

Consequences of Unmet Expectations among Girls in the Family: A Qualitative Study in Yazd, Iran

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Abstract

Background: The Iranian society is undergoing a transformation towards feminization, leading to shifting expectations and demands from girls towards their families. Unmet expectations among girls and family leads to negative personal and social consequences. The present study aimed to investigate the consequences of unmet expectations of girls from their family.

Methods: This was a qualitative study conducted in 2023-2024 in Yazd, Iran. The study participants were 16 girls who were selected through purposive sampling method. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews, and analyzed using thematic analysis method.

Results: The study results showed that in the changing conditions of the family in the context of the study, girls' expectations from their parents have changed and are increasing. Failure to meet these expectations, which is mostly related to cultural changes, has led to the formation of negative consequences among girls. Consequences of unmet expectations in the form of four themes include boredom, stigma, psychosomatic problems, and poor self-confidence.

Conclusion: In today's changing society, it is crucial to recognize and address the specific expectations and rights of young girls. Failing to do so in a timely manner can result in severe and irreversible consequences for this demographic. It is imperative for policymakers to identify these needs and prioritize them in order to ensure the well-being and advancement of young girls in the Iranian society.

Keywords: Daughter, Unmet expectations, Father child relationship, Psychosomatic

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1. Introduction

Unmet expectations are one of the important issue in the family (1). Each family member may have their own set of expectations towards one another. Meanwhile, parents' expectations from their children and vice versa are very important. If the conditions are not suitable, these expectations will not be met, causing serious challenges in the relationship between parents and children. Meanwhile, girls' expectations from their parents can be important, due to various social changes. Failure to meet these expectations can have psychological and social consequences for girls and families (2, 3).

A family is a group of people who are related to each other as husband, wife, mother, father, brother, and sister through marriage, consanguinity, or adoption (as children), and create a common culture and live in a special unit (4). Also, Durkheim believed that the family is the main criterion of socialized morality and the ritual

system of the society is modeled after the ritual system of the family (5). It is in the family that growth and socialization takes place, and a person builds his future life.

Adolescence is a stage of life that extends between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence includes elements of biological development and major social role transitions, both of which have changed over the past few centuries (6). Adolescence is accompanied by dramatic changes in physical and mental characteristics as well as in social environments (7). This time is the first period of development when women are under intense social pressure (8). During childhood and adolescence, the family is an important context for socialization (9). Family is an important source of support and help in the development of important aspects of personality (10). In addition, the family can be a breeding ground for issues and problems, if it cannot perform its duties properly during this period.

In the traditional approach, the family was the

shaper of everything for the individual. This role of the family continued until adolescence and later. In such a society, children can learn everything they need to know and do from their parents, and with these conditions, they can continue adult life without breaking traditions. But if a society is going to change and continuously adapt itself to new knowledge and innovative ways, teenagers must to some extent ignore the beliefs and actions of their parents and learn ideas, techniques, and behavior patterns of their generation.

Expectations can be considered contingent or certain. They include realistic and achievable goals and sometimes hopes (11). Expectations are beliefs or hopes about how to behave, perform, or achieve specific goals. In the context of family, expectations can refer to the criteria, demands, responsibilities, and wishes that girls have towards their parents, and these expectations can also include behaviors, achievements, attitudes, and even certain choices that girls consider desirable and they themselves want in the family. Studies have also shown that adolescents who have strong relationships with their families and trust them establish good relationships with their peers (12) which in a way shows the beginning of establishing social relations. Family life prescribes discontinuities in the role expectations of all human beings. It was shown that better family relationships leads to higher well-being (13). Despite this, it seems that many families do not enough knowledge and skill for better relationship with their children.

Alfaro and colleagues in a study showed that positive family relationships and healthy behaviors were associated with mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic (14). A study on 289 Chinese children showed that less parental supervision and family conflict could neutralize the negative effect of homework anxiety on mental well-being (15). Research findings in Poland confirmed the positive relationship between the quality of family relationships, internal problems, problematic behavior, and social behavior. Support in family relationships has been positively related to social behavior and control has been positively related to problematic behavior and internal problems (16). A study was conducted by Díez and co-workers showed that the perceived support and intimacy of parents have a negative relationship with the dimensions of avoidance and anxiety. In contrast,

perceived parental control (both behavioral and psychological) was positively related to both dimensions of attachment. That is, parental control (both behavioral and psychological) is positively correlated with attachment anxiety and avoidance in children's romantic relationships in adulthood (17). Cross-cultural study in 9 countries found that parents who were more affectionate, less neglectful, and more controlling, as well as parental attitudes that were more authoritarian, were associated with higher expectations about children's obligations within families as well as across cultures (18). Another study showed that teenagers rely more on the support of their families compared to their peers (19).

Studies on girls and their expectations of parents in the Iranian society are limited. Paternal and maternal role integration along with mother's support, making relationship-oriented environment in family, and provision of the girl's developmental needs are the most important responsibilities of mothers (20). It was proposed that creating more opportunities requires the political will to implement women-related legislation in Iran (21). Ghanizadehbafghi and Varmazyar studied the impact of feminist movements on the changing of the concept of family and vice versa. The study results showed that the concept of family, its structure, and functions have been transformed in many ways under the influence of feminism (22). Ahmadi and colleagues indicated that many family disputes stem from conflicting interpretations of principles, leading to contradictions and conflicts with the rights derived from these principles (23). According to feminist definitions and ideas about patriarchy, men's violence can be seen as a mechanism through which men, either collectively or as individuals, exert control over women within the societal and familial structure, thereby perpetuating their dominance over women (24). Generally, these studies showed there is a hidden conflict in the Iranian family based on new changes specifically feminism. This lead to formation new expectation among families' members including girls. In addition, these reviewed studies (21-24) have not shown what happens to girls if expectations are not met.

In the changing society of Iran, girls have found a decisive role. Social changes, on one hand, and the expansion of feminism, on the other hand, have drastically changed the expectations of this

group. The formation of new expectations among girls is evident at the family and community level. The quality of relationships and interactions, rights and expectations, family size, and marriage age are among the most important changes in the family. According to Durkheim, the change in the role of women, the division of sexual labor, and finally the division of social labor, along with the plan of equality between men and women, has created the conditions of family crisis or disruption of the family institution (5). Changes in the family in Iran have led to changes in the rights and expectations of girls from the family. In Iran, so far, no study has been conducted that deals with the consequences of unmet expectations, especially among girls. Therefore, due to a lack of knowledge in this field and its importance, the present study aimed to explore the consequences of unmet expectations of girls in the family.

2. Methods

This was a qualitative study conducted in 2023-2024 among teenage girls in Yazd, Iran. The study paradigm involved an interpretive approach, called constructivism. Accordingly, the understanding and experience of the participants were of great importance in qualitative research. Single girls between 14-22 years old who lived in families with stable conditions were included in the study. Girls from single-parent, divorced, and on the verge of divorce families were excluded from the study. The participants were selected using purposive sampling method and heterogeneous sampling with maximum diversity. With the maximum diversity approach, interviewees with different age, educational levels, religious beliefs, and social class were selected. With the saturation criterion, 16 participants entered the study (Table 1).

The data were collected using semi-structured

interviews. Verbal consent was obtained for participation. Seven interviews were conducted in person and 8 interviews were conducted by phone. Conducting telephone interviews has been suggested in recent qualitative research in social sciences and is used many times (25). On average, each interview lasted about 45 minutes. The interview started with this general question: "Please tell us about your relationship with your parents." What rights do you have as a family member to assert yourself within the family? If these rights are not fulfilled, how do you feel, and what do you do about it?

The data were analyzed and coded using the thematic analysis method. This study was based on a 6-step thematic analysis (26). The process involves getting to know the data through reading and re-reading, engaging in a back-and-forth activity, coding, searching for themes to identify an embodied pattern in the data, examining themes by combining or dividing them to create a compelling narrative, defining and naming the themes, and ultimately writing a coherent and convincing analytical narrative for the reader. This method involves identifying patterns or themes in qualitative data, making it very flexible. Thematic analysis involves summarizing, organizing, and interpreting the data. Data analysis plays a fundamental role in conducting authentic qualitative research. In fact, the qualitative researcher is often referred to as a research instrument. The ability to understand, describe, and interpret experiences and perceptions is crucial for discovering meaning in specific conditions and contexts. Initial coding, sub-themes, and matching them and emerged together for main themes was conducted (27).

In this study, reliability and trust were observed. Because validity, transferability, verifiability, accuracy, and reliability were considered in

Table 1: Participants' characteristics

Participants' No	Name	Age (Years old)	Participants' No	Name	Age (Years old)
1	Sainaz	19	8	Narges	16
2	Samin	18	9	Maryam	20
3	Sahar	18	10	Farahnaz	18
4	Shadi	19	11	Marjan	19
5	Mina	15	12	Farnaz	18
6	Hanieh	15	13	Motahareh	18
7	Negar	19	14	Zahra	21
			15	Baran	14
16	Mohadeseh	14			

data collection and analysis (28). Participant confirmation was conducted by the researcher during the interviews. Member check as a tool for trustworthiness was conducted by the researcher during the study (29). Appropriate methodology, research questions, and interview protocols were used throughout the study. Compliance with the principles of research ethics has been considered. Respecting the anonymity of participants, ensuring satisfaction with participation, and maintaining honesty in conducting and reporting research were among the most important ethical concerns of researchers. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee at Yazd University with the code of IR.YAZD.REC.1403.011.

3. Results

The analysis of the themes showed that the participants perceive the family as a safe environment for living, learning, receiving support, and socializing. Parents, especially fathers, still play an important and unique role in this field and are considered the most significant supporters of girls. However, due to social and cultural changes, girls' expectations from their parents have evolved. As a result of these changes, they have expectations that the family struggles to cope with. For example, the expectations of being understood, supporting, trust, the right to freedom, fewer restrictions on communication, and the right to choose clothing. From the point of view of the majority of participants, parents do not care about their expectations and demands in these cases. Also, they expected more intimacy based on mutual interaction and dialogue. Since such expectations were generally not recognized or were neglected by the family and parents, they experienced a sense of failure. As a result, they experience unintended consequences that are unacceptable to them.

The participants are experiencing differences of opinion and gaps with their families in these cases. This has made them feel that the family does not care about their wishes and expectations in these cases. As a result, they experience frustration and a sense of failure. The most important themes are boredom, stigma, psychosomatic problems, and poor self-confidence (Table 2).

3.1. Boredom

Many participants discussed the suffering caused by parents neglecting their rights and expectations. According to the researchers, families often prioritize the beliefs and values of their own generation, inadvertently neglecting the needs and desires of their children. This dynamic can lead to the transmission of feelings of insecurity to the daughters, ultimately resulting in resentment among the participants. Ignoring the girl's expectations and focusing solely on the parents' generational values has led to the girl's mental disorder. She feels isolated and experiences nervous tension. In the transitioning society of Iran and with the expansion of communication, raising awareness among girls widens the gap between the emerging values and values held by parents. This situation can result in girls feeling extremely restricted, experiencing depression, and facing difficulties, particularly when they have conflicting values with their parents. At times, the struggles of existence have become deeply rooted and complex in the lives of the children.

Mina says: It makes me very upset. My mind gets very busy to the point where I have to write quickly to empty my thoughts and calm down. You may not believe that my heart rate is increasing. When I sit down, I feel my nerves heating up, and it's not a minor issue.

Table 2: Constructed research themes related to girls' experience of unmet expectations in the family

Initial codes	Subthemes	Main themes
Depression, despair, feeling, loneliness, unhappiness, rumination, anxiety, stress, insomnia, lack of concentration, nervousness, mental conflict, nervous panic, feeling of fear, mental resentment, mental torture, stress, mental disorder, aggression, anger	Depression, lonely me, mental disorder, troubled spirit, sadness, immediate panic, mental tension.	Boredom
Feeling judged and inferior, I sometimes feel like I don't exist at all. I suppress my emotions, harbor hatred towards my father, and avoid my family. I hide from social relations due to my fear of society and exhibit stubbornness.	Rejection, withdrawal, isolation, social avoidance	Stigma
Headache, stomach, body ache, heart palpitations, heart pain, taking sedative medicine	Physical pain, physical problems, taking medication	Psychosomatic problems
Feeling weak, poor self-confidence, lack of self-confidence, dissatisfaction, sense of emptiness, aimlessness, survival of feelings, feeling of worthlessness, inadequacy, censoring the body.	Frustration, absurdity, self-doubt	Poor self-confidence

Farnaz: It is depressing and can lead to self-harm, anger, and other negative emotions.

Mohadeseh: Sometimes it really bothers me that my dad doesn't spend time with me. For instance, I don't get upset easily, but his absence puts a lot of pressure on me. My father was traveling. On the third day that he was gone, I found myself not just crying, but also wondering why my father was not here.

3.2. Stigma

The participants of the study felt that their parents stubbornly adhere to traditional beliefs, particularly when it comes to girls. They stated that this rigidity in beliefs leads to the denial of certain rights that they feel should be respected. This deprivation affects not only their psychological well-being but also has numerous social repercussions. The difference of views with parents can lead to the separation of parents from girls within the family, resulting in a loss of opportunities for meaningful conversations. Therefore, girls generally seek refuge in the virtual space, which in the current situation in Iran is referred to as "You spend too much time on your phone." Of course, this term is used for all children, but it is more commonly associated with girls. In the case of girls, it carries an additional social meaning related to value and communication limitations. Therefore, girls feel oppressed and inferior. When it comes to self-stigma associated with addressing behaviors, it is clear that girls may show resistance when their expectations are not fulfilled. According to these girls, they resist their parents by being stubborn, resulting in outcomes contrary to their parents' desires. On the other hand, parents insinuate that the society is deteriorating and express a lack of trust in it. Girls are sensitive to fear, and, in their own words, they sometimes unknowingly restrict their presence in the society. Thus, the girls consciously experience being away from their family and the community, which contributes to a sense of isolation.

Marjan: I have two pages on Instagram: one for my family and one without family. It's much easier than constantly worrying about what my family thinks. Why should I choose the harder path?

Farnaz: As long as they don't limit you. You can't do that. A girl's reputation can be tarnished like a white cloth, impossible to clean.

Haniyeh: What I don't have, I don't feel alone. I feel that my friends have the freedom and ability to go out alone, make their own choices, and do so at any time. Unfortunately, I do not possess that same level of freedom and capability, and I don't feel that I am any less than them.

3.3. Psychosomatic Problems

Most of the study participants experienced physical problems due to family pressures and unmet expectations. According to them, the experience of these physical injuries was due to the family's treatment and neglect of their needs. Parents' unreasonable expectations and comparisons with others, especially during their teenage years, have led to numerous psychological consequences for them. They contemplate the words of their parents, which has led to psychosomatic disorders. Some participants experienced headaches and heart palpitations when discussing their parents' behavior or conversations on a particular topic. Some individuals shared their experiences of physical pain and suffering due to frequent visits to various doctors.

Shadi: Right now, I think my head hurts. I had severe pain; it struck my heart and stomach. This psychological pain was manifesting in my body from my mind. The doctor said, "Madam, you should take your child to the therapist. Why did you bring her here?" He said that no matter how much I press this device, his heart cannot be found. My reason is that I felt suppressed and unsupported by my family, who had high and unreasonable expectations of me.

Mina: It puts a lot of pressure on the brain to the point that once I was sitting in class, and I didn't understand anything for a whole period, and I was just staring.

Samin: This confusion and anxiety keep us awake at night. In addition, I don't want to wake up early in the morning, to prevent those anxieties, words, and behaviors at home from affecting me.

3.4. Poor self-confidence

Neglecting girls' rights, not listening to them, and ignoring their expectations can lead them to experience inner weakness and poor self-confidence. They have a sense of lack and emptiness.

They feel inadequate and lose self-confidence. Sometimes, the repression and lack of acceptance from their parents lead individuals to face negative self-perception and self-censorship. As a result, we will see the behavior and social actions of girls being influenced. They state that lack of self-confidence and self-belief will be very important factors in communication and social interactions.

Maryam: I feel that it has affected my self-confidence. Because I am not a social person at all and I have very poor self-confidence, I feel that not being involved in society has had an effect.

Sahar: I don't exist at all; my opinion doesn't matter at all. I am a person who does not understand anything. My thinking is flawed, I have not matured yet, and I feel inadequate.

Hanieh: There were some issues in the family that I couldn't discuss with my dad. Additionally, my self-confidence in my appearance, abilities, and opportunities is poor. My aunts and uncles do not consider me a disgrace to the family, but my mother behaves as if I am. My father does not stand up for me.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to analyze the consequences of girls' unmet expectations in the family, which include four main themes of boredom, stigma, psychosomatic problems, and poor self-confidence. The present study revealed a two-sided perspective in the thinking of parents and daughters. It appears that both families and girls believe they are right, prefer their own beliefs and values, and seek to impose their desires on each other. When girls' expectations are not met, and parents fail to help them understand or assert their right to their own thoughts, it creates a lack of interaction and dialogue within the family. This situation can have numerous psychological and social consequences for girls. On the surface, the findings suggested significant psychological implications. When a person experiences depression, poor self-confidence, or feelings of absurdity, it can impact their social interactions. According to the study participants, this can lead to isolation in certain cases. They prefer to avoid being in the community. Research supported that family relationships are positively related to social behavior, problematic behaviors, and internal

problems (13). Díez and colleagues discussed the negative effect of parental control on romantic attachment in adulthood (17). This romantic attachment can be influenced by the individual's social interactions in adulthood.

It seems that the family lacks the knowledge and skills required to effectively engage and communicate with their daughters, leaving them unaware of their daughters' needs and expectations. In a society defined by patriarchy and traditional values like in Iran, where meeting girls' expectations is paramount, this presents a significant challenge to the family members in nurturing their relationships with their daughters. Neglecting to meet their needs and desires can lead to significant repercussions, especially during the crucial stage of adolescence when young girls start to discover their identity and place in society. Expectations regarding family obligations are a potentially important factor in unpacking "culture," which is often handled by comparing groups without attention to underlying values (18). The study by Tahir and co-workers confirmed the sensitivity of teenage years and reliance on family support (19). Finally, the repercussions of these actions create uncertainty in the life prospects of these girls and jeopardize their social relationships. Therefore, it is crucial for parents to be aware of the consequences of not meeting their daughters' expectations in order to mitigate these outcomes.

Theoretically, it can be said that the status of girls in the Iranian society is changing. The impact of the impact of feminism on the family (22) and related legal discussions (23) are some of the pieces of evidence that demonstrate significant changes in the family structure in the Iranian society. A part of this change is related to the evolving expectations of girls in the family. This approach criticizes the expectations and traditional behaviors of girls within the family context. Although these expectations are not necessarily accurate, they are ingrained in the family dynamics of the Iranian society. Neglecting or ignoring it can lead to undesirable consequences and harm girls within the context of family and society. However, parents cannot consistently meet the expectations of their adolescents without causing some harm to family life and the parent-child relationship (1). This paradox is evident within the research context. In fact, girls have not been able to strike a balance between their expectations and family concerns.

The present study showed that social and cultural changes in the Iranian society are extensive and have deeply impacted various layers of the society. Some of these changes are related to the family and have affected the interactions between parents and girls. Emerging values resulting from social changes have led to the formation of new rights and expectations among girls. This is because the parents live by different values and norms. The disparity in expectations results in a specific type of failure, the four primary consequences demonstrated in this study. The aforementioned consequences are related to a form of cultural lag within the family environment. This leads to the creation of an atmosphere of conflict and interaction, with girls being the most affected. They not only experience confusion at the individual level but also in social interaction spaces. In this situation, it is evident that they are following different paths without the presence or consultation of their parents, which is more likely to harm them. Further research and theoretical discussions in this field are recommended.

4.1. Limitations

Because this is a qualitative study it cannot be generalized. Communicating with some participants was difficult, because they were facing emotional problems due to not receiving the necessary expectations in the family.

5. Conclusions

The present study investigated the girls' experience of unmet expectations in the family environment. The results showed that girls are in a conflict situation, mostly due to the generational gap related to cultural and social values with their parents. Parents may struggle to accept new social and cultural changes, leading to the rejection of their girls in these matters and neglect of their needs and expectations. The absence of a suitable role model in this field has led to personal and social consequences for the girl which can sometimes lead to other injuries. Given the feminization of social spaces in the Iranian society and the requirements of the new generation, it is recommended to focus on conceptualization and theorizing in this area. It is also suggested that counselors in schools and universities communicate more effectively with the needs of girls and offer counseling classes for parents. Holding educational classes for parents

is recommended to recognize the needs of the new generation and the consequences of unmet expectations.

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Authors' Contribution

Sara Sadeghieh: Contributed in devising the project's framework and methodology; took part in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, as well as initially drafting the manuscript. Ahmad. K. Sadati: Contributed to the conceptual framework and methodology and the study's design, drafting the manuscript and critically reviewing the content to ensure intellectual depth. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work, such that the questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work.

Ethical Approval

The Ethics Review Board of Yazd University approved the present study with the code of IR.YAZD.REC.1403.011. Also, verbal consent was obtained from the participants.

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