

A Comparative Study Between the Paradigmatic Models of Girls and Boys in the Formation Process of Marriage Trauma

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Shadmand, S., Hashemianfar, S. A., & Aghasi, S. (2026). A Comparative Study Between the Paradigmatic Models of Girls and Boys in the Formation Process of Marriage Trauma. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies*, 7(1), 1-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.4763>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to compare the paradigmatic models of girls and boys in the formation process of marriage trauma using a grounded theory framework.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study employed the systematic grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin. Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 21 unmarried girls and 17 unmarried boys residing in Shahreza who did not have psychological disorders. Participants were recruited through an Instagram call posted by a psychological clinic and selected via snowball sampling. Interviews lasted 60–80 minutes and explored causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences related to fear of marriage. Data were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding to identify core categories and reconstruct gender-specific paradigmatic models explaining marriage trauma.

Findings: The analysis revealed distinct gendered pathways in the formation of marriage trauma. For girls, the core category was “the ambiguity of the value of marriage and perfectionism of self and parents,” arising from emotional failures of others, familial expectations, religious–moral incongruence, and economic insecurity. For boys, the core category was “the meaninglessness of marital authenticity,” driven by fear of unsuccessful marriage, economic instability, perceived legal vulnerability, past relational hurt, and sociocultural constraints. Across both groups, intervening conditions such as parental conflict, emotional dependency, and intergenerational narratives intensified trauma trajectories. Strategies included seeking emotional reassurance, emphasizing compatibility, and attempting to learn communication skills; however, consequences such as increased dependency, avoidance, and loss of perceived marriage opportunities were evident.

Conclusion: Marriage trauma among youth arises from intertwined emotional, familial, sociocultural, and structural factors, with clear gender-specific mechanisms shaping fear and avoidance of marriage; understanding these paradigmatic models can inform culturally responsive interventions and support systems.

Keywords: Marriage trauma; grounded theory; gender differences; fear of marriage; socio-cultural factors; emotional breakup; youth psychology.

1. Introduction

Marriage, as a central institution across societies, has historically provided social stability, emotional fulfillment, and normative pathways for intimacy, family formation, and intergenerational continuity. Despite the global variability in marital structures, from traditional arranged unions to contemporary companionate marriages, the psychological and sociocultural significance of marriage remains profound. In recent decades, however, rapid modernization, shifts in gender roles, global mobility, and digital transformations have reshaped young adults' perceptions of marriage, leading to heightened uncertainty, ambivalence, and in many contexts, trauma-like responses toward the prospect of marriage. Scholars increasingly describe these reactions as "marriage trauma"—a complex psychological and sociocultural condition shaped by emotional experiences, family histories, cultural norms, and structural factors (Mączka, 2021; Thapa & Kattel, 2019).

The sociocultural landscape of marriage in societies undergoing rapid transformation, such as Iran and other Middle Eastern or Asian contexts, reflects tensions between traditional expectations and modern individualistic aspirations. Historical work on consanguineous marriage patterns demonstrates how kinship-based marital systems persist despite modernization pressures, underscoring the strength of cultural continuity in shaping marital choices and anxieties (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2008). Contemporary research indicates that young people increasingly negotiate between inherited norms and emerging lifestyles, generating internal conflicts around marriage readiness, mate selection, intimacy, and independence. These tensions may manifest as avoidance, fear, or trauma, particularly when prior relational experiences or intergenerational patterns reinforce negative expectations (Niakani, 2022).

Marriage trauma is understood not merely as fear of commitment, but as a complex emotional and cognitive response shaped by earlier relationship breakdowns, familial instability, sociocultural pressures, and personal vulnerabilities. Psychological research on romantic dissolution shows that breakup distress, unresolved attachment patterns, and rumination significantly influence individuals' subsequent relational expectations and fears (Arana et al., 2024; Eisma et al., 2022; Field et al., 2020). Studies also show that young adults who have experienced emotional rupture often display reduced trust, heightened monitoring of partners, or anticipatory anxiety toward marriage (Verhallen et al., 2019; Yılmaz et al., 2023). These

psychological residues directly contribute to what is conceptualized as marriage trauma.

Sociologically, the forces of modernity have reshaped marital ideals and disrupted traditional pathways to marriage. Changing family structures, rising educational levels, delayed economic independence, and evolving gender identities collectively challenge previously stable marital expectations (Gara, 2022; Shabani et al., 2022). In Iran, as in many societies in transition, young people negotiate between religiously grounded expectations for stable, lifelong unions and emerging desires for emotional compatibility, autonomy, and mutual respect (Ismail et al., 2025; Rahai, 2023). These opposing forces often create internal dilemmas: an individual may aspire to emotional intimacy but simultaneously fear the rigid commitments or socioeconomic burdens that marriage entails.

One of the strongest sociocultural determinants of marriage trauma is intergenerational transmission. Marital patterns, family instability, and parental conflict shape children's emotional schemas and expectations regarding marriage. Research shows that parental divorce and marital discord consistently reduce children's trust in future romantic partners and their confidence in navigating intimate relationships (Hoffman, 2020; Yılmaz et al., 2023). Intergenerational narratives of marital suffering—such as stories of unequal gender roles, emotional neglect, economic dependency, or infidelity—act as cultural scripts that contribute to fear, avoidance, and trauma-like reactions to marriage (Grøntvedt et al., 2020; Najmabadi, 2022).

At the same time, psychological processes related to intimacy, attachment, and emotional regulation strongly contribute to the development of marriage trauma. Emotional breakup experiences generate grief, uncertainty, and self-doubt, which can be reactivated when contemplating marriage (Khodavardian et al., 2020; Zamanshoar et al., 2022). Ruminative thinking—characterized by repetitive negative reflections on past relationships—has been shown to exacerbate anxiety about forming new commitments or entering marriage (Loan et al., 2023; Trần et al., 2023). Some individuals display heightened fear of intimacy, emotional avoidance, or hypervigilance toward potential relational threats, all of which reinforce trauma-related responses (Fife et al., 2022; Shishefar et al., 2024).

Gender plays a crucial role in shaping how marriage trauma develops and manifests. Comparative studies reveal that girls and boys engage with sociocultural expectations differently. In many contexts, girls internalize familial

expectations, concerns about security, and demands for social conformity more strongly, while boys may experience pressure related to economic readiness, responsibility, and independence (Azami, 2021; Honarparvaran, 2017). Moreover, social structures around masculinity and femininity influence the psychological meaning of marriage; for example, young women may fear economic dependence or loss of autonomy, whereas young men may fear financial instability or legal commitments (Avneesh Kumar & Apeksha, 2024; Sadeghi, 2021). These gendered expectations create distinct psychological pathways to marriage trauma.

Legal, religious, and sociopolitical frameworks also shape how young people perceive and experience marriage. In Islamic societies, marriage is both a sacred institution and a legally regulated contract, which adds layers of responsibility, rights, and obligations that may intensify fear for some individuals (Ismail et al., 2025). Discussions on temporary marriage, autonomy within marriage contracts, and legal protections illustrate the evolving nature of marital expectations in modern Islamic contexts (Rahai, 2023; Sadeghi, 2021). Social inequalities, economic instability, and structural barriers—such as limited job opportunities, housing shortages, or high marriage expenses—further heighten the emotional burden associated with entering marriage (Касаркина & Антипова, 2020). These external pressures often intersect with psychological vulnerabilities to shape trauma-like responses.

Cross-cultural perspectives demonstrate that marriage trauma is not confined to a single region. Studies from Nepal, Europe, and Turkey show similar phenomena: modernization leads to shifts in relationship expectations, increased valuation of personal autonomy, and rising uncertainty about long-term commitments (Arana et al., 2024; Thapa & Kattel, 2019; Yılmaz et al., 2023). The emotional consequences of breakups and relational insecurity are remarkably universal, contributing to global patterns of marriage avoidance or delay (Fife et al., 2022; Verhallen et al., 2019). Yet, the sociocultural systems that shape these concerns differ, suggesting the need for localized, culturally sensitive analyses.

Despite the growing body of research, there remain significant gaps. First, while the literature extensively addresses marital attitudes, breakup distress, and the role of cultural norms, few studies integrate these strands into a comprehensive model of *marriage trauma*. Second, although gender differences in relational expectations are widely discussed, there is limited empirical work comparing

the *paradigmatic structures* of marriage trauma among girls and boys within the same sociocultural context. Third, current studies often rely on quantitative surveys that fail to capture the nuanced, grounded, and experiential nature of trauma-like marriage anxieties. A grounded theory approach provides the methodological depth needed to uncover latent structures, emotional dynamics, and sociocultural mediators of marriage trauma (Tajbakhsh & Goodarzi, 2021; Zamanshoar et al., 2022). Finally, no existing research systematically compares how young girls and boys construct the meaning of marriage, interpret family experiences, interact with sociocultural pressures, and develop fear-based narratives around marriage.

Given these gaps, a thorough qualitative exploration of gendered paradigmatic models is needed to understand the mechanisms through which marriage trauma forms, evolves, and persists in different sociocultural contexts. Such an inquiry can illuminate not only the psychological patterns but also the broader cultural narratives that shape individuals' relational trajectories. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for designing culturally grounded interventions, premarital education programs, and social policies aimed at reducing marriage-related fears and supporting healthier relational development.

The aim of this study is to compare the paradigmatic models of girls and boys in the formation process of marriage trauma using a grounded theory framework.

2. Methods and Materials

In this study, the grounded theory method based on Strauss and Corbin's systematic approach was employed, which analyzes data through continuous and systematic comparison and emphasizes coding as the central axis of analysis. In this process, qualitative data such as interviews were first divided into smaller segments and subjected to initial coding to identify detailed concepts (54 codes for girls and 42 codes for boys). Then, in the axial coding stage, these codes were connected to one another, and broader concepts and core categories such as fear of marriage, social changes, and cultural pressures were formed (three axial categories for each group). Finally, selective coding extracted the final categories to provide an overall explanation of fear of marriage and to present a theory grounded in empirical data that explains the social and cultural factors and individual experiences influencing fear of marriage among girls and boys in Shahreza. This method enables the use of primary

data to construct a practical and valid theory regarding this social phenomenon.

In this study, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation, such that the main axes of the questions were pre-designed but the course of the interview remained flexible according to participants' responses and preferences. The interviews began with open-ended questions and gradually proceeded toward deeper issues such as marriage-detering factors, the role of family and culture, and attitudes toward marriage traditions, allowing participants to express their experiences and views naturally and without anxiety. In addition to verbal content, behavior, tone, social interactions, and emotional reactions were also observed in order to identify the cultural and social contexts influencing their mindset. The data were then analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding to extract the main concepts and the relationships among them and to reconstruct the shared and divergent patterns of fear of marriage in girls and boys, while

adhering to research ethical principles to maintain the credibility and objectivity of the data.

3. Findings and Results

In these interviews, three fundamental questions were asked, each corresponding to the conceptual elements of the paradigmatic model. These three questions were:

What conditions have contributed to your not getting married?

Causal conditions / contextual conditions / intervening conditions

What is the current state of your life situation?

Consequences

What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current single life? / How do you think a successful marriage can be achieved?

The essential concepts of the paradigmatic framework have been preserved.

Table 1

Qualitative Analysis

Consequences, Strengths and Weaknesses of Single Life	Strategies and Approaches for Achieving Marriage	Causal Conditions	Contextual Conditions	Intervening Conditions (Underlying Factors That, if Absent, Lead to Fear Formation)
Moral looseness, masturbation, cohabitation ("white marriage"), having a boyfriend, having a girlfriend, cohabitation, open relationship	The presence of love and attachment removes fear / conscious selection accompanied by love / cooperation and mutual participation in marriage / personal and spousal growth / mistrust toward the opposite sex	Emotional failures of others in marriage: parents' divorce, sister's or brother's divorce, divorce among relatives, divorce among friends, legal marriage contract requirements for men, fear of unsuccessful marriage	Lack of economic security: unemployment, lack of housing, inability to purchase dowry and infant supplies, high cost of marital life, high cost of wedding ceremonies	Related to the family of origin: agreement between parents, father's occupation, mother's occupation, parents not desiring their child's marriage, high family expectations and opposition, parental conflicts, lack of parental intimacy
Increasing attachments: attachment to parents, attachment to peers, attachment to pets and plants, attachment to siblings, strong attachment to nieces and nephews, over-attachment to work; depression, medical interventions, introversion, social withdrawal, loss of self-confidence, severe aggression especially among men under age 30	Reassurance in marriage: financial and cultural agreement prior to marriage, attaining mutual understanding with the future spouse, sound decision-making in marital life, indecisiveness; financial management such as saving money, obtaining housing, buying a car, purchasing gold coins, purchasing dowry (for girls)	Perfectionism: high-status occupation, advanced education, high cultural level, high economic status, type of car, type of residence, spouse's parents' occupations, physical appearance, clothing style, viewing a spouse as a step toward advancement, social comparison, progress in work/education to find a better spouse, inability to find an ideal partner, high expectations of the partner	Percentage of successful and unsuccessful couples around the individual: parents, siblings, relatives, friends	Limitations of marital life: fear of responsibility, lack of agreement in ethical and religious values, mismatch in moral values, lack of agreement in beliefs (hijab, prayer, fasting)
Losing the golden opportunity of marriage: aging, loss of fertility window (for women), decline in number of suitors, reduced selection range for older women by men	Learning effective communication with the future spouse, avoiding control, fulfilling roles effectively	The single lifestyle of friends and acquaintances (comfort): single trips, strong attachment to friends, leisure associated with single life, professional/academic advancement due to singleness, indecisiveness		Support from children toward parents: financial support, emotional support, intimate relationships, parental status

Developing communication skills: reading, counseling, discussion and consultation with qualified individuals

Fear of disappointment in marital life: lack of love and attachment, failure to achieve reassurance, fear of personal failure in marriage, lack of mutual understanding, emotional problems observed in others' marriages, fear of sexual dissatisfaction, emotional issues in others' marriages, fear of responsibilities
Lack of long-term relational skills such as patience, tolerance, sacrifice, loyalty
Inability to make timely decisions, military service (for men), having older siblings, having older unmarried sisters (for girls), older brother (for boys), lack of necessary emotional motivation
Lack of attraction toward the opposite sex: comparison, multiple relationships and moral looseness, narcissism
Infidelity: infidelity in one's own relationships, parental infidelity, witnessing infidelity among acquaintances
Sexual assault: childhood sexual abuse, adult sexual assault
Secret relationship, temporary marriage ("sigheh"), cohabitation ("white marriage")

Support toward siblings: financial support, emotional support

Fear of marriage among young people can be strongly influenced by social, cultural, and familial factors. In the present study, the various background conditions that affected the non-marriage of girls and boys were examined. These factors predominantly relate to family circumstances and the social and cultural context of the individual.

The Role of Family in the Formation of Marriage Fear

At the beginning of the marriage process, family support is identified as the first and most essential factor. Some participants stated that parental disagreement about marriage or even their opposition to their children's marriage played a significant role in their fears and concerns. Families, sometimes due to cultural and social pressures, place high expectations on their children, contributing to intensified fear of marriage. These issues become particularly severe when girls and boys, due to emotional and financial dependence on their families, remain distant from marriage and independence.

Fereshteh, 55 years old, stated: *"What caused fear in the marriages of me and my sister was my parents' wrong traditions and inappropriate behavior. If they had agreed to my marriage, perhaps my sister's marriage would have been arranged as well. Marriage by age order had become a rule in our house..."*

Emotional and Financial Dependencies

In many cases, emotional and financial dependency on parents—or even siblings—prevents individuals from getting married. This is especially evident among boys who, due to unemployment, lack of housing, or insufficient income, feel incapable of supporting marital life. In some interviews, girls specifically mentioned that their families could not afford dowry or essential household items, leading them to avoid marriage.

Sepideh, 41 years old, stated: *"My mother always says, why do you want to get married? You are your own man. I have financially supported my family a lot. My main concern in life is buying a house. I love my siblings' children very much... My sister married at age 23. The dowry my mother had prepared for me was given to my sister with my consent. My brother married at age 26, and I helped him greatly with the wedding expenses."*

Economic Conditions and Fear of Responsibilities

Poor economic conditions and inability to cover the expenses of marital life are major contributors to fear of marriage. The fear of financial inadequacy, especially among boys, was clearly evident in the interviews. For many girls as well, economic stability and financial security were crucial criteria for evaluating marriage prospects. Even some employed girls stated that weak economic conditions or lack

of financial security created significant doubts about marriage.

Behzad, 25 years old, stated: *"I really want to get married, but my problem is that my parents do not agree about my marriage. I recently found a good job, but I have not yet reached financial stability. I rely on my parents financially. No matter how much I insist on marriage, it is useless. My parents use my financial instability as an excuse... and they always scare me with talk of court, divorce, and the marriage contract."*

Cultural and Religious Incompatibilities

Social and cultural trauma associated with fear of marriage intensifies particularly when individuals' moral and religious values do not align. Significant differences in religious practices—such as hijab, prayer, or fasting—were highlighted as major sources of fear. These discrepancies create mistrust and hesitation, ultimately discouraging individuals from choosing a marital partner.

Reyhaneh, 25 years old, stated: *"My cousin divorced her husband because they did not agree in religious and moral values, and her husband was excessively attached to his mother. I do not want resentment and revenge in my future life. My parents have provided me with comfort and peace, and I will not destroy that. When speaking to suitors, religious compatibility is my priority. I am careful... It is important to me that my husband has a clean past. I'm afraid of promiscuous men..."*

Negative Experiences and Fear of Failure

Negative experiences of divorce among family members and acquaintances—parents, siblings, relatives, and even friends—were repeatedly cited as major factors contributing to fear of marriage. Participants who had witnessed emotional failure or divorce in their surroundings expressed increased anxiety and hesitation toward marriage. Among boys, fear of legal obligations such as signing the marriage contract was also noted.

Saman, age unspecified, stated: *"We are five brothers, and two of my brothers have each been divorced twice and paid heavy dowries... The brides caused so much trouble for my mother that she has no desire for me to marry."*

Perfectionism and High Expectations

A dominant characteristic among some young people contributing to marriage fear is perfectionism. Many participants referred to high standards and specific expectations for their future spouse—such as high-level employment, higher education, economic status, type of car or home, and even the occupation and cultural level of the spouse's parents. Absence of these criteria in potential

partners resulted in anxiety and fear of future unhappiness. Social comparison and competitiveness also played a significant role.

Omm-ol-Banin, 45 years old, stated: *"I did not think about marriage until age 24 when I obtained my bachelor's degree. For two years I tried to find a job but was unsuccessful. My mother insisted that I get my degree and work in education or a government office. I had suitors, but I was overly selective. Since I was an only daughter, my family was very strict. Their minimum standard for a son-in-law was a bachelor's degree, a house, and a car. Looks also mattered. All these conditions did not exist in one person..."*

Impact of Previous Relationships and Infidelity

Experiences of infidelity—whether in one's own relationships or observed in others—were highlighted as a significant source of marriage fear. Witnessing unfaithfulness can create deep anxiety, as individuals seek emotional security within marriage and fear betrayal.

Adel, 38 years old, stated: *"Years ago, I decided to marry my girlfriend, but I discovered her infidelity. It devastated me. Loyalty to each other is very important..."*

Lack of Attraction to the Opposite Sex and Moral Looseness

Lack of attraction to the opposite sex—especially when driven by constant comparison or multiple non-committal relationships—can contribute to fear of marriage. Moral looseness and endless casual relationships among young people can lead to fear of long-term, permanent commitment.

Social and Cultural Trauma of Fear of Marriage

Social and cultural trauma surrounding marriage among young people, particularly in traditional and culturally structured communities such as Shahr-e Zā, is strongly influenced by an interplay of familial, economic, cultural, and psychological factors. These fears may lead to delayed marriage, reduced marriage rates, and even social issues such as informal relationships, cohabitation ("white marriage"), or moral looseness.

To address this social and cultural trauma, cultural and educational programs—especially those focusing on communication skills, premarital education, economic awareness, and improving conditions necessary for marriage—need to be developed. Such measures can reduce the fear of marriage and increase young people's readiness for forming a stable marital life.

Elham, 36 years old, stated: *"I worked for years to obtain my PhD and now have a good job and high income. Since age 24, I have talked to suitors, and my mother usually*

advises me constructively. For a few months, I have been in a relationship with a man who cannot marry because he already has a wife... When I see men who are extremely

dependent on their families and cannot make decisions, I know they are not suitable for marriage..."

Figure 1

Paradigmatic Model of Fear of Marriage Among Girls

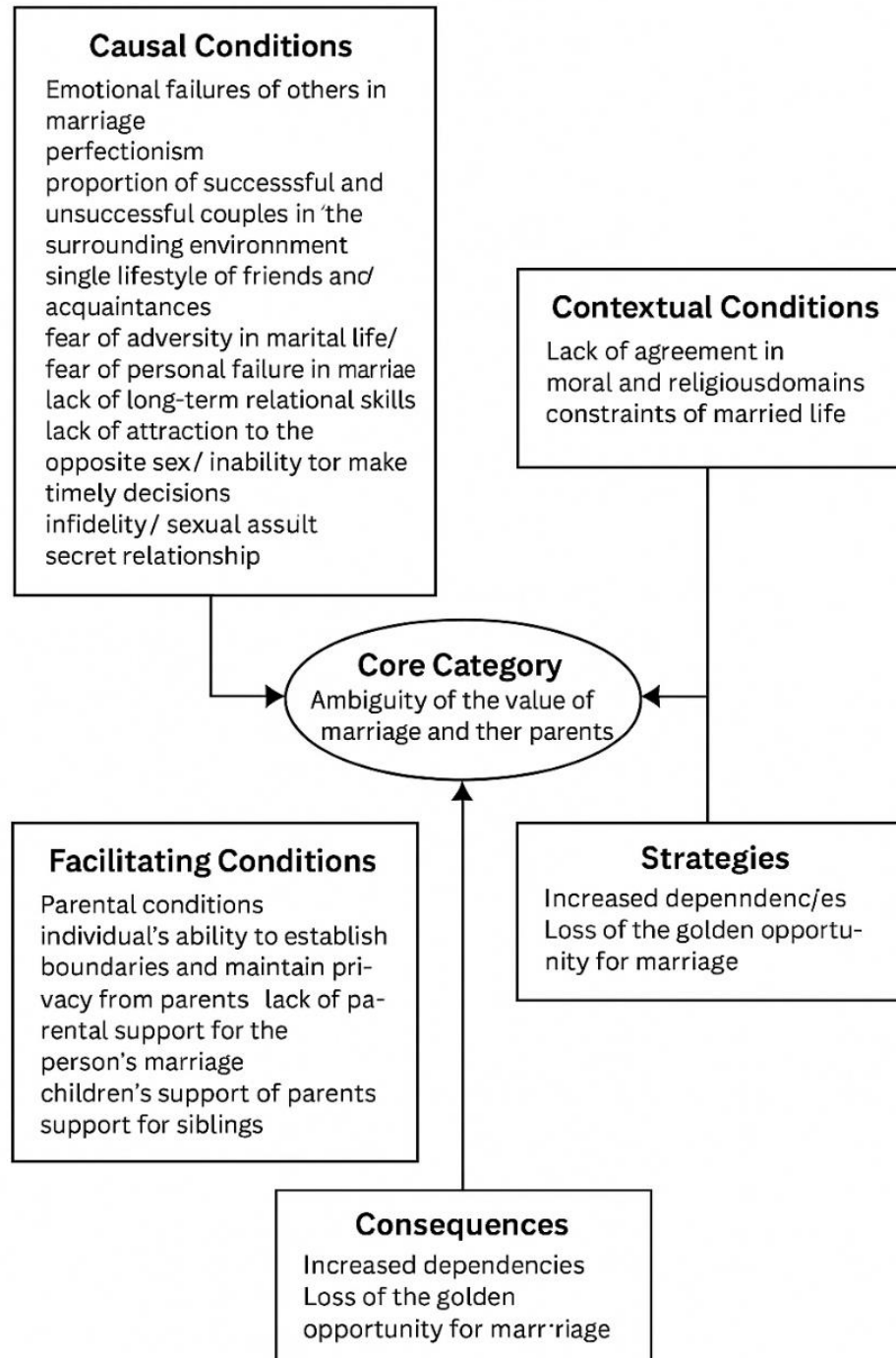
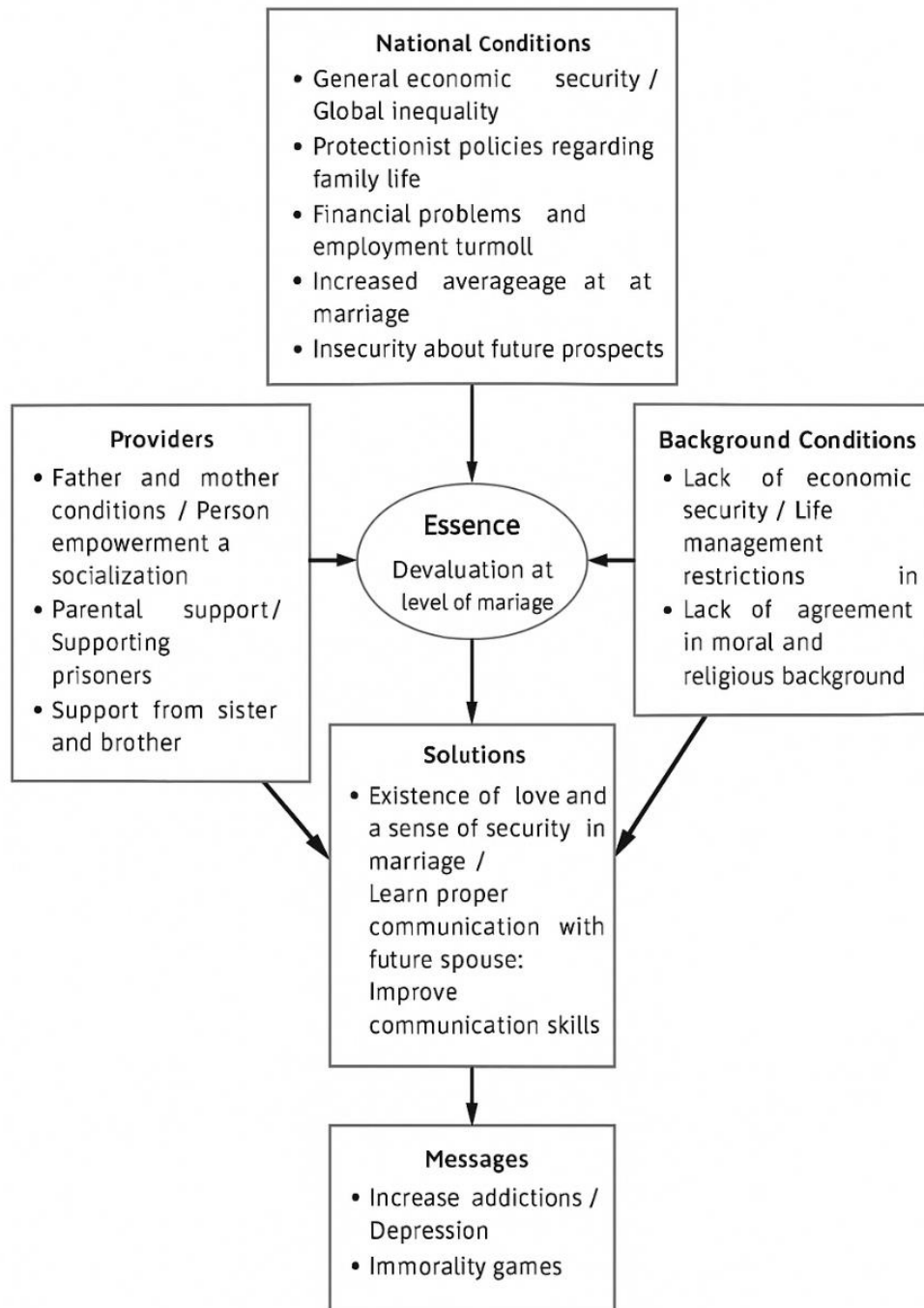


Figure 2

Paradigmatic Model of Fear of Marriage Among Boys



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore and compare the paradigmatic models of girls and boys in the formation of

marriage trauma, unveiling the complex psychological, familial, cultural, and social mechanisms that shape fear and avoidance of marriage among young adults. The grounded theory analysis revealed both shared and gender-specific pathways through which marriage trauma develops. Among

girls, the core category centered on the ambiguity of the value of marriage and perfectionism enforced by the self and parents, whereas among boys, the core category revolved around the perceived meaninglessness of the authenticity of marriage. These findings reflect deep socio-cultural transformations in contemporary marriage expectations and align powerfully with international research on relational anxieties, emotional ruptures, and the sociocultural reinvention of marriage norms.

One of the central findings was the role of emotional and familial histories—notably parental discord, divorce, emotional failures of close relatives, or past relational hurt—in intensifying marriage trauma. This aligns with research showing that intergenerational patterns, especially parental divorce, significantly shape trust and expectations in future relationships (Yilmaz et al., 2023). Similar patterns have been noted in qualitative studies examining young women's socio-emotional adjustment after relational rupture (Khodavardian et al., 2020) and in thematic analyses of breakup narratives indicating that relational dissolution can activate long-lasting emotional vulnerability (Zamanshoar et al., 2022). The fear-based responses identified in this study—particularly among girls—mirror the emotional schemas described in breakup distress literature (Eisma et al., 2022; Trần et al., 2023), highlighting that unresolved experiences related to intimacy or betrayal may transform into anticipatory marriage trauma.

The findings further showed strong gender differences in what each group perceives as threatening about marriage. Girls' trauma pathways were heavily influenced by perfectionistic expectations, familial control, and internalized ideals of "ideal marriage conditions." This reflects studies showing that cultural and familial norms around purity, suitability, and marital readiness remain influential in many traditional societies, including Iran (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2008; Niakani, 2022). Perfectionism, as a culturally reinforced expectation, often leads to unrealistic standards in partner selection and contributes to anxiety, ambivalence, and delay in marriage (Azami, 2021). Additionally, girls' heightened sensitivity to emotional, religious, and moral congruence echoes findings showing that religious compatibility and value alignment are strong determinants of marital attitudes in Islamic and transitional societies (Ismail et al., 2025; Rahai, 2023).

Among boys, the dominant theme involved fear of failed marriage and a perception that marriage had lost its "authentic meaning" due to economic instability, legal pressures, or fear of relational entanglements. These results

are consistent with research demonstrating that men, more than women, express anxiety related to economic responsibility, legal vulnerability, and the financial costs of marriage (Thapa & Kattel, 2019; Касаркина & Antipova, 2020). Studies exploring male attitudes toward marriage in Iran similarly document that job insecurity, housing difficulties, and the rising cost of marital rituals contribute to avoidance and fear (Akbari Ghamsari & Mehdizadeh Moghadam 2020). This study found that boys also expressed concerns about the emotional risks of marriage, including betrayal, relationship surveillance, and fear of an unsuccessful union—findings that correspond closely with previous work on perceived threat, blame, and forgiveness in response to hypothetical infidelity (Grøntvedt et al., 2020).

Another critical dimension emerging from participants' narratives involved socio-cultural transformations, such as the transition from traditional arranged marriages toward more individualized, autonomy-oriented models. The tension between inherited norms and modern ideals echoes global findings showing that modernization disrupts conventional marriage trajectories and increases relational ambivalence (Avneesh Kumar & Apeksha, 2024; Mączka, 2021). Prior sociological investigations confirm that contemporary youth frequently experience internal conflict between cultural expectations and personal aspirations, a phenomenon especially evident in societies grappling with modernization and religious tradition (Sadeghi, 2021; Shabani et al., 2022). This friction contributes significantly to marriage trauma, as individuals struggle to reconcile autonomy with social obligations.

In both gender groups, fear of intimacy and emotional vulnerability emerged as salient factors. Girls articulated worries about emotional exploitation or insufficient mutual understanding, while boys emphasized fears of emotional entrapment or infidelity. These findings align with studies showing that fear of intimacy is a powerful mediator of psychological distress following emotional breakup (Shishefar et al., 2024). They also mirror relational dissolution research, which documents that individuals who experience unresolved attachment distress often struggle to imagine secure, lasting marital bonds (Field et al., 2020; Fife et al., 2022). Furthermore, the presence of rumination—frequently reported by participants—corresponds with evidence showing that repetitive negative thinking heightens breakup distress and influences subsequent relationship expectations (Arana et al., 2024; Loan et al., 2023).

Socioeconomic stressors consistently emerged across both genders. Economic insecurity, unemployment, lack of housing, or family financial burdens were powerful contributors to marriage trauma. This mirrors scholarship highlighting modernization's influence on the decline of marriage rates and rising commitment hesitations in developing societies (Thapa & Kattel, 2019). Research specifically addressing Iranian youth confirms that job instability and high marriage costs create structural barriers to marriage and elevate anxiety around the marital transition (Bahadri Moghadam, 2023; Tajbakhsh & Goodarzi, 2021). The present study's findings also align with legal and jurisprudential analyses emphasizing the increasing complexity of marriage contracts and autonomy-related concerns under Islamic law, which contribute to heightened marital apprehension (Ismail et al., 2025; Rahai, 2023).

Finally, this study demonstrates the interplay of emotional, cognitive, cultural, and structural factors in shaping marriage trauma. These multifaceted dynamics closely resemble multi-component models proposed in previous relational and sociological research, especially those emphasizing family narratives, emotional ruptures, cultural expectations, and socio-economic pressures as intertwined predictors of marital attitudes (Gara, 2022; Honarparvaran, 2017; Verhallen et al., 2019). The grounded theory model developed here contributes uniquely by differentiating gender-based paradigmatic structures and offering a more nuanced comparative framework for understanding marriage trauma.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

This study relied on a qualitative sample from a single geographic region, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader populations. Participants self-selected into the study, which may introduce bias related to their openness or willingness to discuss intimate experiences. All data were derived from self-report interviews, meaning that memory distortions, selective disclosure, or emotional reactivity may have influenced the narratives. Additionally, cultural sensitivities around topics such as intimacy, infidelity, or family conflict may have led some participants to withhold certain details. Finally, although grounded theory offers depth and richness, it does not measure the prevalence or statistical significance of the identified patterns.

Future studies should examine marriage trauma in more diverse regions and cultural contexts to explore similarities

and differences across ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups. Quantitative research could complement qualitative findings by measuring the prevalence and strength of identified factors using validated instruments. Longitudinal designs would allow researchers to track how marriage trauma evolves across emerging adulthood. Future work may also compare trauma pathways in same-gender relationships, divorced individuals, or those cohabiting without marriage. Cross-cultural studies could illuminate universal versus culture-specific mechanisms, while intervention-based research could test programs aimed at reducing marriage-related anxiety.

Counselors and mental health practitioners should develop culturally sensitive therapeutic interventions to address marriage trauma, focusing on emotional regulation, communication skills, and healing from past relational hurt. Families could benefit from psychoeducational programs that encourage supportive, non-controlling involvement in their children's marital decisions. Policymakers might consider initiatives that reduce economic burdens associated with marriage and improve access to affordable housing. Schools and universities should incorporate relationship education and premarital training into youth development curricula to promote healthier marital expectations and reduce fear-driven avoidance.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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