

Factors Influencing the Decision to Have Children in Iranian Military Families: A Qualitative Study

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Introduction section, the statement “military families constitute one of the most influential social institutions within the structure of modern societies” is theoretically broad and normatively framed. The manuscript would benefit from a clearer sociological or family-systems definition of “military families” and a stronger theoretical justification explaining why they should be conceptualized as a distinct analytical category rather than simply an occupational subgroup. The authors should also clarify whether “military families” refers only to active-duty personnel or includes veterans, reservists, and affiliated security institutions.

The paragraph beginning with “In many countries, military families encounter unique conditions...” provides several international references; however, the manuscript lacks a critical comparison between Western military structures and the Iranian military context. Because organizational culture, ideological structures, and family policies differ substantially across

countries, the authors should explicitly explain the transferability limitations of Western military-family literature to Iranian military institutions.

The sentence “childbearing decisions in military families cannot be understood solely through economic or demographic frameworks” is conceptually important but underdeveloped. The article would benefit from a dedicated theoretical framework section explaining how grounded theory was informed by sociological theories of fertility, symbolic interactionism, family systems theory, pronatalist ideology, or Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital. Currently, theoretical integration appears fragmented.

The paragraph discussing “commitment to the leadership discourse system” introduces a highly sensitive ideological construct, but the manuscript does not explain how ideological influence was operationalized during interviews. The authors should clarify whether this theme emerged organically from participants’ narratives or whether interview prompts explicitly directed participants toward political or ideological discussions. Without this clarification, concerns regarding interviewer influence and confirmation bias remain significant.

The manuscript repeatedly uses highly normative expressions such as “raising soldiers for the Imam Mahdi” and “supporters of the leadership system.” The authors should provide a reflexive methodological statement explaining how they managed researcher positionality and ideological neutrality during coding and interpretation. In qualitative research, especially grounded theory, reflexivity is essential when studying politically or religiously charged topics.

In the Methods section, the description of purposive sampling is insufficiently detailed. The manuscript states that 18 participants were recruited from Tehran, but it does not explain how access to participants was obtained, whether recruitment occurred through military institutions, personal networks, or formal organizational approval, and whether rank, branch, years of service, or deployment history were considered during participant selection. These factors could substantially shape fertility attitudes.

The statement “theoretical saturation was achieved after 16 interviews” requires stronger methodological justification. The authors should explain how saturation was assessed operationally. For example, was saturation determined through redundancy of categories, absence of new conceptual relationships, or coding stability? Merely stating saturation without methodological evidence weakens the rigor of grounded theory implementation.

The interview protocol requires further elaboration. Although broad domains are described, the manuscript does not report whether pilot interviews were conducted, whether the interview guide was revised during theoretical sampling, or how probing questions evolved throughout data collection. Since grounded theory relies on iterative data collection and analysis, the dynamic development of interviews should be clarified.

The study claims to use Strauss and Corbin’s grounded theory approach, yet the analysis section does not adequately demonstrate core grounded theory procedures such as constant comparative analysis, memo-writing, theoretical coding, or paradigm model integration. The authors should explain how codes evolved into categories and how the final conceptual model was generated from iterative comparisons across interviews.

The discussion section tends to summarize findings rather than critically analyze contradictions or tensions within participants’ experiences. For example, participants simultaneously emphasized economic insecurity as a barrier and ideological-religious obligation as a motivator. The manuscript should examine how families negotiate these competing pressures instead of presenting categories as harmoniously integrated.

The concept “child as an ontological investment” is potentially innovative; however, it remains theoretically underdeveloped. The authors should provide clearer philosophical or phenomenological grounding for this concept. Currently, the phrase appears interpretive and rhetorically strong, but its analytical meaning remains ambiguous.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

There is an inconsistency between the abstract and the findings section regarding coding outcomes. The abstract reports “13 selective categories, 38 axial categories, and 156 subcategories,” whereas the Findings section later reports “12 main categories, 32 subcategories, and 116 initial codes.” This discrepancy is a major methodological inconsistency and must be corrected throughout the manuscript.

Table 2 is informative but excessively descriptive. Many initial codes overlap conceptually and appear repetitive. For example, “belief in divine providence,” “trust in God,” and “belief in divine destiny regarding childbearing” could potentially be merged into a more analytically coherent subcategory. The current presentation resembles thematic listing rather than grounded conceptual abstraction.

The category “Commitment to the Leadership Discourse System” raises concerns regarding analytical separation from “Faith-Based Action and Religious Identity.” The boundaries between ideological-political obedience and religious commitment are not sufficiently clarified. The manuscript should explain how these categories were analytically differentiated during axial coding to avoid conceptual redundancy.

The manuscript reports demographic characteristics in Table 1, but it omits several variables highly relevant to fertility decision-making in military populations, including duration of military service, rank, combat exposure, deployment frequency, housing status, spouse employment, and military branch affiliation. These omissions reduce the interpretive depth of the findings.

The participant quotations are generally useful; however, several quotations are too long and descriptive without sufficient analytical interpretation afterward. For example, the quotations regarding “jihadi spirit” and “raising soldiers for Imam Mahdi” should be followed by deeper conceptual analysis explaining how ideological identity interacts with psychological resilience and fertility motivation.

The section “Transformation of Contemporary Lifestyles” contains potentially problematic generalizations. The quotation regarding “keeping animals instead of having children” risks appearing culturally judgmental and insufficiently grounded analytically. The authors should contextualize this discourse sociologically rather than reproducing participant narratives without critical interpretation.

The article would benefit from greater attention to gender dynamics. Although the sample includes both men and women, the analysis does not systematically compare maternal and paternal perspectives. Military motherhood, emotional labor, occupational burden on women, and gendered parenting expectations deserve much deeper analytical attention given the topic of fertility decision-making.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.