

# Afghan Refugee Women in Iran: Self-Awareness and Change in Traditional Gender Roles

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## Abstract

*This article looks at how Afghan migrant women to Iran gained greater self-awareness and experienced many changes in their traditional gender roles. This qualitative study was conducted through in-depth interviews with Afghan working women in Tehran. The women had a median age of 39 (between 23 to 55) and had been living in Iran anywhere between one to twenty-five years. Most of the responders migrated to Iran after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 1995. A few were more recent migrants who arrived after the Taliban took over in August 2021. The article addresses the ways in which Afghan women have attained self-awareness and the multiplicity of factors which have facilitated or impeded this process. We will see that these women have gone far beyond the immediate restrictions and impediments that were imposed by their traditional families, as well as the strict gender division of labour in their community.*

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*Eyes ought to be washed anew, a fresh view ought to be  
The very wind, the very rain, words new ought to be;  
With a parasol unopened still, under the rain ought to be;  
Mind, memory unperturbed, under the rain ought to be  
With the city's all folks under the rain ought to be;  
.....  
Life is a perpetual plunging in the pond of timelessness;  
Let's disrobe, the water is just a step away,  
Let's taste lucidity...*

***Sohrab Sepehri***

Modern times have witnessed different modes of emigration and taking of refuge in other countries. A large body of research has addressed the drive behind emigration and the aftermath of taking refuge in other countries. This study, which specifically deals with female Afghan refugees and their motivations for migration, uses the same approach, but the article looks at two historical stages: (1) the aftermath of the Afghan civil war and the first Taliban rule in Afghanistan (1996–2001), when the Taliban first imposed severe restrictions on women’s rights, education, and participation in public activities and confined women to domestic work away from public space; and (2) the Taliban’s return to power in 2021, when many of these restrictions have been reimposed. This article focuses on Afghan women’s self-awareness and changes they have undergone as a result of living as migrants in Iran.

I examine the changes they have experienced in their traditional gender roles through a qualitative study and in-depth interviews with Afghan working-class women. The women who were interviewed had a median age of thirty-nine (between twenty-three and fifty-five), and had been living in Iran for anywhere between one and twenty-five years. All the respondents had emigrated to Iran either after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 1995 or more recently, when the Taliban took over again in August 2021. The article addresses the ways in which Afghan women have attained self-awareness and considers numerous factors that have facilitated or impeded this process. We will see that these women have gone far beyond their immediate restrictions, impediments that were imposed by their traditional families, as well as the strict gender division of labor in their communities. In their new social environment in Iran, with a shrinking family size and new responsibilities, Afghan migrant women have attained greater self-awareness and rediscovered their capabilities, and

have also been able to achieve a new and better social status, one that helps them as well as their family members.

Here, we should refer to the of Before the 1979 revolution, Iranian society was relatively modern in its urban communities, with a rich social and cultural background. Iranian women had achieved many of their individual and civil rights, including freedom of clothing, the right to vote, the right to attain higher education, to be employed outside the house, and to be elected to parliament, as well as to serve as minister. Their situation was not comparable to that of women in neighboring Afghanistan.

However, as is well known, after the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iranian women suffered from extensive gender discrimination and have had to confront a host of restrictions in their daily lives. Yet the battles of Iranian women are different than those of their Afghan neighbors. They are primarily aimed at state-imposed restrictions based on highly discriminatory segregation laws, including the mandatory Law of Chastity and Hijab.<sup>1</sup> Due to different opinions and tendencies within the power structure, this law did not find a coherent executive form: its implementation was delegated to law enforcement agents and was therefore carried out in an arbitrary manner, which increased the complexity and ambiguity involved in dealing with hijab in society.

The battles of Iranian women also stem from the theocratic state's refusal to reform marriage and family laws or to implement democratic laws, despite persistent demands for such reforms by a majority of the Iranian people, both women and men. Long ago, Iranian women gained the right to frequent public spaces, to attend schools and universities, and to be gainfully employed outside the house, and they have maintained and expanded upon these rights, despite the state's misogynistic policies. In contrast, leaving the house without permission of one's husband or extended family, going to the university, or working outside the house for a living remain major hurdles for Afghan women, since the authority of the

husband and the extended family continued to reign supreme in Afghanistan.

The very fact of being immigrants—that is, living under novel social, cultural, and economic conditions, outside of the cocoon of old and familiar culture and lifestyle—threw these individuals into new and uncharted personal and social terrain, sometimes with drastic ramifications. With this in mind, this article investigates Afghan women's self-awareness in light of their newfound status in the host society of Iran, and the implications for their children, especially their daughters.

In this article, I define awareness as having a clear view of problems and inequalities; self-awareness thus refers to the perception that individuals develop about their own existence and their place in the grand scheme of the universe. In addition, the implication of self-awareness implies a stage at which an individual knows her potentials and capabilities, and actively uses them to realize her personal goals, her rights, and her status in a new environment. This definition the emphasis is on the relationship between self-awareness and the social environment.

Put differently, our attitudes and perceptions of ourselves can only be gained through interaction with others. How individuals interact with the larger society affects not only their status within society and the development of their feelings of dignity and value, but also their expectations of society. (Betz 2022).

The Afghan people I interviewed had escaped the instability and insecurities of Afghanistan that arose from decades-long war and occupation of Afghanistan by foreign forces as well as an ongoing civil war. The largest migration of people from Afghanistan took place during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), which coincided with the Afghan civil war. Family constitutes the first and most important environment an individual comes to know, and family connections largely define an individual's existence. Additional knowledge of other living spaces and the self-

awareness that arises from that knowledge are secondary to the self-awareness gained from living within the family. Afghan women who arrived in Iran did not just leave their homeland behind—they often left their extended family and the institutions that had defined them and their status in society and guided their behaviour... Such changes had consequences for them and for their children.

In the 1990s birth control was freely available and easily accessible for married couples in Iran. The government encouraged its use, and we can safely assume that Afghan families also benefited from the availability of birth control, which led to smaller families. While some migrants had more than three children, the younger couples who migrated to Iran, or were married in Iran, had limited the number of their children to three.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Beyond the Borders of the Extended family**

In the first few years of immigration, the family plays a crucial role in the lives of the refugees. It offers them a sense of identity and a continued sense of belonging to their previous culture. Family also helps individuals find meaning in life. But family can also interfere with the process of gaining self-awareness. With this in mind, in any evaluation of Afghan women's self-awareness in Iran, their newfound roles and responsibilities in this new family structure serve as leading indicators (Duvall and Wicklund 1972).

Family provides immigrants with their most important habitat, However, migration and refugee status disrupt this framework, and the structure of a refugee's family is different from the structure of her extended family in her home country in many ways. These differences lead to changes in the role, status, and responsibility of refugee women.<sup>iii</sup> For immigrants, families are smaller, since many relatives are left behind. In Afghanistan, the norm is living in a large extended family, but immigration often changes that, and most refugees live in nuclear families: the husband, the

wife, and their children, and in some cases, elderly in-laws (father and mother). In a traditional extended family in Afghanistan, men—especially the male members of the husband’s family (uncles and grandfathers)—are the major decision-makers. In contrast, in a nuclear family the power of the wife increases.

This is an argument which Raheleh, forty-four, who only has an elementary education and arrived in Iran with four children, offers in the interview I conducted with her:

*In Afghanistan, women are treated as inferior to men; but here, men know better. They are aware that women are capable of doing anything and they would succeed in doing that. ... It all comes down to the environment. ... [In Tehran] we came to understand the way of the world, and we learned how to make decisions; we ventured outside our homes into the streets and became worldly-wise. Now I totally decide for myself on matters of the house. I am entrusted with all family decisions. Before this, in Afghanistan, the elder brother [in-law], my husband, and generally his family would have had the last word in every matter. With responsibility comes authority.*

Samar, thirty-nine, who graduated from high school in Afghanistan and was the mother of six children when she arrived from Afghanistan, had been living in Iran for fourteen years . She compares living in the extended family to living in the nuclear family:

*I was almost tortured by my brother-in-law; I mean torture within the family and the tyranny to which Afghan women are systematically subjected. Now my husband has the courage to stand his ground and would never be easily intimidated by bullies, since he has learned from the new culture. He has learned a great deal. In the past, my husband would have*

*categorically agreed with the rest of his family, since it was his elder brother's decision which almost always prevailed. My husband was a mere follower. Now he would not allow anybody to impose their opinions on me. As I act assertively in expressing myself, and have a say in important matters, they [the rest of his family] see that I know everything, and no longer have anything to say.*

Samar also commented on the important role of the mother-in-law in an extended family:

*In the recent past [in Afghanistan], wives would not leave the home without their mothers-in-law; even brothers-in-law were bold enough to authorize [or not authorize] whether or not their sister-in-law should leave the house.*

Samar then describes how cultural aspects of a host country can influence the culture of the immigrant families:

*Now that Afghan women are socialized in an Iranian setting, the culture and milieu [of Iranian society] definitely have had an impact on them. We have been more integrated [into Iranian society]. ... When I finished high school and was planning to find a job, my brother-in-law told my husband, 'Your wife is not in a position to go to work. It is not necessary and she should remain a housewife.' Samar concluded that if she had continued living in Afghanistan, her husband would have followed the advice of his brother, and Samar would have never been able to get a job.*

### **Evolution of Women's Traditional Role in the Family**

The most important change that is taking place within the immigrant Afghan community is the waning authority of men in the new nuclear

family, to the point where their contribution to the survival of the family is diminished and in some cases even non-essential. Many Afghan men participated in the *jihad* wars in their homeland, where a large number of them were either killed or disabled. Some of these disabled men, who have relocated to Iran with their wives and children, are now the passive receivers of services. In some cases, their widowed wives are now taking care of the remaining family members. In other cases, the men died after coming to Iran and the widow became the sole breadwinner of the family. Maryam, thirty-five, who has an elementary school education, and is the mother of three children, has been living in Iran for a decade. She recalls that:

*ten years ago, we came to Iran. My husband had wounds from the battleground and he died in Mashhad. ... Now I am the sole breadwinner of the family. I am both mom and dad for my children, and I am the only person who makes the decisions about the family's financial issues.*

In the absence of the husbands, or in situations where the husband is a dependent of his wife because of his disability, a significant shift takes place in the dynamic of the marriage. The men's dependent status now bars them from playing the active role they used to play in the extended family in their homeland. Eventually the wife ventures into the streets to provide for the family, an activity that once seemed impossible for them. But the survival of the family challenges women, be they mothers, wives, or daughters, to travel on this treacherous road and fight outside the home for a living. This is indeed a battle, a hard and exhausting one. But in the course of this battle, the woman discovers different aspects of her abilities.

Jabin, who is thirty-eight and has been living in Iran for fourteen years, left Afghanistan along with her husband and four children. She finished her high school education in Iran through courses offered by the Iranian Literacy Campaign.<sup>iv</sup> She recalls,



*My husband was bed-ridden and remained in a hospital until his death. He barely saw Tehran and never worked here. I have single-handedly taken all the responsibilities. When I arrived in Tehran, I was illiterate. I could not figure out what people were saying on the streets. Everything was obscure to me. Now I know everything, I know what happens and what people are saying, easily and effortlessly. I am cognizant of my surroundings. Now I feel that I can travel all over the world by myself. The only problem I might have is the language problem; other than that, I can handle all other issues.*

Even when men accompany their families in Iran, the need to work full-time at odd menial jobs, as well as their illiteracy, prevent them from performing their traditional roles in the family. Bolour, who is twenty-three, and only completed the fourth grade in Afghanistan, is the mother of two children. She immigrated to Iran in 1992. She recalls the tremendous changes she experienced in her new role within her family:

*My husband is a manual laborer and knows very little about what happens around him. Because of his job, he could not participate in the Literacy Campaign. ... Now I am the only person who decides on matters of importance in our family.*

Bolour believes that financial independence is an essential precondition for personal freedom and independence:

*In Afghanistan, I would not have been allowed to leave our home. I would not be given money to go shopping, never. But after I came to Tehran, I gained this freedom. Now my husband, who earns an income, trusts me in the way I spend the money he brings in and I feel that is better in many ways. In Afghanistan, for example, if he were planning to buy a house, he would not think that his wife might have an opinion on this matter, and would not think about whether she might*

*like or not like a particular house. He would not have sought my opinion or taste when buying a piece of clothing. He would have decided on his own and in his mind [he would have assumed] I liked that piece of clothing. But now things are different. For example, at the realtor's office, he asked me to go and see the house first.*

### **Women's New Status within the Family**

An important factor in shaping women's perception of her status within the family, as well as the image that other family members have of her, is the radical changes in lifestyle these women and their families have experienced as a result of moving from a deeply traditional, rural community to a much more modern, urban setting, such as Tehran or one of Iran's other major cities, where new forms of social interactions govern relations between the sexes. Men are also affected by these radical changes in lifestyle and environment. Raheleh points out, for example,

*In Afghanistan, women are not given any authority; they cannot even make simple choices in life as to how to handle household issues; but here, when my husband and other Afghan men mingled with the larger society— and saw other men's conduct— their attitudes changed.*

The lived experiences of Afghan families in Iran, especially in their daily encounters with the medical and educational establishments, shed greater light on how different societies, even those of Iran and Afghanistan, which have great affinity in terms of religion, language, and culture, may have different gender norms, something that brought greater self-awareness to both Afghan women and men. The self-awareness gained in the process of this lived experience is like a light that transforms the vague and unclear image of the Afghan refugee woman into a bright and dynamic image. The

vision of the world that has opened before her can be compared to the blurred image lines that are described in Jabin's description:

*I learned how to maintain a sanitary environment around the house by going to health practitioners. In adult school, I learned from my teachers and acted upon my learnings at home; I learned a lot. Alas! what had I been before! I used to be like a deaf and blind person, who made little out of her surroundings.*

This self-actualization can only happen when other family members also acknowledge and approve the new norms, and when the women feel safe in their new surroundings; that is, the process needs to be reciprocal. When a wife finds out that her husband approves of her new role, her new self-awareness bears fruit because, as mentioned earlier, the process of gaining self-awareness is a social one. Bolour believes that 'one result of taking greater responsibility was the fact that my husband became more approving of me as he became a witness to my efforts for the sake of the family.' Thus self-awareness, if acknowledged and reciprocated, works to strengthen relations within the family and may make it more humane and peaceful. She adds that 'now my husband loves our daughter and he is affectionate towards her. ... Before, baby girls were totally ignored. Now he always hugs his daughter and affectionately embraces her to demonstrate his love.'

### **Immigration and Children's Status within the Family**

Self-awareness also sheds new light on events of one's past life. Hindsight that is informed by self-awareness of one's past often results in quick flashbacks, where one revisits scenes from one's own or another's childhood and formative stages in life, and reconsiders those experiences. Scenes where girls are forced to leave school or are denied the right to go to school, or when they are forced to marry, but their opinion in marriage

is never solicited, are often revisited in these accounts. Maryam, in thinking about the responsibilities and duties of a modern-day mother, criticizes the traditional practices of raising children that she encountered as a youth:

It is always the parents who decide the future of their children, whether in their marriage or other issues. My parents only told me to marry; they did not ask my opinion about the individual I would marry; his education, his income, his social status, and his personal demeanor. For them, having an unmarried fifteen-year-old daughter was socially inappropriate. She had to get married as soon as possible, and go to her husband's house and start a new family.

One of the first results of gaining greater self-awareness is the impact it has on raising one's children, as parents attempt to break this evil cycle of repeating bad parenting practices and to form new habits. Maryam thus adds, 'All my efforts are focused on this purpose that my children be educated and have a brighter future.'

All of the women I interviewed placed great stress on educating their children. Bolour, who was the youngest mother among those who were interviewed, said,

One other major difference I see in my life here is the life of my children. ... These children are different from those growing up in Afghanistan. If they had grown up in Afghanistan, they would have acted like other children; they would have lacked respect for their mothers and lacked motivation to focus on their school homework. ... I noticed how Iranian mothers were serious about their children; the emphasis and effort they put into educating them was exemplary. Iranian mothers provided us with an excellent example of how to be a good mother, and their children also provided a model of excellence for our children in school. ... [Now] I go

through thick and thin so that my children attend school; so that they will not be like us, their parents

The women's greatest goal in life is thus to prevent the flow of the past into the present. Most of these women see education as crucial in preventing the earlier vicious cycle they experienced in the lives of their children. They themselves have learned how to live under the new conditions mostly through trial and error, and have gained self-awareness without the help of their parents or mentors. Some accounts confirm the dynamics of this process. Raheleh adds, 'In Iran girls go out, go to school, and know the way of the world, see everything and will have clear minds. ... They know how to behave outside the home and what happens outside.'

A majority of women whose road to self-awareness is investigated in this article had a rural background. They first went to school after coming to Iran and after attending Literacy Campaign classes. Others were educated in Afghanistan. They were working in Kabul and other Afghan cities, but their academic credentials were not retrieved due to the chaos of immigration; thus, it was difficult or impossible for them to show their diplomas to local authorities in Iran, and they faced insurmountable problems in finding appropriate jobs. Other deprivations and hardships that they faced as migrants in Iran isolated them more than before.

For this group of women, family offered the sole source of relief and escape from the vicissitudes of life, even though the traditional gender roles perpetuated within their families further restricted them. These imposed family constraints made their upward mobility difficult and kept them grounded in the family structure. Against all odds, however, eventually they attempted to change their lives and those of their children. As we will see below, while they lived within the family structure, they were able to adopt a different approach to raising their children and eventually empowered themselves while preparing their children for life in their new homeland.

### **Immigration: Integration or Transition?**

After twenty years of being kept from power, the Taliban once again seized control in Afghanistan in the summer of 2021, which triggered the movement of tens of thousands of frightened Afghan people toward Iran, in a desperate attempt to flee from violence, hunger, ethnic and racial persecution, political instability, and a collapsed economy.

Some of the Afghans who illegally traveled to Iran did so out of economic desperation, since their livelihood had collapsed completely as a result of COVID-19 waves and layoffs in 2020–2021. However, because Iranian currency had depreciated significantly as a result of the US-led reimposition of sanctions on Iran in 2019, the value of the money that Afghan immigrants earned inside Iran and sent back to their families in Afghanistan had also declined considerably.

During the first Taliban takeover, the most vulnerable section of Afghan society had been women. Now with the Taliban's reappearance in power, women saw the writing on the wall and realized that once again the deeply misogynistic policies of the Taliban would bar them from going to school, being employed, and even entering the public sphere unchaperoned. US policies in Afghanistan between the years 2001–2021, policies that had promised to bring permanent and positive change to the country's infrastructure, to foster sustainable growth, improve the lives of Afghan women, and close the gender gap had come into conflict with local cultures and now came to a crashing halt as US forces left the country.

Zinat, who is fifty-two, continued her education in Iran and earned a college degree. She then became an active member of an NGO that addressed women's issues. She offers an excellent example of how and why US policies failed to deliver the promised changes:

*As somebody well-versed in NGOs and social activism, I believe that Western powers often squandered the huge sums of money and resources they poured into projects to promote democracy in Afghanistan, because they did not fully understand the local cultural nuances, and their efforts did not resonate with native sensitivities. Since the local people viewed them as foreign and detached from the local realities and values, the US-led efforts were thought to be superficial, lacking depth and complexity. Indeed, European and American investments in Afghanistan were largely wasted, since they were not based on realistic estimations of local conditions and thus were blown away by the mildest form of opposition. ... Western powers built schools, but they failed to inculcate in locals the mindset that their children needed to go to school; that is, they ignored the need to encourage local people to actively participate and to appreciate the services they were providing. Because they did not interact effectively with the local population, many essential local needs remained buried beneath a thick shroud of propaganda.*

Many Western feminist activists and advocates of women's rights, as well as some from Afghanistan and Iran, believe that the Western media presented a very inaccurate image of Afghan women as utter victims with inferior social status in order to legitimize Western intervention in Afghanistan. Zinat says that many Afghan women in rural villages and towns felt just as insecure while US forces had control in Afghanistan as they did when the Taliban were in power. As a result, these rural women carefully avoided streets and public spaces in order to escape potential violence. Many pivotal issues for Afghan women were never addressed, including their right to work and gain financial independence, their right to be reimbursed for gender-based violence and the war they had endured, and their inferior position in the family and community, especially

regarding forced early marriage and the grave issue of trading women and girls between families in order to solve ethnic and family disputes.

This is a dominant theme that emerges in any investigation of Afghan women's lives nearly four decades after they migrated to Iran. While the first generation of Afghan immigrants to Iran belonged to farming and village families with no education, the second and third generations, who grew up in Iran, have achieved a better position in Iran and reached much higher social status.

Leila's account shows this contrast between the generations. She is fifty-five and has two sons. She has a high school degree from Afghanistan.

*We have been living here for many years now. We are officially residents of Iran. In 1994 when the Mujahedin were fighting in a civil war, my husband was a staff member of the presidential office. The Mujahedin dissolved that office and laid him off. Then we left for Iran. We feel that we have more freedom here. Unlike people living in small towns and far-flung provinces, my family was among Kabul's middle class of technocrats who worked for the government, and therefore we were not facing much social and financial pressure before the civil war. Even female immigrants from traditional parts of Afghanistan who have migrated to Iran now feel freer. For example, I go to work and have achieved financial freedom. I work as a nurse. But in Afghanistan, the family posed the greatest barriers in the road to women's employment.*

When I asked Leila if she would return to Afghanistan, she replied,

*In terms of general peace of mind, Iran is more stable than Afghanistan; we now have a better life. Afghanistan has huge problems, and it has become even worse since the Taliban takeover [in 2021]. In particular, the situation for women has deteriorated. Women are barred from going to school and*



*working; Taliban fighters are a source of trouble and have interfered with the daily lives of Afghan women. Since we came here, our kids have gone to school and have become educated. For a while, there were some restrictions on their going to colleges and universities (because they were Afghans), but now those restrictions have been lifted, and our kids graduate from universities with degrees.*

Jabin offers a similar response: 'I was totally ignorant of all things around me when I arrived here fresh from Afghanistan; now I have turned into a wise and educated woman.'

And Samar added,

God has created men. He has created us women as well; we are the same and have no difference. ... Since we have known our rights, we would protect those rights in any time and any situation. ... Why should men always go to work and women should not, while we are all educated, and as you see, we actively search for jobs.

Raheleh also commented, 'I think in retrospect, I would do the same (in terms of immigration), since from every aspect, my situation has become better than it was in the past. I would not change it for worse.'

This radical change in their attitudes also reflects changes that have taken place in the role of mothers in the family. Many of these women are now the primary breadwinners and thus are essential for the survival of all family members. The self-awareness discussed above passes on to the next generation of sons and daughters who are more fully integrated in the host country. Such attitudes are common among Afghan immigrants in Iran after the recent Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021.

The latest generation of Afghan immigrants (those who came after August 2021) often consider Iran a springboard for their future immigrations to Western countries. Many of them are educated and prepared to live the

life of a modern citizen. This empowerment comes as a result of access to education and years of living in metropolitan cities and gaining greater, though still limited, social skills. These abilities will help these immigrants in their transition to Western countries.

After four decades of peaceful coexistence between Afghan immigrants and Iranians, we also notice a change in the attitudes of Iranians toward immigrants. Afghan women's self-awareness brought about major changes in their role within the family and opened venues to them where they could accept new responsibilities. These changes have made Afghan women more capable and more responsible players in the host society. Afghan women have drastically altered the way they raise their children. Their interactions with host institutions are informed and refined by their newfound status as accomplished individuals. This newfound status even creates a new system of family relations, in which immigrants are no longer seen as bound by traditions and conventions of the past.

For many of these women, family served as the foundation on which their self-awareness was based. Family has played a positive role, since it no longer has the old, traditional framework, but a new structure, which has helped women experience life firsthand outside their homes. They are now part of a world where their individuality matters and is protected. In this way, and by supporting the same awareness in their children, they have transformed themselves and now are able to clear the path for the next generation of confident Afghan women.

Despite all the legal limitations that continue to be imposed on women in Iran, both Iranians and Afghans, the greater rights that Iranian women have secured in the domestic and public spheres after more than a century of struggle have also benefited and transformed Afghan refugees. Afghan women have gained a much stronger self-awareness from this new opportunity to live as independent individuals rather than beings whose existence revolves around others, be they husbands, in-laws, or children.

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<sup>i</sup> Immediately after his return to Iran in February 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini admonished unveiled women and called for greater modesty. However, the public ignored these comments, since several generations of women had grown up without veiling and the idea of reimposing the veil struck many as absurd. The first mandatory laws regarding modesty and hijab were ratified by the Islamic Majlis in 1983 and were aimed at women who entered or worked in government offices. The new law stated that ‘women who appeared without properly religious hijab in public would be punished and receive up to 74 lashes.’ Initially, women were taken to judges to mete out the punishment. More recently, in the summer of 2022, the morality police started enforcing the law once again, ignoring the fact that for over forty years, Iranian women have resisted this and other discriminatory gender laws and have organized a number of important social campaigns dealing with the subject of gender segregation as well as greater democratic rights for all. In September 2022 the brutality of the Iranian morality police once again resulted in the death of a young Kurdish woman named Mahsa Amini, who was visiting Tehran, a tragic event which made national and international news. See Afary and Anderson 2022.

<sup>ii</sup> Contraceptive use among married women varied from 49.0% in 1989 to 73.8% in 2006. Successful strategies included, ‘The creation of a supportive environment, reorientation of family planning services, expanding of coverage of family planning services, training skilled personnel, providing free contraceptives as well as vasectomy and tubectomy services, involvement of volunteers and nongovernmental organizations and promotion of male participation. For more information see Simbar 2012 participation’.

<sup>iii</sup> As a graduate student at UCLA, I conducted a research on Latin American women who migrated to the United States and came upon a very similar finding. Women who came from more traditional cultures, but had left behind the extended family, were far more adept in assimilating to US culture: They went to ESL classes, took up driving, and were more open in communicating with people of the host country when compared to their husbands.

<sup>iv</sup> Adult literacy classes began in Shiraz in 1907 during the Constitutional Revolution, but systematic efforts to fight illiteracy in villages and illiteracy of children in school were launched in 1962, when a Literacy Corps was established in the era of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. In 1980, the new Islamist government continued the campaign, which was now offered under the rubric of Islamic Jihad Literacy. The new program taught rudimentary literacy to adults. It consisted of at least 400 hours, which could be extended to 550 hours of instruction.