

Social Capital among Indian and Iranian Youth and their Families

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Abstract: *The social capital, conceptualized into different aspects, i.e. scope of social relations and level of social trust, was studied among 600 cases of Indian and Iranian students and their parents, in two cities of Chandigarh and Tehran, in India and Iran. The results showed that the scope of social relations in India was higher than Iran. One of the variables which could affect the scope of social relation network was the distance or closeness of the person with his relatives. Normally, in villages or small towns, the relatives live close to each other. It is this closeness factor which results in the increased interactions of relatives and neighbors. Contrary to this, in large or metropolitan cities, the closeness people's with their relatives is not available to such an extent.*

Keywords: *Social Capital: Youth: Trust Metropolitan:*

Introduction

Social capital as key concept of this article is very important for societies because a growing body of strong literature over the last several years shows that social capital not only empowers individuals but also produces social improvement for societies.

Societies with higher levels of social capital are likely to have higher educational achievement, better performance of governmental institutions, faster economic growth, and less crime and violence. Therefore the people living in these societies are probably happier, healthier, and have a longer life expectancy. In places with greater social capital, it is easier to mobilize people to deal with problems, and easier to arrange things that benefit the group as a whole. Given the above points, this article can be useful.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In the words of James Coleman and Robert Putnam, social capital is a compound of 'trust', 'networks' and 'shared norms'. In his book about Italy, Putnam, writes that the concept of social capital 'refers to features of social organization, such as trust, reciprocity norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating harmonized actions' (Dekker, 2004, p.88). Putnam (2000) in *Bowling Alone*, debates on relation between social networks and the norms of reciprocity which increases the trustworthiness of people.

This concept was expanded as an attribute of social structures or a public good by Coleman and he has used the social capital to explain a variety of outcomes including educational achievement. For instance, Coleman conceptualized family involvement in children's schooling or community/religious sanctions as a form of social capital which inheres in families or in larger communities and which explains both individual and community performance in education. Coleman's definition of the concept, though, to some extent, narrower than other theories, is very instrumental in assessing the effects of social capital on educational achievement. Coleman argued that given the decline of sources of social capital like the family or religion, these 'voluntary and spontaneous' organizational forms had to be substituted with formal organizations that could produce the same results (Coleman, 1988, p.118).

As a concluding argument, it is demonstrable that social capital in James Coleman and Robert Putnam's words, includes 'trust', 'networks' and 'reciprocal relations'. Hence, as much as they increase the trustworthiness

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and reciprocal relationship into the social networks for individuals, they are easily able to achieve their goals, interact with each other and thereby accumulate social capital for them. Therefore the author believes that social capital refers to reciprocal and trusty relationship that can facilitate collective action for mutual benefits. Indeed, it is “give and take policy” based on trust which is behind the concept of social capital.

Social Capital in India and Iran

Many Indian experts regard social capital as social networks based on kinship relationships or on caste and religion, which plays an important role to support individuals. In this definition, the decline of social capital is inability to encounter life problems, poverty, exclusion and powerlessness.

However, various aspects within the current literature do provide good examples that attest the validity, in the Indian context, of the concept of social capital of Putnam and Coleman. Studies on educational structures and facilities suggest that the source of the higher quality of services in Kerala as opposed to Uttar Pradesh lies in the attitudes of parents, and their willingness and capability to voice their protest and take appropriate action if needed, when teachers are absent, infrastructures are decadent, and promised funds do not arrive. Mobilization is possible when people share their understanding of the common good and trust one another to achieve this objective. That citizens’ voice and reaction might be what makes the difference between inefficient and efficient schools in India. It also provides an appropriate example of the notion that greater social capital makes existing physical and human capital more effective (Serra, 2004, p. 279).

Most Iranian researchers also regard social networks as social capital following current theories such as Colman and Putnam conceptualizations. For example, Vahida in his research about the impact of social capital on students’ social identity among 700 students from eleven government universities in Tehran found that there was a considerable relationship between social capital of students and their social identity. The definition of social capital in Vahida’s study was based on Putnam and Colman’s works. Also, Ketabi (2003) investigated the relations between religion, social capital and social-cultural development in Esfahan. The author in his article identified different elements that affect social capital. The research report showed that the main variables which influence social capital were religion and culture.

The conducted researches over social capital in Iran show that effective variables have various effect on forming social capital and its components, in a way that the same variables have positive or negative effect on a distinct variable or it does not have any relations with that. Such things might happen for various reasons—time difference of conducted research, various statistical society, different procedure of operating concepts and samples. But, on the whole, despite differences in results, many similarities and frequencies can be seen on the relations between variables.

Methodology

In order to measure the social capital in this research, the Structured Interview questions and questionnaire were used. The already existing valid and applicable tools to measure a number of these variables were revised and developed but generally the new instruments such as Structured Interview questions and questionnaire for the others based on the operational definitions of the variables, specifically measurable and objective indicators were designed.

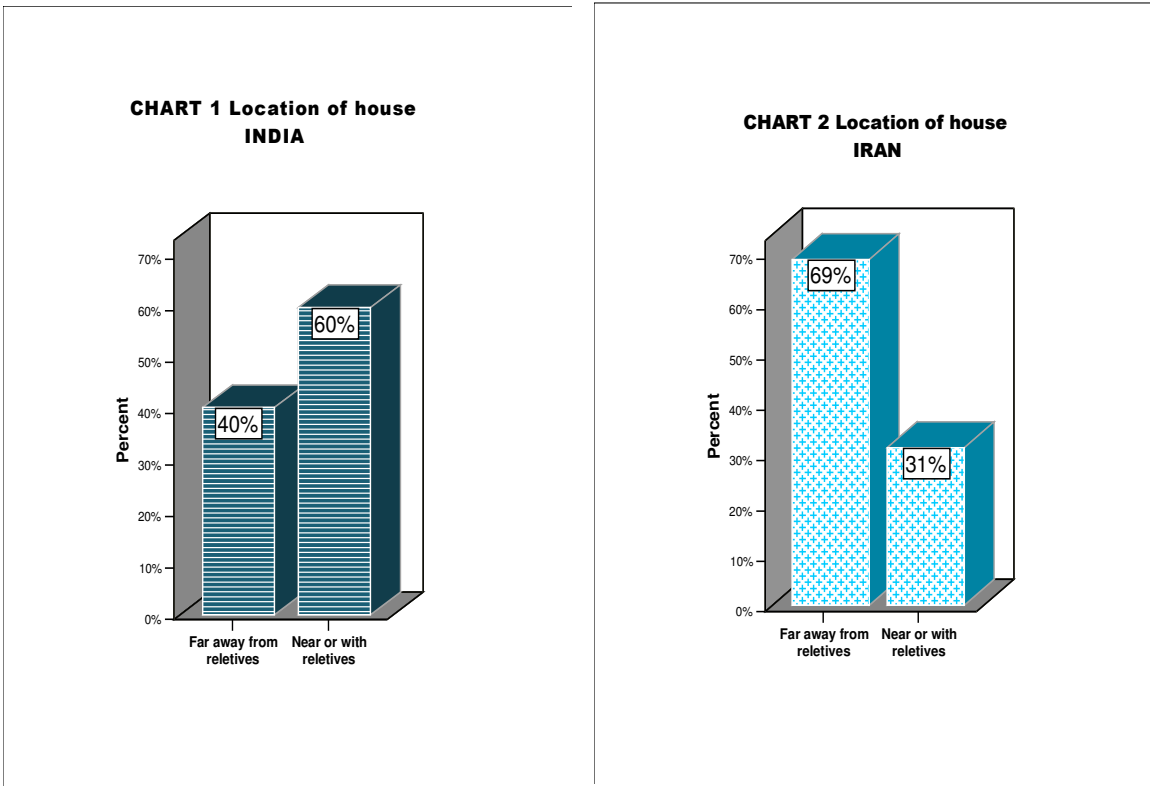
To provide valid instruments to measure the main part of conceptual domain of social capital, two recent built techniques were chosen as foundation for construct of needed instruments. These techniques called position generator and resource generator which were parts of three instruments (i.e. name generator / interpreter, position generator and resource generator) were used in the 1999-2000 Dutch Social Survey on the Networks (Flap et al, 2003).

The sample of the research consisted of 600 female secondary school students from Tehran and Chandigarh. The sample was composed of female secondary school students from Chandigarh and Tehran studying in classes 11 and 12. As mentioned, approximately six hundred students were selected from private and government schools for collecting the data.

To achieve a better representation of the total population in this study, the multistage systematic random sampling procedure was adopted. Multistage random, here, is referred to as the use of a form of random sampling in which there are two or more stages.

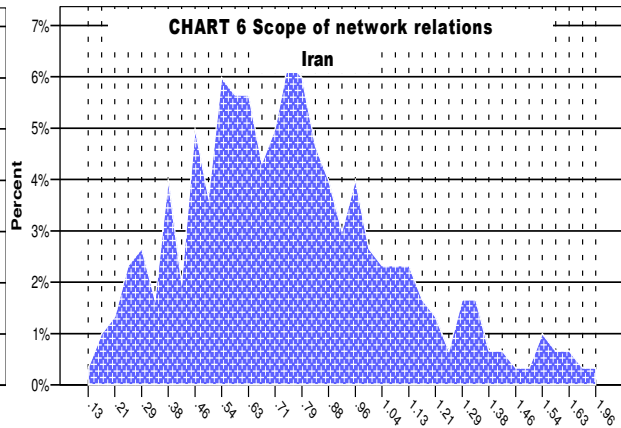
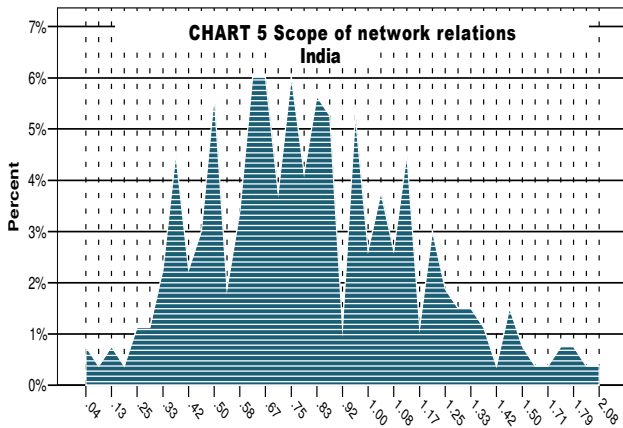
Results

With the given conceptualization of social capital in this article, it was made clear that the core concept of the social capital was based on Scope of social relation network and to some extent trust. The research done in Iran and India –which the present article is a summary of – was based upon the above said conceptual models and focused on the evaluation of scope of network relations of people. One of the variables which could affect the scope of social relation network was the distance or closeness of the person with his relatives. Normally in villages or small towns, the relatives live close to each other. In other words, in villages or small towns, the residential plot of kinfolk & relatives is situated in one locality or one alley or in one single apartment sometimes. It is this closeness factor which results in the increased complexity of relations between the relatives. Contrary to this, in large or metropolitan cities, the closeness of residences of people with their relatives is not available to such an extent.

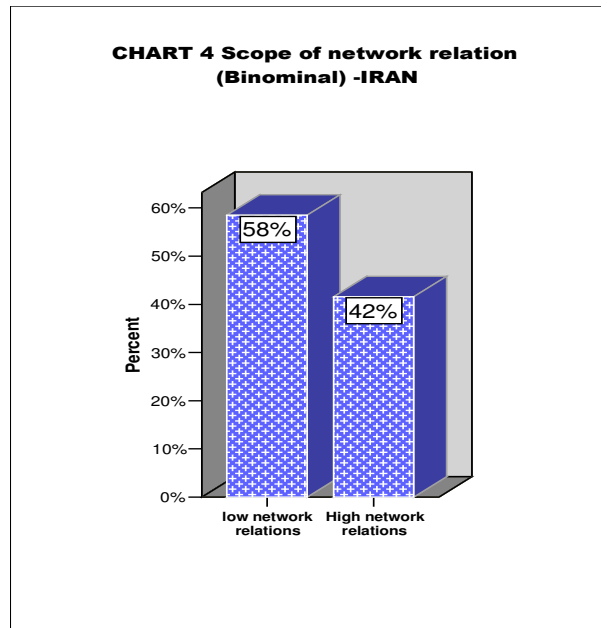
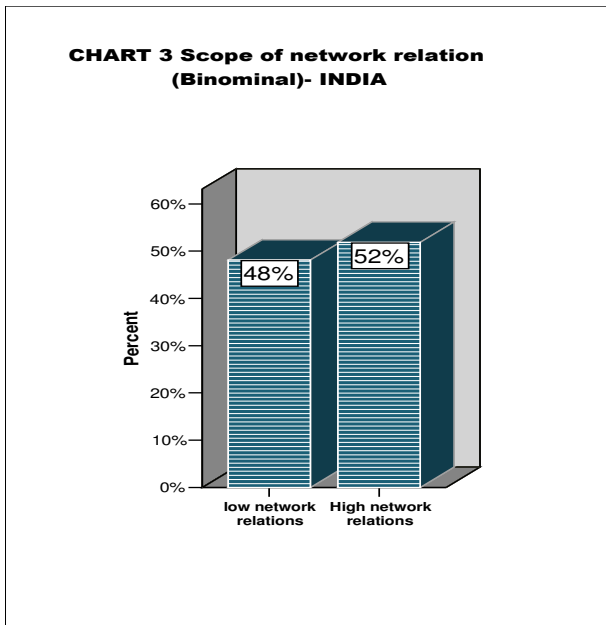


Charts 1 and 2 illustrate the place of residence of a person in regard to distance or closeness with the residences of his kinfolk or relatives. As we can see, Tehran and Chandigarh, i.e. the two cities studied for this research, have two completely different situations with each other. The first chart shows that 40 percent of studied Indian families live far from each other; while the same figure is close to approximately 70 percent for the Iranian counterparts of the study. In other words, majority of the studied Iranian families live far from their kinfolk while on the other hand majority of studied Indian families i.e. 60 percent of them, practically live in places which is close to their kinfolk i.e. a single residential complex or a common residence or either their residences are situated in a single alley or common locality. Such a factor can naturally lead to an increase in social network, especially the relations with kinfolk and relatives. It is worth mentioning, here, that the influential factor on the widespread social relations is not just the closeness and distance of the place of habitation of people in a city, but other factors also play an equally important or much more important role in determining the same.

Besides factors that can probably play an important role in affecting the scope of social relation network, the size of foresaid relations can be regarded as the indicators of social capitals of the societies.



Based on the facts mentioned in this article up to here, the scope of social relation network among people is taken into consideration as one of the prime components of the social capital. Chart 6 and 7 describe the rate of social relations in India and Iran based on having interaction with other people in local social network. It seems these types of interaction potentially provide a kind of accessibility to the resources that Coleman compares it with credit card which is useable in social relations. As Chart 6 demonstrates, the rate of scope of social relation networks in Iran has downward sloping toward higher level of relation. On the contrary the chart of Indian youth shows bias toward higher level of social relations.



Charts 3 and 4 respectively show clearly the difference in social relation network of the studied Indian and Iranian youth and families within a binominal variable. The above said charts are divided on the basis of an overall average of the scope of relations into two groups namely above average and below average. It is distinctively clear that the number of families with below average scope of relations in the studied Indian cases

is much less than the abundant number of people whose scope of social relations is higher than average. For Iran, an exactly opposite situation can be seen in Chart 4.

In other words, the numbers of people with lower than average scope of relations are higher than those who have higher than average scope of relations. It is worth mentioning that, based on the position generator technique of the situation; the mentioned variable also evaluates the scale of access of people to the resources in the network other than scope of relations.

If we consider the possibility of social relations having a potential of being an asset, these types of assets are much more for Indians as compared to their Iranian counterparts. But as it was mentioned in the theoretical discussion of this article, the social capital is a multidimensional concept and cannot be defined just with scope of relations, but it is the main aspect of social capital. The other various aspects like level of trust in relations between people are also important in explaining the social capital and deserve separate researches.

Conclusion

Based on the theoretical framework of this article, the main indicator of social capital was defined as scope of social network relations. The findings showed that regarding the scope of social network relations, the studied Indian subjects had a broader scope of relations as compared to their Iranian counterparts. It seems that, alongside all the other factors, one key determinant is the closeness or the distance of residences of people in both the studied countries. As it was seen and noticed, the residence of Indian families in Chandigarh city was close to each other as compared to the capital city of Iran.

As discussed, the level of scope of social relations as a main indicator for a weak tie social network is different from strong tie indicators such as level of trust in the social network; so, it can be drawn that a social network with weak ties can be seen in Indian social network more than Iranian studied cases.

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