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ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Investigating the relationship between lifestyle and water consumption in Sari County

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Abstract

Today, energy consumption in our country has become one of the serious concerns of politicians, especially in the domestic water consumption sector. And due to Iran being located in the dry and waterless part of the world and its dire need for drinking water, this concern has intensified. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of lifestyle on the water consumption of families in Sari County. The method of this research is survey and descriptive studies and also includes correlational research. A questionnaire was used to collect data and information. The findings showed that despite water shortages, average water consumption is high. There is a significant positive relationship between a consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption. The Pearson correlation coefficient for this relationship is 0.410 with a significant level of 0 ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, income and education levels are positively correlated with this lifestyle and water consumption, while age is negatively correlated. The Pearson correlation coefficient for income and lifestyle is 0.276 ($p < 0.05$), for age and lifestyle is -0.232 ($p < 0.05$), and for age and water consumption is -0.127 ($p = 0.011$). The Spearman correlation coefficient for education and water consumption is reported but its value is mentioned as 0.009, which seems to be an error in the text. This study shows a positive relationship between a consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption. This lifestyle emphasizes consuming more and using expensive goods to display identity. Higher income and education levels also lead to increased water consumption. Younger couples are more inclined towards this lifestyle, resulting in higher water usage. Income plays a crucial role in increasing consumption, with education contributing to higher income and subsequently more consumption.

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INTRODUCTION

In general, lifestyle is a very important concept that is often used to express "people's way of life" and reflects a full range of values, beliefs and social activities. Lifestyle is formed from people's cultural patterns, behaviors and habits, and people use them in their personal and social life on a daily basis ([Shahnoushi & Taji, 2012: 92](#)). A transitioning society like Iran has also experienced many changes in the field of consumption in recent decades. According to the official statistics published in 2009, the average energy consumption in Iran is more than twice the world average. Meanwhile, the ratio of consumed energy to manufactured goods is 8 times that of developed countries ([Zareh Shahabadi et al, 2013](#)). One of the most important energy consumed by households is water. Water is a vital human need. The economic supply of water has always been limited. However, along with the increase in population and change in lifestyle, the amount of water demand has increased. In terms of geographical location, Iran is also located in a region that is threatened by drought and water shortage. The total water resources of this country are reported as 130 billion cubic meters. In the current situation, due to issues such as the increase in the number of consumers, the trend towards urbanization, the change in people's lifestyles, the tendency to use luxury facilities and the need for faster access to consumer needs due to time constraints, there is always a risk of wasting and reducing fresh water resources. and on the other hand, the concern of improving and optimizing the consumption pattern of the society has increased. Therefore, one of the important topics related to energy and water consumption is the consumption pattern, which is closely related to the lifestyle of individuals and households .

Lifestyle refers to the characteristics that are related to the personality and preferences of people. Lifestyle is focused on thought and behavioral patterns committed by social groups. In the process of modernity, there was a situation where urbanization spread and different social groups lived in cities and different cultural origins and gradually, due to the proximity and coexistence of different social groups, a special lifestyle emerged. This lifestyle is related to many areas of collective life and forces people to a certain type of way of providing livelihood and meeting needs and adapting to needs and requirements. These conditions made people live in the city with different lifestyles and fulfill their needs. Lifestyle is related to the way of clothing, architecture, way of spending leisure time, meeting nutritional needs and the type of social and cultural relationships and all these things are covered by lifestyle ([Mohammadpour et al, 2011](#)). From another angle, lifestyle is related to daily activities and refers to the habits of wearing, eating, following fashion, environment and facing others ([Giddens, 2011](#)). In this sense, lifestyle is the result of all choices, preferences and behaviors that a person makes in relation to material goods and consumer culture. These ways of consumption are located in a hierarchy that creates a complete range of distinctions and differences within the capacity of the human mind ([Abazari & Chavoshian, 2002](#)). One of the most important uses in modern urban life is water consumption. Fresh water is one of the vital natural resources, the lack of which is completely felt. Of all the water available on the surface of the earth, only 2.5% of it is fresh water, of which about two-thirds (68.9%) is locked in glaciers and only one-third of it can be used, and this amount of water is unevenly distributed (Dolatshahi Pirouz & Tahmasbi Ashtiani, 2010). According to existing estimates, at least 50 countries in the world will face a shortage of fresh water by 2050, and Iran is among these countries ([David, 2005: 97](#)). At the same time, even though the average rainfall in Iran is one third of the world average, the per capita consumption in all domestic, agricultural and industrial sectors is higher than the global standards (Alizadeh, Keshavarz, 2005). For example, per capita household water in Iran is 220 liters per day, while its standard in the world is only 75 liters. This shows that the amount of water consumption in Iran is a social issue (Ahmadi et al, 2013: 186).

Fotros et al (2013) conducted a research titled the effect of incremental block pricing on drinking water consumption in the provinces of Iran. The research results showed that increasing block pricing has no effect on drinking water consumption in Iran, in other words, the policy of increasing water prices in Iran does not reduce water consumption. Therefore, one of the variables that can be considered in this situation for making policies in the field of fuel consumption is "lifestyle". In fact, consumption is based on understanding and valuing methods, therefore, this is a matter of choice that is required

from Attitudes, values and tastes. Consumption is a symbol of the characteristics through which a person is judged, and lifestyle is a construction of the totality of social situations based on personal choices ([Majdi, 2010: 34](#)).

Today, the life of societies in which modern relations of production prevail, it is manifested as an infinite accumulation of shows. Therefore, consumption should also be analyzed in the form of the society of the show; A society where everything is a commodity and the commodity itself appears as a representation of other things. It is clear that this situation cannot and should not be analyzed only with economic actors (Dobor, 2003: 55). How much and how people consume is very decisive in shaping their lifestyle, because consumption style largely reveals people's choices and their reasons. Studying the quality of consumption makes it possible to even get to the values and attitudes of people. In other words, consumption is the external manifestation of internal attitudes that influence other behaviors. On the other hand, despite the sensitive situation of the environment, lack of resources and consumption more than international standards in Iran, social sciences have not yet been able to enter these discussions and make a claim. The statistics show that after the targeting of subsidies in the country and the increase of fuel carriers, the amount of consumption has not followed the consumption reduction plans expected by economists, so it becomes necessary to include social and cultural issues in consumption discussions. One of the important variables in explaining consumption is lifestyle, and the consumption factor is of fundamental importance in the analysis of lifestyle. Consumption shows the identity of people with its symbolic function. The symbolic function of consumption is the result of the fact that in the modern world, the orientation of consumption is not only to meet biological needs, but it is a choice that reveals a distinct identity. Today, consumption and need are separated from each other and a gap has emerged between them in such a way that human consumption is no longer in accordance with human needs, but consumption is something more than that and that gap has been filled by consumerism. Today, consumption and need have distanced from each other, and a gap has emerged between them, so that human consumption is no longer in accordance with human needs, but consumption is something more than that and that gap has been filled by consumerism (Movahed et al, 2010, 8). Also, lifestyle is a predictable issue because it is affected by the path that society takes in the process of moving towards the future. This point applies to the material and cultural lifestyle. The processes of globalization, the expansion of media communications, and the reduction of the distance between the center and the periphery in terms of information, have always caused the change and diversity of lifestyles among different strata. Paying attention to the mentioned factors and having a realistic picture of future conditions will help people to know and find the right path (Fazeli, 2009: 180). Therefore, it is possible to evaluate the amount of consumption and the influencing factors on the amount of consumption of individuals and households by knowing the lifestyle.

Literature Review

[Rahmani Firouzjah et al \(2020\)](#), investigated the effect of household lifestyle on water consumption in Sari county in their article. The findings of this research showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between the income of couples and the consumeristic-hedonistic lifestyle. But there is a negative and significant relationship between the age of the couple and the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle.

Fotros et al. (2012) investigated the effect of incremental block pricing on drinking water consumption in the provinces of the country in a research entitled "Effect of incremental block pricing on drinking water consumption". In this research, time-periodic series statistics of Iranian provinces between 2004 and 2008 were used and patterns of average price and final price of drinking water demand were estimated using panel data method (fixed effects). Also, the influence of atmospheric variables and household income on drinking water consumption in Iran was determined during the study period.

The results showed that in the period under study, the incremental block pricing policy has not been able to effectively control drinking water consumption in the country.

[Beheshti \(2012\)](#) in his master's thesis entitled "Sociological explanation of consumption of energy carriers and presentation of optimal consumption model" investigated the social factors affecting the consumption of energy carriers in Iran and to limit the issue, only the social factors affecting consumption He studied electricity among Isfahani families. The research method of this research is a mixed research, that is, a sequential quantitative-qualitative mixed design was used. In this way, the main burden of research is on the quantitative part of the study. The regression estimation of social factors affecting energy consumption showed that these factors are able to explain 11% of the variance of household electricity consumption. The path model test of the research variables also showed that the factors that have more action and behavior dimensions, such as lifestyle, pro-environmental actions, adherence to economical actions, have a higher contribution in explaining the variance of the dependent variable. Another important variable in this research is the extent of the problem of considering excessive electricity consumption by consumers. These findings showed that in order to achieve the optimal pattern of electricity consumption among households, it is necessary to first define excessive electricity consumption as a social problem and provide the basis for changing the behavior of consumers, not by changing their attitudes.

[Sanquist et al. \(2012\)](#) in a research entitled "American lifestyle factors in household electricity consumption" examined five factors that indicate the behavioral and social patterns of communities, including: weather condition, use of laundry, personal computer, status residential air and TV use. The findings showed that the geographical divisions of the scores of the factors reveals the differences and style of consumption.

[Yan and Lifang \(2011\)](#) investigated "the influence of psychological, family and background factors on household energy consumption behavior in China". The result of this research showed that concern for energy, environmental values, behavioral barriers, monetary savings and individual norms are the most important and powerful predictor variables for energy consumption behavior.

Theoretical foundations of research

life style

There is no empirical or conceptual agreement about the origin of lifestyle. In the field of sociology, only behaviors and collective and social spirit are the criteria of lifestyle. In the field of psychology, in addition to behaviors, values and attitudes have also been discussed. The identity of people is formed in social life and they show their identity through their lifestyle.

In a simple and general definition, lifestyle can be defined as "way of life" or more precisely, it can be defined as "patterns and ways of everyday life", which not only includes desirable personal patterns of life, but also includes all the habits and lifestyles that are related to the members of a group or society. Therefore, the lifestyle is not limited to the house and furniture and includes all things such as patterns of social relations, entertainment, consumption and clothing and reflects the attitudes, values and worldview of the individual and the group he is a member of ([Thyra, 1996: 3](#)). In general, lifestyle includes things that are related to human life, including his personal, social, material and spiritual aspects. Things like insights (perceptions and beliefs) and tendencies (values, inclinations and preferences) which are mental affairs or internal behavior and external behaviors (both conscious and unconscious actions, states and physical condition), situations (situations) social and assets which are tangible things. Therefore, environmental issues (both physical and social or in other words space and time or social situation) and heredity are conceptually separate from life. Of course, these matters affect life and shape it. Lifestyle includes all behavioral areas and social situations and assets: political, economic, social and cultural areas in its special sense ([Fazli, 2008: 181](#)).

Lifestyle components

One of the ways to get a better understanding of the concept of "lifestyle" from the point of view of different researchers is to examine the elements and components that they have listed for lifestyle. In this research, for the typology of lifestyles and consumption patterns, the components must be known and explained.

Things that have been suggested by researchers as factors influencing lifestyle (such as income and education) have not been considered as components. Other elements of lifestyle according to researchers are: nutrition, self-decoration (type of clothing and following fashion), type of residence (decoration, architecture and furniture), type of means of transportation, ways of spending leisure time and entertainment, type of behavior, place of residence, type of house, use of cultural-recreational-sports facilities, way of playing and dressing, consumption patterns, type of clothes, way of speaking, relationships with children, density of the population living in the house and place (which is limited to private sanctuaries and the amount determines the noise and interactions) type and characteristics of employment (including family members, type of work clothes or workplace, distance from workplace to home, number of missions, time away from home) etc.

From the mid-1980s onwards, aspects of health and hygiene were considered as one of the components of lifestyle ([Mahdavi Kani, 2008: 211](#)). One of the main and fundamental characteristics of lifestyle is its multidimensionality. Time is also a dimension that mainly expresses the existing situation. Life experiences and history of diseases together form another part of this dimension. Also, the expectations that a person may have about the distant future have an effect on this dimension (Mahasti Jouybari, 2011: 35).

Iran's water situation

The average annual rainfall in the world is about 800 mm, while the average rainfall in Iran is 251 mm. On the other hand, the rainfall in Europe is over 1500 mm and even in some European countries this amount has reached over 2000 mm (Asr-e-Iran news website).

According to the announcement of the World Bank, the pattern of drinking water consumption for one person per year is 1 cubic meter and for health in life 100 cubic meters per person, while in Iran this figure is about 70-80% more than its global pattern. The average water consumption per capita in the world is about 580 cubic meters for each person per year, but this figure in Iran is about 1300 cubic meters, which indicates the waste of water resources and excessive wastage of vital resources. Per capita renewable water in Iran was 5,000 cubic meters in 1961, this amount reached 1,750 cubic meters in 2006 (Iran Work News) and decreased to about 1,400 cubic meters per person in 2014, which means approaching the water stress stage (IRNA news agency).

According to the amount of water resources and per capita consumption, Iran is in the group of countries facing a physical shortage of water. This group includes countries that face physical water shortages in 2025. This means that these countries, even with the highest possible efficiency and productivity in water consumption, will not have enough water to meet their needs.

Table 1 shows the average per capita consumption of drinking water in Iran (including commercial, industrial, domestic, green spaces, etc.):

Table 1: Comparison of annual average water consumption in Iran and other countries

Country	Average water consumption
Iran	204
Spain	200
Greece	175
Portugal	194
England	153
France	139

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Germany	129	
Netherlands	129	
Belgium	112	
America	295	
Canada		326

Source: IRNA news agency

The effect of targeted subsidies on water consumption

Fotros et al. (2012) investigated the effect of factors affecting urban drinking water demand in their research. Based on this goal, two models of average price and final price were introduced. The results of the model estimation showed that in the studied period, the effect of the final price on the consumption of drinking water was less than the effect of the average price, that is, the incremental block pricing system did not have the expected efficiency in controlling the consumption of drinking water in Iran. This inefficiency can be found in the low price of drinking water. In other words, in many provinces of the country except Tehran, Isfahan and Fars, the average amount of consumption of subscribers is mostly found in the initial blocks of the incremental block pricing system. Since the prices of these blocks are lower than the average price, it has finally led to more water consumption. On the other hand, urban drinking water is a necessary commodity. This fact results from the low variable coefficient of per capita income in both average price and final price models. The significance of the difference variable in the final price model shows that in the applied block pricing system, in most of the provinces of the country, the water price of each subscriber is calculated only with the price of the same block in which it is located. For example, a drinking water subscriber, being placed at the beginning of a higher block, must pay the total price of his water according to the price of that block. Also, other variables, such as average air temperature and annual rainfall, have a direct effect on water demand in both average and final price models. In other words, with increasing temperature, because evaporation increases, more water is consumed. Also, the increase in rainfall increases the water supply and because the restrictions imposed on drinking water consumption may be removed, it causes an increase in drinking water consumption.

Research Methodology

The method of this research is survey and descriptive studies and also includes correlational research. A questionnaire was used to collect data and information.

Research findings

Due to its location in the water-scarce region of the world, Iran is facing a double risk of water shortage, which is aggravated by the warming of the Earth's climate. But the research results have shown that despite Iran's special conditions, Iran's average water consumption is much higher than other parts of the world. On the other hand, lifestyle topics also emphasize consumption style. Therefore, by studying the lifestyle, we can also study the water consumption.

There is a significant relationship between the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption.

Table 2: Test of significance of the relationship between consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption

Type of test	Strength of correlation	Significance level
Pearson	0.410	0

Source: Research findings, 2025

The above table data shows that the Pearson correlation value of 0.410 has a significant level of 0, which is desirable because its value is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_0 , which states no relationship between consumptive-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis H_1 , which states a relationship between consumptive-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption, is confirmed. Furthermore, the data indicates that there is a positive and direct relationship between consumptive-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption.

There is a meaningful relationship between the income of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle .

Table 3: shows the significant correlation between the income of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle

Type of test	Strength of correlation	Significance level
Pearson	0.276	0

Source: Research findings, 2025

The data in the above table indicate that the Pearson correlation coefficient with a correlation of 0.276 has a significant level of 0, which is desirable as its value is less than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis H_0 regarding the absence of a relationship between the income of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle is rejected, and the hypothesis H_1 regarding a relationship between the income of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle is confirmed. Additionally, the data show that there is a positive and direct relationship between the income of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle.

There is a significant relationship between the age of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle.

Table 4: Test of Significant Relationship between the Age of Couples and their Consumerist-Hedonistic Lifestyle

Type of test	Strength of correlation	Significance level
Pearson	-0.232	0

Source: Research findings, 2025

The data in the above table indicate that the Pearson correlation coefficient with a correlation of -0.232 has a significant level of 0, which is desirable as its value is less than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis H_0 regarding the absence of a relationship between the age of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle is rejected, and the hypothesis H_1 regarding a relationship between the age of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle is confirmed. Additionally, the data show that there is a negative and indirect relationship between the age of couples and their consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle.

There is a significant relationship between the age of couples and their water consumption.

Table 5: Test of Significant Relationship between the Age of Couples and their Water Consumption

Type of test	Strength of correlation	Significance level
Pearson	-0.127	0.011

Source: Research findings, 2025

The data in the above table indicate that the Pearson correlation coefficient with a correlation of -0.127 has a significant level of 0.011, which is desirable as its value is less than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis H_0 regarding the absence of a relationship between the age of couples and their water consumption is rejected, and the hypothesis H_1 regarding a relationship between the age of couples

and their water consumption is confirmed. Additionally, the data show that there is a negative and indirect relationship between the age of couples and their water consumption.

There is a significant relationship between the education level of couples and their water consumption.

Table 6: Test of Significant Relationship between the Education Level of Couples and their Water Consumption

Type of test	Strength of correlation	Significance level
Pearson	0.009	0

Source: Research findings, 2025

The data in the above table indicate that the Spearman correlation coefficient with a correlation of 0.009 has a significant level of 0, which is desirable as its value is less than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis H0 regarding the absence of a relationship between the education level of couples and their water consumption is rejected, and the hypothesis H1 regarding a relationship between the education level of couples and their water consumption is confirmed. Additionally, the data show that there is a positive and direct relationship between the education level of couples and their water consumption, and an indirect relationship also exists.

Results

The results of this study indicate that there is a positive and direct relationship between the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption. This means that families who score higher on the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle scale consume more water. The characteristics of the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle are focused on consuming more, enjoying, being different, and using more expensive goods. In this type of lifestyle, individuals not only show their distinct identity from others by consuming, but also create their distinct identity by consuming. Therefore, individuals who have this type of lifestyle consume more water compared to other lifestyles. It is noteworthy that consumption in this lifestyle is not necessary to meet a need; it is simply for display and identity formation. By consuming more water and aligning with it, individuals separate themselves from those who cannot afford high water bills and show their differentiation from them. The results of the study show that there is a positive and direct relationship between the income of couples and the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle, and this hypothesis is confirmed. The consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle is closely related to increased water consumption, with higher-income families having greater financial capacity for increased consumption. Those with higher incomes are able to consume in various ways, and tend to have a desire to differentiate themselves from those with lower incomes, with consumption being the most important way to do so in modern society. The results show that there is a negative and indirect relationship between the age of couples and the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle, confirming the hypothesis. Younger couples tend to have a greater inclination towards this lifestyle, which is more prevalent among them. The results also indicate a negative and indirect relationship between the age of couples and water consumption. In other words, the younger the couple, the higher their water consumption. This supports the previous hypothesis that younger couples tend to have a greater consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle, which in turn leads to increased water consumption. The study also found a positive and direct relationship between the education level of couples and water consumption, confirming the hypothesis. Education is one of the most important ways to access higher-paying jobs, leading to increased income and subsequently, increased consumption. While lifestyle theories emphasize the importance of consumption, income is perhaps the most important and perhaps only way to increase consumption, with a close relationship between income, consumption levels, and types of consumption.

Research Recommendations

- The results of the research indicate a significant relationship between the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption. Based on previous research that showed no positive effect of increasing block tariffs on water consumption (such as the study by Fotros et al., 2013), it is recommended that responsible institutions promote the principles of frugal living through cultural education.
- The research results show that younger couples have a greater tendency towards the consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle. Therefore, necessary education should be provided in educational institutions, especially in schools and universities, to raise awareness among young generations.
- It is suggested that future research should focus on the impact of differences between Islamic lifestyles and consumerist-hedonistic lifestyles on water consumption.
- Finally, it is recommended that necessary awareness-raising measures be taken seriously and comprehensively regarding the water scarcity in the country, global environmental crises, and their impact on future generations so that the entire society feels responsible for preserving this vital resource.

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Today, energy consumption in our country has become one of the serious concerns of politicians, especially in the domestic water consumption sector. And due to Iran being located in the dry and waterless part of the world and its dire need for drinking water, this concern has intensified. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of lifestyle on the water consumption of families in Sari County. The method of this research is survey and descriptive studies and also includes correlational research. A questionnaire was used to collect data and information. The findings shows that despite water shortages, average water consumption is high. There is a significant positive relationship between a consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption. The Pearson correlation coefficient for this relationship is 0.410 with a significant level of 0 ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, income and education levels are positively correlated with this lifestyle and water consumption, while age is negatively correlated. The Pearson correlation coefficient for income and lifestyle is 0.276 ($p < 0.05$), for age and lifestyle is -0.232 ($p < 0.05$), and for age and water consumption is -0.127 ($p = 0.011$). The Spearman correlation coefficient for education and water consumption is reported but its value is mentioned as 0.009, which seems to be an error in the text. This study shows a positive relationship

between a consumerist-hedonistic lifestyle and water consumption. This lifestyle emphasizes consuming more and using expensive goods to display identity. Higher income and education levels also lead to increased water consumption. Younger couples are more inclined towards this lifestyle, resulting in higher water usage. Income plays a crucial role in increasing consumption, with education contributing to higher income and subsequently more consumption.

