Investigation of the Distribution of Power in Families in Tabriz

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1- Introduction
Power is regarded as an important social variable when studying any social structure and institution. Accordingly, distribution of power in family structure has a great importance and could affect many familial experiences such as development of personality, socialization, self-esteem, solidarity, satisfaction, happiness, etc. (Mahdavi & Saboori Khosroshahi, 2003). Extended family was the dominant form of the family in Iran until a few decades ago, and the husband occupied the top position in the familial power structure (Hosseiniyan, Karami, & Amini, 2012). However, Iranian family, like in any other society in the world, has experienced remarkable changes in its way to modernity, especially in wife/husband’s duties and places in the familial power structure. The present study aims to investigate the distribution of power and some of its socio-economic correlates among families in Tabriz.

2-Theoretical Framework
Theoretical debates on familial power structure began mainly in the 1960s. The “Resource Theory” as a leading theory in the field, was developed by Blood and Wolfe in the same period. The theory, developed on the basis of Exchange Approach, tries to explain the distribution of power between spouses, while making familial decision making. According to this theory, any of the spouses, who has brought more valuable resources into the marriage, will gain the higher power rank in the family as well. Blood and Wolfe (1960, cited in Enayat & Dastranj, 2010) found out that husband’s power in the family is generally related to his SES (i.e., educational attainment, job rank, and income). According to the existing literature in Iran, as well, educational attainment, income level, employment status, age, and duration of marriage are among variables that influence the structure of power relations of the family (Enayat & Dastranj, 2010).

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According to Feminist perspectives, it is not the biological and personality-related differences between two sexes which causes inequality between men and women in the family and society. Such inequality is, instead, caused by the unequal (and less) access to financial resources, social status, power, and self-actualization opportunities for women. It should be noted that this inequality is reproduced and transformed to next generations via socialization process (Yazdi & Hosseini Hosseinabad, 2008).

The present study uses Resource Theory as its main conceptual framework. As mentioned earlier, according to this theory, the person who has more valuable resources in the family will have more power and influence in the family relations, too. Because it is usually men who are more likely to be employed and have higher income and education, therefore, they tend to gain more power and apply it in familial decision making. In this situation, the power structure in the family takes a more authoritarian estate. Many researches have acknowledged the positive role of education, employment, and financial independence of women in their places in familial power structure.

3- Research Methodology
Present study is a type of applied research done by the use of survey method and the data were collected through questionnaire. The study population is all women of Tabriz city in 2013. Using Cochran’s sampling formula, 384 women were specified as sample size which were selected by the use of stratified sampling technique.

4- Research Findings
According to the findings, the average age of the respondents was 38 and majority of them were undergraduates. Around 64% of the respondents were housewives and around 28.6% have been employed in governmental jobs. Employed women's average monthly income is estimated to be 6640000 Rials. The average point for familial power distribution index was estimated to be around 60.23 in a scale of 1 to 100, indicating that, according to the respondents’ evaluation, women in Tabriz are at a medium-to-high stance in terms of democratic power distribution scale. Results showed that with increases in educational attainment among both men and women, power structure of the family tends to be more democratic rather than authoritative. In this regard, the educational attainment of husband has more predictive power than that of the wife. Income level of both men and women is positively related to the women’s participation in familial decision-making and employed women have a higher position in the familial power structure.
In contrast, with an increase in age differences between couples, in the family size, and in the duration of marital life, familial power structure tends to be more authoritative.

Regressing familial power structure on independent variables of the study showed that only three variables, namely, husband’s educational attainment, wife’s employment status, and wife’s income, have statistically significant effects on the dependent variable and other variables were excluded from the final regression model. The three mentioned variables could explain around 16.2 percent of the variance in familial power structure.

5- Discussion and Conclusion

Significant relationship between education and familial power structure is indicative of the fact that with higher levels of education, traditional patterns of authoritative familial power structure fade away; the finding that confirms the results of Garoussi (2005), Mansourian and Ghaderi (1996), and Mahdavi and Saboori (2003). Men's educational attainment can change attitudes towards women's role in the familial power structure.

Positive relationship between women's income and familial power structure shows that, even lower levels of income, as a valuable resource for women, can increase their power in the family relations. Increasing the binding power sources, such as employment and income among women, can improve their status in the family. This process is accelerated by degenderized ideology that paved its way into Iranian society and families of recent times (Hosseiniyan et al., 2012).

According to the results, and based on the increasing trends in women's education and employment, it is expected that familial power structure become more democratic among Tabrizian families. Therefore, further efforts to increase women’s and also men’s education can reduce traditional patriarchal intentions among men, decrease those stereotypes related to gender roles, and increase self-esteem among women. Providing more employment opportunities for women could bring about higher levels of financial independence, and in turn, proper place for them in familial power structure, which all will cause Tabrizi families to be more democratic than before.

Keywords: Familial power structure, Women, Education, Occupation, Income.

References

