

The roll of demographic factors (gender, age, birth order and the level of education) in mate selection criteria of Shiraz studentsSaeed Mokhtari Masoumi Alamdarloo¹, Hamidreza Zakeri*²**Abstract**

Introduction: Mate selection is one of the most important decisions that people make in their lifetime. The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating role of gender, age, birth order and the level of education in mate selection criteria of Shiraz students.

Methods: The research design is descriptive and the statistical population of this research is all students of Islamic Azad University of Shiraz branch who studied in this branch in 2022. A sample of 377 people (235 women and 142 men) was selected using the step-by-step clustering method and was evaluated by the demographic factors questionnaire and the mate selection criteria inventory (MSCI) were investigated. After collecting the questionnaires with SPSS software version 26, they were analyzed at two descriptive and inferential levels.

Results: The results of the analysis of the findings using the multiple regression method in a simultaneous manner showed that gender and level of education play a negative and significant role in mate selection criteria of the participants. Also, the results of the analysis of the findings using the step-by-step multiple regression method showed that among these factors, gender plays the most important role in mate selection criteria.

Conclusion: So that women had more criteria to choose their future husband. This could be related to their foresight. From that point, women are thinking about their future and their children, they will prefer a spouse who can best provide their future needs and draw a bright and beautiful future for them.

Keywords: Birth Order, Gender, Mate Selection Criteria, Level of Education**Received: 21/ April/ 2023****Accepted: 20/ June / 2023**

Citation: Mokhtari Masoumi Alamdarloo S, Zakeri H. The roll of demographic factors (gender, age, birth order and the level of education) in mate selection criteria of Shiraz students, Family and health, 2024; 14(1): 161-173

¹.Instructor, Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Educational Science and Psychology, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran, saeedshz7694@gmail.com

². (**corresponding author**), Instructor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Economics and management, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran. (Hzakeri55@yahoo.com), tell: 09171178857



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Introduction:

The family, which has been a social unit throughout history, is the oldest and smallest known human social structure. Although there may be different opinions around the world, marriage is seen as a cultural necessity in order to create family unity (1)

Marriage, as the formation of a healthy, balanced and stable life, like any other important matter, requires logical thinking, effort and diligence (2). Marriage is one of the big psychological, social and emotional changes in the life of every person (3). Marriage, the first stage of the family life cycle and the most important factor in creating a healthy society, is considered an important phenomenon, and in this category, mate selection as the first cornerstone of family formation is very important (4)

Mate selection as an interaction-based process based on a set of cultural values and rules that shape spouse selection behaviors has always been the focus of social researchers (5)

Mate selection is a complex decision for a person. A good marital relationship depends on how to choose a spouse, so mate selection is one of the most important decisions that people make in their lives. Mate selection is a culturally defined process that varies from one society to another and depends on factors such as health, age, body shape, social conditions, education level, religion, dress, body, beauty, financial status and occupation. Several factors are effective in choosing a mate around the world, for example, cultural and social values, mate selection preferences, self and community value systems, and social conditions (6). One of the most important effective factors in this choice is the criteria for mate selection.

The priority and criteria for mate selection is a person's perception of traits or characteristics that are required from an imaginary love or a future spouse, and a large number of these perceptions are obviously related to emotions (7). Many studies have been conducted to know whether the criteria for choosing a spouse are different among people in each culture, according to the results of which physical attractiveness, physical appearance, physical health and beauty are known as the most influential criteria for mate selection (6 & 8).

There are many personal characteristics that must be weighed in mate selection decisions. This means that people probably differ in their skill in choosing the best partner (9). Demographic factors can be mentioned among the influential factors in the difference in the criteria for mate selection among people. Demographic factors are the socio-economic characteristics of a population that are expressed statistically. These cases usually include factors such as age, gender, education level, income, marital status, occupation, religion, birth rate, death rate, average family size, average age of marriage, etc. (10).

Demographic factors are characteristics of a population classified by distinct criteria such as age, gender, and income as a means of studying the characteristics of a particular group. Studying demographic data is essential for decision making by businesses, organizations and governments. Using this data, businesses can develop marketing strategies and governments can implement public policies. Demographics refers to the specific characteristics of a given population and includes such things as age, income level, and geographic location. Demographic data can be collected in a variety of ways, such as focus groups, surveys and polls, census tracts, and psychological research. Demographic information can be used to create successful marketing campaigns, economic analysis, and government policies (11).

The difference in people's gender causes a difference in their worldview and outlook on life issues. This difference in their worldview can be different in people's behaviors and social

reactions. One of these differences shows itself in the choice of wives for girls and boys. According to their gender characteristics, boys and girls show different criteria and attitudes from each other in material and non-material dimensions, and each of them differs in their criteria for a future spouse and their attitude towards having an ideal spouse based on their gender and the opposite sex (12). According to the theory of sexual strategies, the economic resources of the future spouse is one of the important criteria in the selection of women, so that the higher the income of women, the more importance they attach to the income and wealth of their future spouse (13).

Research has shown that people tend to marry someone with a similar level of education. Many young people emphasize romantic love and individual agency in finding a life partner, although the acceptance of romantic attitudes toward love is increasing, realistic attitudes and practical concerns are still prevalent among educated people (14).

Most studies of mate selection preferences focus on adults in their early twenties, particularly college students, and do not examine the effect of age on how participants value mate selection criteria. According to research, 73% of people over 50 are sexually active and are actively looking for companionship. A survey by the National Council on Aging shows that 48 percent of men and women over the age of 60 are sexually active. Additionally, 71% of men and 51% of women in their 60s, 57% of men and 30% of women in their 70s, and even 25% of men and 20% of women in their 80s are sexually active. Marriage rates for older people have also increased in recent decades. Women often postpone marriage and give up having children in order to continue their education and work, and often they marry after the onset of menopause (15).

The influence of birth order on later life outcomes is one of the oldest and most interesting topics in psychology. Studies have shown how birth order is related to personality traits and lifestyle choices, such as rebelliousness, academic success, and social orientation. One area of study has been how birth order affects people's choices, such as friendships and romantic relationships. Research has shown that only children are actually more likely to marry other only children. Also, more women marry their first and middle children. They are less likely to marry single-child men. It is possible that first and middle children have characteristics that women find attractive, such as the success and drive of first children or the sociability of middle children. Conversely, men are less likely to marry first and middle children. They mostly marry singletons. Men may be less attracted to first and middle children, perhaps seeing them as more masculine. People who have been married multiple times are more likely to marry other people with a certain birth status. Apparently, it is possible to roughly draw a person's romantic type with the status of that person's birth order (16).

The correct choice of spouse leads to the formation of a healthy family, which is the first environment for socializing people and through this process leads to social cohesion. In the opposite case, i.e. incorrect choice of spouse, the institution of the family, contrary to its expected positive function, becomes the source of conflict and education of deviant and disillusioned children and even leads to divorce in most cases (17). Unbridled and shaky families cause a shaky society. In a society where there is no sign of a healthy family, the rate of divorce increases day by day and there are less desirable and planned marriages. According to the statistics provided by the relevant institutions in Iran, in 2020, one out of every three

marriages resulted in divorce. Also, during the last 10 years, the marriage rate has decreased by more than 36%. In addition, according to the statistics of the country's civil registry in the first quarter of 2021, 31% of marriages have resulted in divorce, and Fars province ranks third in the country with 2525 divorces after Tehran and Razavi Khorasan provinces. According to the United Nations report in 2020, Maldives had the highest divorce rate in the world with 2,984 divorces per year. According to research results, one of the most important causes of divorce is wrong choice of spouse (18).

Thus, taking into account the importance of the criteria for choosing a spouse in a correct marriage and the strong role in reducing the divorce rate in Iranian society, it is very necessary to investigate the factors influencing the selection of a spouse. Considering the above and the existing research gap in this field, it seems necessary and important to carry out a research that can examine and analyze the various effective factors in choosing a spouse from various dimensions and be comparable with other cultures. Therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of investigating and determining the role of gender, age, and birth order and education level in the criteria of choosing a spouse.

Research method:

The method of the present research is based on the practical objective and based on the collection of descriptive and correlational data, in which the mate selection criteria are used as criteria variables, and gender, age, birth order, and level of education are used as predictor variables. The statistical population of this research includes undergraduate, masters and doctoral students of Islamic Azad University of Shiraz branch (20338 people) who were studying in this unit in 2022. Based on the table of Karjesi and Morgan (19), a sample of 377 students (235 women and 142 men) was selected. Sampling was done based on multi-stage cluster sampling method. In this way, among the faculties of Islamic Azad University (8 faculties) of Shiraz branch, 3 faculties were randomly selected and 2 departments from each department and 3 classes from each department were randomly selected. Then, after obtaining the necessary permits from the university and receiving the code of ethics, the researcher attended the Islamic Azad University of Shiraz, and after coordinating with the selected faculties, he went to the selected classes and, with the coordination of the class teacher, distributed the research tools in a group. The students played. To comply with the ethical principles, the questionnaires were anonymous, and it was explained to the participants of the present study that they can use special codes for themselves, so that they can be informed of the evaluation results if they wish. Also, the participants were assured that the information obtained from them would remain confidential. The participants participated in the research with their consent, and the questionnaire was not distributed among those who did not consent. After that, the students were asked to answer the research tools accurately and honestly, and finally, the data was analyzed with the help of SPSS version 26 statistical program at two descriptive and inferential levels.

In this research, demographic factors questionnaire and mate selection criteria questionnaire were used to investigate the research variables, which will be analyzed further. Measuring tools:

Demographic Factors Questionnaire: This questionnaire contains 4 self-reported questions on gender (female or male), age, birth order (first child or middle child or last child) and level of education (bachelor's or master's degree or doctorate).

Mate Selection Criteria Questionnaire: This questionnaire was implemented by Schwartz and Hassibrook (20) to evaluate spouse selection criteria. In this study, the participants evaluated the importance of 82 criteria for choosing a spouse for a long-term relationship, and their investigation showed that most of the variables deviate significantly from the normal distribution hypothesis. This questionnaire was standardized by Isanajad and Houshmand in Iranian sample in 2017. The standardized form has 58 items and 9 factors of kindness and understanding (questions 1-10), having a social base (questions 17-11), being trustworthy (questions 18-22), having similarities and creativity (questions 23-32), ambition (questions 33-40), physical attractiveness (questions 41-45), culturedness (questions 46-50), romanticism (questions 51-54) and good-naturedness (questions 55-58). This questionnaire has a 5-option Likert scale (1 means unimportant and 5 means very important), which are scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. The results of the fit of the confirmatory factor model showed that the 9-factor model of the spouse selection criteria questionnaire has a good fit in the Iranian sample. The Cronbach's alpha of the factors was between 0.51 and 0.91 and was obtained between 0.53 and 0.72 by the retest method with an interval of one month. The correlation of the questionnaire factors with the factors of the priority questionnaire of Refahi, Sanai, Shafiabadi and Pasha Sharifi (21) criteria for choosing a spouse was positive and significant. In this study, Cronbach's alpha method was used to check the reliability of the spouse selection criteria questionnaire, and the alpha coefficient for the mate selection criteria was 0.92.

Findings:

After collecting the raw data, SPSS version 26 software was analyzed at two descriptive and inferential levels. At the descriptive level, the demographic characteristics of the sample group were described, indicators such as mean, standard deviation, maximum, minimum, and correlation coefficient were calculated, then at the inferential level, it was investigated using simultaneous multiple regression analysis and step-by-step regression analysis. The research question was addressed.

Table1. Demographic characteristics of the sample group

Characteristics		frequency (n)	frequency %
Gender	woman	235	62/3
	man	142	37/7
Age	18-28	286	75/9
	29-39	70	18/6
	40-50	18	4/8
	51<	3	0/8
level of education	bachelor	239	63/4
	master	122	32/4
	PhD	16	4/2
Birth order	first	153	40/6
	middle	116	30/8
	last	108	28/6

As it can be deduced from table 1, the total statistical sample was 377 people, of which the most gender belongs to the group of women (62.3 percent), the most age belongs to the group of 18 to 28 years (75.9 percent), the most educational level Related to bachelor group (63.4 percent) and in terms of birth order, first children group (40.6 percent) has more frequency.

Table 2. Descriptive indicators related to mate selection criteria

Variables	mean	standard deviation	minimum	maximum	skewness	kurtosis
mate selection criteria	4/215	0/357	2/90	5	-0/385	0/029

According to Table 2, the average score of the criteria for choosing a spouse was 4.215 and its standard deviation was 0.357. Also, the value of skewness and kurtosis is in the range of -1.96 to +1.96, so the distribution of research data can be normal. Therefore, we use parametric statistics to answer the question of this research.

The main research question: Do gender, age, birth order and education level play a role in choosing a spouse? In order to answer the main question of the research, the regression test was used in a simultaneous way, the results of which are shown in tables 3 and 4.

In Table 3, specific assumptions of regression have been checked in order to implement this statistical method.

Table 3. Regression assumptions for the main question

variables	Durbin-Watson	Collinear statistics	
		VIF	Tolerance
gender		1/015	0/985
age		1/777	0/850
birth order	1/811	1/008	0/993
level of education		1/186	0/843

In Table 3, assumptions of non-collinearity have been investigated by tolerance and factor density statistics and independence of residuals by Durbin-Watson statistic. As it can be seen, the value of tolerance statistic of the predictor variables is more than 0.1 and the value of their factor density statistic is less than 10, as a result, the assumption of non-collinearity has not been violated. Also, the value of Durbin-Watson statistic is between 1.5 and 2.5. Therefore, the assumption of independence of the residuals has been met.

Table4. Simultaneous regression test to investigate the role of gender, age, birth order and education level in the mate selection criteria of the participants

variables	Criterion variable: wife selection criteria							
	R	R ²	F	P	df	β	t	P
gender						-0.220	4/340	0/001
age						-0/045	0/832	0/406
birth order	0/248	0/051	6/095	0/001	4	0/005	0/106	0/915
level of education						-0/119	2/174	0/030

According to Table 4, as it can be seen, gender ($P = 0.001$ and $\beta = -0.220$) is negative and significant and education level ($P = 0.030$ and $\beta = -0.119$) is negative and significant. They play a role in the criteria for choosing the spouse of the participants. It should be noted that the total predictor variables explained 5% of the variance of the criteria for choosing a spouse.

Sub-question of the research: among gender, age, birth order and level of education, which factor plays a greater role in the criteria for choosing a spouse? In order to answer the sub-question of the research, a step-by-step regression test was used, the results of which are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Step-by-step regression test to investigate the role of gender, age, birth order and education level in the mate selection criteria of the participants

model		Criterion variable: wife selection criteria							
		R	R ²	F	P	df	β	t	P
1	gender	0/204	0/039	16/209	0/001	1	-0/204	4/026	0/001
	gender						-0/219	4/343	0/001
2	level of education	0/244	0/055	11/884	0/001	2	-0/136	2/700	0/008

Table 5 shows the results of the model. As it can be seen, the model has entered gender in the first step and this variable was able to explain 4% of the variance of the criteria for choosing a spouse. In the second step, by adding education level to gender, about 5.5% of the total variance has been explained. Also, according to the value of the standardized regression coefficient (β) for gender ($\beta = -0.219$) and education level ($\beta = -0.136$), among these factors, gender plays the most important role in choosing a spouse. Also, these two variables have an inverse effect on the criteria for choosing a spouse. That is, women and undergraduate students have higher scores in the criteria for mate selection.

Discussion and conclusion:

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the role of gender, age, and birth order and education level in the mate selection criteria of students in Shiraz. In this section, we first review the results of the research and then discuss the limitations and suggestions of the research.

The results of the findings showed that gender has a negative and significant role and the level of education has a negative and significant role in the criteria for mate selection of the participants. Also, these two variables have an inverse effect on the criteria for choosing a spouse. That is, women and undergraduate students have higher scores in the criteria for choosing a spouse. Also, among these factors, gender plays the most important role in choosing a spouse. This finding is inconsistent with the research of Khodarahimi and Fathi (3) and with the researches of Shahrabi Farahani, Fatehizadeh and Etamadi (22), Isanejad and Houshmand (7), Schwarz and Hassebrook (20), Islam (6), Xiao and Kuian (14). It is aligned. For some time, our country has paid attention to economic development and technology, increasing the level of education and development of communication, etc. Factors such as the emergence of megacities and extensive changes in the face of cities, the increase in urbanization and the multiplication of the population, the sudden increase in the number of young people in the last few years, the large changes in the price of oil and the gross national product, the increase in the percentage of literate people, the increase in the percentage of educated women and the presence in the environment, they are all signs of extensive physical, social and cultural changes at the level of society, which have caused noticeable and significant changes in the cultural field and changes in religious tendencies, family and gender norms, and the transformation of material values into metamaterials. From Inglehart's point of view, the transformation of material values into metamaterials plays a decisive role in explaining many social and cultural issues (23).

Some people emphasize the educational criteria in mate selection and try to choose a person who has the desired level of education and has the same level of education as them. Some people on the verge of marriage try to choose someone who has a university education and has a minimum in this field. In explaining this result, it can be stated that nowadays education is one of the main aspects of life and people always try to consider this criterion in choosing their spouse. Some people try to choose a person as a wife who is fond of studying, has a university education and has good literacy. If these criteria are not present in the chosen person, the probability of successful transplantation of these people is at a low level (22). Xiao and Kuian (14) stated that education status is an important criterion for choosing a spouse. As access to higher education expanded significantly, most people, regardless of gender, considered a bachelor's degree to be the minimum acceptable level of education for a potential spouse. In other words, the social boundaries that separated the college graduates and the less educated have become too rigid. In this research, it was found that undergraduate students consider more criteria about their marriage than master's and doctoral students. This issue can be investigated from two ways. On the other hand, as people get older, despite their better economic status, they find fewer opportunities to choose their lost half than their younger counterparts. On the other hand, with the increase in the scientific and social level of man, he will have a wiser view on marriage and distance himself from perfectionism regarding his mate selection criteria. Isanejad and Houshmand (7) by examining the gender differences for determining the criteria for mate selection, have shown that the average criteria for mate selection are more in women than in men, which means that women are stricter than men in choosing a spouse and act more obsessively. Different behavior in men and women is related to their biological sex, though not necessarily. People are identified as male or female based on their physical makeup, which is determined by chromosomes, gonads, and hormones. This label is applied since birth and is

the first step in the evolution of sexual identity. Although a person's gender is determined by nature, culture determines the attitudes and behaviors appropriate to his gender. In every culture, people learn to adapt their expectations to their personal and professional lives. Gender roles are behaviors and attitudes that a person shows based on being a woman or a man. When a child is born, gender stereotypes play a role. For example, others comment on the child like this: "a healthy and strong boy" or "a cute and lovely girl". These labels affect the child's psychological development in different ways. A person's thoughts, beliefs and behavior largely originate from his gender. Accepting a gender role as male or female leads to different social roles and behaviors. These roles lead to the formation of feminine and masculine beliefs in the individual, and by that, we can observe different behaviors of both sexes, which are specific to the same gender. Beliefs that play a fundamental role in all our behaviors, actions, choices and decisions. One of the most important choices in our life is choosing the right spouse. Men and women have different criteria for choosing their spouse, which is rooted in the gender role they have accepted since childhood and have developed their beliefs according to that role. Therefore, gender plays a very important role in the criteria for choosing a spouse for students and young people.

According to the findings of the present research, which was conducted to investigate the role of gender, age, birth order and level of education in the criteria for choosing a spouse of Shiraz students in 1401, it was found that gender and level of education play a significant role in the criteria for choosing a spouse, which in Among these factors, gender plays the most important role in choosing a spouse.

Ethical considerations: In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed. Considering the conditions and time of completing the questionnaires while emphasizing on completing all the questions, the participants were free to withdraw from the research. Also, this research had a code from the Ethics Committee with ID IR.IAU.SHIRAZ.REC.1401.009, which was approved by the Research Vice-Chancellor of Islamic Azad University, Shiraz branch.

Research limitations: Undoubtedly, every research faces limitations that are almost impossible to avoid. Among the limitations of the current research, we can point out that the statistical population of the research is limited to a specific group of society, that is, students, collecting information only through questionnaires, and some social, economic factors and variables that were not available to the researcher.

Suggestions: In line with the limitations of the research, it is suggested that in future researches, this issue should be investigated in other statistical communities and other data collection tools such as interviews should also be used. Also, workshops should be held in order to increase students' insight about marriage and the criteria for choosing a spouse for students in the university, and the results of this research should be used in pre-marital counseling. In the end, I would like to thank all the people who helped me in this research, especially the students of Islamic Azad University, Shiraz branch, without doubt, this research would not have been possible without their help.

Acknowledgments: This research is taken from the master's thesis of Islamic Azad University, Shiraz branch, which was defended on 17/12/2022. The authors of the article consider it necessary to express their gratitude to all the people who helped us in this research, especially

the students of Islamic Azad University, Shiraz branch, without any doubt, this research would not have been possible without their help.

Contribution of authors: The present study is the result of adaptation of the master's thesis of the first author. The author of this research was involved in the design, conceptualization, methodology, data collection, statistical data analysis, drafting, editing and finalization.

Conflict of interest: The authors of this study have no conflict of interest in conducting and writing it.

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