directly related to their needs. In this sense, the type of life they have in the community, if it matches their needs, is perceived as a pleasant existence for them.

Conclusion

The narrative of the interviewees showed that, on the one hand, they are under severe economic pressure, and on the other hand, they see their self-respect at risk; As a result, they choose to "break from social ties"; As a result, according to Lavoic, when a person tries to "reject the desired" or "unwanted", he gradually breaks the previous bonds and as a result, he is deprived of the possible support of these bonds (Lavoic, 2016). The interviewed women stated that they needed support after accepting guardianship and creating the role of father and mother or husband and wife. However, in Kaufman's interpretation, the type of support that society gives to a female head of the household forces her to fluctuate in their perception of the support needed (Kaufman, 2020). Meanwhile, the results of Heydarkhani et al.'s study (2016) show that the receipt of social support directly correlates with the social relationships of female heads of households.

On the other hand, the results show that distrust, instability, and poisoning that govern relationships, especially relationships with the opposite sex, cast a shadow on the relationships of most of them and provided the ground for the emergence of a contradictory identity. It is very clear that the major changes are seen in the structure of their social relations. The absence of a spouse has provided them with an additional role of men, willingly or unwillingly; This is when it is necessary to be strong for them to play the role of a woman. As a result, according to Bauman, they suffer from a structural contradiction in their lived social experience. A group of them try to distance themselves from others and reduce the scope of their communication in this plagued atmosphere (Mokhtari & Dehghani, 2021). Therefore, for this group, "trying to distance" covers most of their relationships. Meanwhile, some of them have made "rethinking relationships" the focus of their social relations. This group experiences a wide range of social relationships, from caution in establishing relationships to expanding them.

For these women, the living space is also a platform where relationships take place and affect the quality and quantity of their relationships. The results show that the fastest change in the living space of female heads of the household occurs in their "social roles" because the absence of a husband has inevitably made their presence in the public sphere more colorful than before. For them, such a situation brings about "equalization of the role of father and mother" and "equalization of the role of wife and husband". Therefore, assuming the headship of the household disrupts the previous calculations of this group of women. As a result, a serious challenge for them is "successfully combining work and playing female roles". Although some of them feel self-worth when they experience a more colorful presence in the social arena, men's presence in the public arena has eroded the softness of their female relationships (Chen et al., 2017).

The evidence of this study showed that the lived time of female heads of the household also has all the personality spectrums in "Zimbardo's time perspective theory" (Kaufman, 2020). So that a group of them have a clear vision of their past lived experiences. At the same time, some of them have a negative attitude toward their past. Also, for a group of them, the present time is important. And in their words there are signs of wanting to forget the past and enjoy the present. At the same time, some of them consider themselves surrendered to the pre-written fate and give up any effort to change their situation. But there is also a group who, in addition to being

optimistic about the future, try to overcome their disappointment and try to make the right decision for the future considering the existing conditions. Now, regardless of valuing the challenges experienced by these women, we can think about this paradigm, the contradictory presence of women heads of households in their social relations in both private and public arenas and the messages that the members of these two arenas give to her. Future papers can provide a clearer picture of these relationships.

On the other hand, today in Iran, various organizations are in charge of supporting women heads of households. However, none of them, not even the vice president's office for women and family (as the highest political authority related to women heads of households), has accurate statistics on these women. In addition, many organizations and officials who deal directly with social harms, such as women heads of households, choose the easiest option for these phenomena: hiding relevant information and statistics. This situation would limit any research. On the other hand, although this research made an effort to make the participants talk about their social relationships without any worries, with appropriate preparations and empathetic implementation. However, since their psychological structure is strongly tied to mistrust, some avoided expressing aspects of their lived experience. Therefore, it is suggested to be more accurate based on reality in this field. For example, social support for women with incompetent spouses is not provided in the law, so it is suggested that the legislators pay serious attention to this group of female heads of the household when making laws. In addition, it is suggested that organizations in charge of women heads of households should be identified, organized and merged with each other through a legal process, and then each of them should provide support to women heads of households as a pole.

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