





Strategies and Consequences of Non-Marriage among Men: A Grounded Theory Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study is to examine the strategies and consequences of non-marriage among single men.

Methods and Materials: The study was carried out using a qualitative approach and grounded theory methodology. The study population consisted of men whose age ranged between 33 and 45 years, considering the average age of marriage for men in the city of Kazerun in 2023 was 30.9 years. All participants were residents of Kazerun County in Fars Province. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling based on inclusion/exclusion criteria until theoretical saturation was reached (15 participants). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach, including open, axial, and selective coding.

Findings: In the open coding phase, out of 232 identified codes, 33 open codes related to strategies and 56 open codes related to consequences were extracted. These codes were categorized into different concepts during axial coding. Finally, in the selective coding phase, the main categories and related outcomes of non-marriage were identified. The most significant strategies for not pursuing marriage included improving economic conditions, enhancing mental and physical well-being, developing alternative relationships, and seeking emotional or financial bonds. On the other hand, mental and psychological consequences, objective consequences, and environmental consequences were among the major outcomes associated with prolonged singlehood in men. These included negative emotions such as depression, isolation, wasted time and energy, and economic and social problems.

Conclusion: This study revealed that the decision not to marry among men is the result of a combination of psychological, social, cultural, and economic factors that influence individual choices. Based on the findings, it is recommended that social and cultural policies aimed at supporting youth and facilitating marriage are essential. Moreover, identifying and thoroughly examining cultural and social barriers to marriage could help reduce the rate of singlehood and increase the willingness to marry among young people.

Keywords: Non-marriage, Marriage, Men, Single, Strategies, Consequences, Grounded Theory.

1. Introduction

Marriage is a social process that constitutes the foundation of human relationships. In this union, a man and a woman are drawn to one another by latent forces arising from instinct, tradition, and love, surrendering to each other freely and fully to establish a dynamic unit known as the "family." Marital life begins with marriage and family formation (Ashirbayeva et al., 2025; Koçyiğit & Uzun, 2025). Since antiquity, marriage has been emphasized by social scientists as the most important and esteemed social institution for fulfilling individuals' emotional and security needs and for ensuring the continuity of the human race (Purnomo & Suprihandari, 2025; Zhao & Mansor, 2025). Marriage occurs for various purposes, among the most significant of which are unity, freedom, love and affection, family formation, sexual satisfaction, procreation, and the desire for children (Darussamin et al., 2023). Marriage is one of the most important forms of interpersonal relationships that most adults experience. Healthy marriages and spousal relationships offer numerous benefits to individuals, society, and families. Allison (2023) asserts that most people, at some point in their lives, intend to marry and establish a family of their own (Allison, 2023).

Today, youth marriage—especially the reluctance of young men to pursue marriage—has become one of the major national challenges. Young men refrain from initiating marriage for various reasons, turning the phenomenon of non-marriage into a new social issue. Young men who, for any reason, remain at home, or who consciously choose to stay single, have turned the issue of bachelorhood into a widespread social problem facing many Iranian families. According to statistics from the National Youth Organization, approximately 30 percent of men in large cities such as Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, and others live independently and unmarried. The prevailing societal realities and stark truths reflect this painful dilemma: a sharp decline in young people's—especially men's—inclination to marry, to the point where the phenomenon of non-marriage is becoming a recognized social lifestyle. On the other hand, the modernization process in Iranian society—driven by urbanization, industrialization, growth of the middle class, an expanding youth population, and social mobility—has produced new dynamics in the structure and function of family relationships. Family structure and marital functions have evolved alongside cultural changes, transforming the dimensions and roles of the traditional extended family (Vaezi et al., 2024). Consequently, today's economic and

social transformations, followed by cultural shifts in Iranian society, have fundamentally altered people's perceptions of the family and their expectations of marriage and marital life (Zeyn al-Dini & Veysi Sartayereh, 2023). As William Goode (1963), a prominent American sociologist, explains, tangible global changes are occurring within family systems, all converging on common themes: marriage at older ages, a decline in arranged marriages, increased freedom in partner selection, and growing tendencies toward remaining single or not marrying at all. Considering the vital importance of marriage and marital bonds and their impact on societal vitality and health, many studies aim to identify factors that, over time, influence marital quality and the emergence of psychological traits in individuals after the formation of a marital life (Foroutan, 2021).

Various theorists over time have sought to explain changes in marriage patterns. For example, according to Merton's strain theory (1938), when means and goals within a social group—or more broadly, within the societal structure—are aligned (e.g., both traditional, or both rational-legal), the society remains stable (Naebi et al., 2017). However, when the goals are emotional or value-laden, but the means of achieving them are rational, this misalignment leads to societal imbalance and dysfunction (Rocheleau et al., 2023). This explanation applies to many social issues, including the rising age of marriage and male non-marriage. In today's Iranian society, where marriage is still viewed as a value-laden, emotional, and even traditional goal, but the methods of attaining it are entirely rational, the resulting misalignment causes societal disruption and significant harm—one outcome being the non-marriage phenomenon among men (Barry, 2023). Similarly, Durkheim's functionalist theory (1900), which emphasizes social change, concludes that increasing specialization and individual differentiation creates a state of anomie (a breakdown of values), thereby intensifying individual needs (Malik & Malik, 2022). Today, population growth, expanded social division of labor, and the emergence of diverse occupations have led to heightened social interactions, moral congestion, and a multiplicity of values and norms in society. Another significant theme within social change is modernity, which, as a phenomenon, has undeniable effects on various aspects of human social life, including family and marriage. The decline in marriage rates and rise in marriage age are among such effects (Chae et al., 2021).

Hechter's rational choice theory (1938) presents a fundamental contrast to other marriage theories. While most

theories regard marriage primarily as a moral act, Hechter's theory views it from a utilitarian perspective. Theorists who use rational choice theory to explain collective action argue that individuals favor behaviors that maximize personal benefit (Krstić, 2022). According to this theory, conscious and goal-oriented individuals seek to maximize personal gain in every situation. Regarding marriage, it posits that individuals marry only when it offers clear benefits—such as preserving or enhancing social status. When such benefits are not perceived, the phenomenon of male non-marriage emerges in society (Diekmann, 2022). According to national civil registration statistics (2023), the average age of first marriage for men in Iran has reached 28.3 years, 30 years in Fars Province, and 30.9 years in the city of Kazerun. Data for 2022 shows that, nationwide, there are 7,058,171 unmarried men over the age of 20 and 2,525,891 never-married men over the age of 30. In Fars Province, these figures are 497,268 and 203,587 respectively. These alarming statistics reflect a concerning increase in marriage age and the widespread occurrence of male non-marriage, highlighting numerous barriers that may ultimately lead to firm decisions by many young men to remain single and avoid marriage and family formation. Therefore, it can be inferred that as the age of marriage increases, so does the threshold age of bachelorhood. Notably, the average age of marriage in Fars Province is about 2 years higher than the national average, and in Kazerun, approximately 2.5 years higher.

Ghiyasvand (2022), in a study analyzing marriage trends and youth inclinations, found that 22 percent of youth held positive attitudes toward marriage, while 26 percent held negative attitudes (Ghiyasvand, 2022). Similarly, Tayyebnia et al. (2023), in a qualitative typology study on marriage attitudes among single students, identified two general frameworks—structural and ideological—comprising key typologies: subjectivity (structuralist and agency-based attitudes), situational (radical and rationalist attitudes), and consequential (commercial and functionalist attitudes). These typologies reveal that the transitional state of Iranian society yields diverse and often conflicting perspectives on marriage among youth (Tayyebnia et al., 2023). Javanmard et al. (2022), using qualitative grounded theory to examine the consequences of romantic relationships among male and female university students, reported that factors such as age, ease of communication and meeting, increasing marriage difficulties, weakened religious and traditional values, and emerging value systems were key intervening conditions. They observed that participants engaged with the opposite

sex under emotional and cognitive influence, and reported consequences such as hostility and violence, suspicion and mistrust, family disruptions, norm violations, academic and talent stagnation, emotional and psychological harm, physical and sexual harm, seeking therapy, regret and disillusionment, nostalgia, and critical reflection (Javanmard et al., 2022).

Male non-marriage can have irreparable micro- and macro-level consequences for both individuals and society. For instance, delayed marriage for women and related maternal health risks, population decline, widening generational age gaps, loss of hope for the future, and rising depression, anxiety, and other clinical disorders. This study may be regarded as the only one that explicitly focuses on men's roles in marriage and the challenges, difficulties, and hardships they face—so much so that many choose not to marry in order to avoid them. It investigates their lived experiences to explore and scrutinize their views on this understudied phenomenon. This research addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining the overlooked role of men in family formation, offering new insights and perspectives on rising marriage age, male non-marriage, and declining population growth. According to national civil registry data, the average age of first marriage for men is 28.3 nationwide, 30 in Fars Province, and 30.9 in Kazerun, indicating a rising trend in male marriage age and an increasing number of unmarried men. Without serious intervention, this could lead to widespread social harms. Unfortunately, due to a lack of statistics for 2024, projections must rely on prior data, suggesting an increasingly dire situation in the coming years. Most existing studies in this domain have focused on women or youth more broadly. However, given that, in traditional Iranian culture, it is typically expected of men to initiate marriage through formal proposals, focusing on men and the barriers they face—as well as their lived experiences—can yield a clearer, more transparent, and more accurate picture of the causes preventing men from taking the initiative in marriage, a topic largely neglected by scholars and policymakers. The findings of the present study can provide conceptual clarity for decision-makers, helping to identify strategies and consequences of male non-marriage and thereby improve social conditions. Accordingly, the primary aim of this study is to investigate the strategies and consequences of non-marriage from the perspective of single men in Kazerun.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a qualitative research design of the grounded theory (GT) type using the systematic method proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Grounded theory is particularly suitable for identifying, describing, and explaining processes within their original contexts and for analyzing and interpreting the conditions and factors related to interactional processes among individuals and groups. Given that the primary objective of this study was to describe and explain the strategies and consequences of non-marriage among men, such understanding could only be achieved through in-depth interviews with experienced individuals, the collection of reports on their lived experiences and personal motivations, and input from subject-matter experts. The systematic research design followed the three-stage coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

The participants in the current study were single men aged between 33 and 45 years, based on the average marriage age of men in the city of Kazerun, which was 30.9 years in 2023. All participants were residents of Kazerun County in Fars Province. Considering the nature of this study, purposive sampling was used based on inclusion and exclusion criteria until theoretical saturation was reached (15 participants). The inclusion criteria were: male gender, age between 33 and 45 years, single marital status, minimum literacy (ability to read and write), birth in Kazerun County, and a residence history of at least the past ten years in Kazerun. The exclusion criteria included: diagnosis of any mental disorder, use of psychiatric medication, presence of any severe physical illness or disability, use of drugs and/or alcohol, history of divorce, and prior experience of marriage, engagement, or formal courtship. The participants' mean age was 36.46 years, with a standard deviation of 2.02; the minimum and maximum ages were 33 and 39 years, respectively. Educational levels were as follows: 6 participants (40%) had a lower secondary education, 1 participant (6.66%) had a high school diploma, 2 participants (13.33%) held a bachelor's degree, 4 participants (26.66%) held a master's degree, and 2 participants (13.33%) were general practitioners.

The researcher first developed the questions required for the semi-structured interviews. After drafting, the questions were reviewed by academic supervisors and advisors, and revisions were made accordingly. In the next step, the researcher engaged with single men in public areas of

Kazerun and explained the research purpose to them. Naturally, only one participant was interviewed per session. Individuals meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria were interviewed either on-site or later at the researcher's office, depending on circumstances and convenience. Interviews were conducted individually, respecting privacy and ethical principles (including explaining the study's purpose, ensuring the confidentiality of identifying information, maintaining the confidentiality of the interview content, deleting audio recordings after participant approval, informing participants of the research outcomes upon request, the right to skip questions, and the right to withdraw from the study and have their data destroyed). Each session was recorded, transcribed, and returned to the participant for confirmation. Upon their approval, the content was analyzed and the findings documented. This process was repeated with subsequent participants until theoretical saturation was reached. Interview durations ranged from approximately 45 to 90 minutes. During interviews, if a participant's statement was unclear or subject to misinterpretation, the researcher would clarify and confirm interpretations directly with the participant.

To enhance credibility, three fully coded interviews were independently coded by three PhD students experienced in grounded theory research. Inter-coder agreement was then assessed, resulting in a 95% consistency rate. To ensure data trustworthiness, multiple strategies were used. Initially, all codes were clearly identified and defined. Statements from various participants suitable for coding were coded, revealing both differences and similarities among the constructs used. Dimensions of each construct were also clarified. Particular care was taken in linking concepts with quotes when participant statements were not easily interpretable. A detailed sequential process for model development was then described. This theoretical progression guided the researcher toward model construction. Furthermore, to confirm data dependability, all original interview recordings were transcribed and repeatedly checked against the typed documents to ensure accurate reflection of participants' statements.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structure Interview

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were employed. Initially, questions covering the dimensions of non-marriage among men (strategic and consequential aspects) were developed. These questions were then

reviewed for content validity by subject-matter experts. Subsequently, preliminary interviews were conducted with three participants and three professionals in the fields of marriage counseling and psychology. Based on their feedback regarding the comprehensiveness and clarity of the questions, necessary revisions were made.

2.2.2. Hope

The Hope Scale was developed by Snyder in 1991. It consists of 12 items and includes two subscales: agency thinking and pathways thinking. This questionnaire is scored on an 8-point Likert scale and is applicable for individuals aged 15 and above. The score range is between 1 and 64. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported as 0.71 in the study by Afshani and Jafari (2017), indicating good reliability.

2.2.3. Attachment Style

This self-report questionnaire was developed by Hazan and Shaver based on Ainsworth's tripartite attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and ambivalent). It includes descriptions of how individuals perceive their relationships with significant others in their current life. The questionnaire has 15 items, with five items corresponding to secure attachment style, five to insecure/avoidant attachment style, and five to insecure/ambivalent attachment style, measured on a 5-point

scale. The item with the highest rating indicates the individual's dominant attachment style. Zolfaghari Motlagh et al. (2008) reported internal consistency coefficients for attachment styles ranging from 0.55 to 0.74, and reliability coefficients of 0.84 for secure attachment and 0.78 for insecure-ambivalent attachment.

2.3. Data Analysis

In the current study, data analysis was performed using the grounded theory approach based on the systematic method of Strauss and Corbin (1998), involving text categorization and coding. Data obtained through this grounded theory method were analyzed using a three-step coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

To ensure coding reliability, the researcher conducted simultaneous coding reviews and sought external validation by involving another knowledgeable individual. Additionally, a second interviewer was used in parallel, and their coding was compared with that of the primary researcher. In each interview, codes that were identical between the two coders were classified as agreements, and differing codes were marked as disagreements. Subsequently, the researcher and the assistant coded three interviews together, and the intra-topic agreement rate was calculated:

Table 1

Inter-Coder Agreement Evaluation

Row	Interview Number	Number of Codes (Coder 1 and Coder 2)	Agreed Codes	Reliability
1	Interview One	89	37	83%
2	Interview Eight	56	19	68%
3	Interview Fourteen	48	17	71%
Total		193	73	76%

Based on this evaluation, the reliability coefficient for the interview protocol in this study was determined to be 76%. Given that the minimum acceptable reliability threshold is stated to be 0.60 (60%), the obtained reliability rate of 76% is considered satisfactory.

3. Findings and Results

The first step in the data analysis process based on the grounded theory approach involves identifying open codes from the interview transcripts. This stage is known as open coding. Open coding is the initial phase of interview analysis in grounded theory methodology. It is referred to as "open"

because the researcher, with an open mind and without any limitations on the number of codes or categories, extracts codes and constructs preliminary categories. In essence, open coding is an analytical process through which latent meanings within the data are first identified in the form of open codes, which are then compared with one another to recognize similar phenomena and subsequently grouped under common conceptual labels. Accordingly, concepts emerge from the integration, synthesis, and finalization of open codes, and result from organizing codes based on their inherent similarities and structural relationships. Therefore, this stage involves, in sequence, the extraction and

finalization of open codes to form the initial and foundational indicators, followed by the classification of these codes to derive conceptual categories. Based on the qualitative data analysis, in the first step, a total of 233 open codes with a frequency of 394 instances were identified.

The aim of open coding is to deconstruct, compare, and process open codes to form concepts, thereby preparing them for categorization in the next phase—axial coding. This classification is conducted according to the research objectives or the similarities among the analyzed data. Specifically, in this step, after identifying and refining the open codes, they are systematically compared and rearranged. The researcher examines them from different angles to determine and discover the appropriate and meaningful category for each code in the form of a concept. In this study, a total of 233 finalized open codes were generated, which needed to be grouped into conceptual

categories. These 233 codes were the result of several rounds of refinement and expert consultation, derived from 15 interviews. In this section, based on the inherent similarities, proximity of meaning, and structural relationships among the open codes, the codes were grouped into clusters. This classification process was repeated until all codes within a given group (constituting a concept) were sufficiently similar in essence, meaning, and association, making their grouping into a single category logical and meaningful. Accordingly, through repeated iterations and intra- and inter-group comparisons, the open codes were ultimately classified into various conceptual categories. In this regard, the open codes were grouped based on semantic and functional similarities and affinities. Through multiple rearrangements of these codes across different conceptual groups, the final concepts were ultimately formed.

Table 2

Extracted Concepts from Open Codes

No.	Concept	Code Count	Open Codes
1	Negative emotions/thoughts	17	Sense of aimlessness, Feeling of failure, Lack of personal satisfaction, Feeling behind peers, Guilt about opposite-sex relationships, Dissatisfaction, Belief that emotional attachment is unlikely, Regret over missed opportunities, Fear of judgment/negative perception of singles, Negative self-thoughts, Fatigue from multiple relationships, Dissatisfaction with short-term relationships, Comparison with married men, Hopelessness, Regret over past decisions, Concern over preserving dignity
2	Emergence of depressive symptoms	10	Feeling depressed, Irritability, Nervous behaviors, Lack of joy in single life, Social withdrawal, Decreased morale and motivation
3	Selection-related abnormalities	9	Disillusionment with marriage, Avoidance of marriage, Strictness in choosing spouse, Negligence toward marriage, Lack of enthusiasm for marriage, Obsessiveness in choosing a spouse
4	Wasted time and energy	4	Wasting youthful energy, Wasting time
5	Increased responsibilities	4	Fulfilling family responsibilities, Assuming family obligations, Having a central role in the family, Becoming devoted to the family
6	Loneliness due to singlehood	5	Psychological loneliness, Loneliness
7	Loneliness in older age	3	Psychological loneliness in older age, Loneliness in older age
8	Involvement in inappropriate relationships	7	Too much socializing, Engaging in harmful relationships, Getting involved with bad groups, Risk of addiction
9	Lack of financial foresight	4	Wasting money, Inability to save money
10	Reduction in restrictions	2	Having freedom
11	Age-related issues	8	Generational gap, Age difference with future children, Age difference with spouse, Lack of understanding with spouse
12	Reactions/behaviors of others	9	Humiliating behavior from others, Family expectations from singles, Limited interaction with relatives, Being compared to married individuals, Sarcastic remarks from others
13	Efforts to improve economic conditions	18	Achieving sufficient income, Purchasing a suitable vehicle, Achieving financial stability before marriage, Obtaining a proper job, Financial preparedness, Acquiring suitable housing
14	Physical improvement	1	Achieving ideal body shape
15	Psychological improvement	3	Desire for marriage, Desire for commitment, Viewing marriage as necessary
16	Positive thinking about the future	10	Hopefulness about marriage, Improvement of economy and market, Positive attitude toward marriage, Interest and willingness to marry
17	Easy sexual satisfaction	12	Non-emotional relationships, Masturbation, Friendship with opposite sex, Watching porn, Multiple opposite-sex relationships, Interest in temporary marriage
18	Expanded family/friend relationships	5	Feeling calm with family and friends, Joy with family and friends, Emotional connection with friends, Emotional needs met through family/friends, Support from friends

19	Engagement in work/leisure/social activities	11	Pursuing education, Following goals, Social engagement, Social media, Working, Exercising
20	Finding an emotionally suitable partner	2	Finding the right person
21	Finding an economically suitable partner	2	Partner with no unrealistic expectations
22	Past experiences	7	Matriarchal dynamics, Negative proposals, Bad past relationships, Observing infidelity, Financial exploitation, Rejection due to job ambiguity, Rejection due to informal job
23	Advice/experiences of others	11	Unsuccessful friend marriages, Negative stories from peers, Married people advising bachelorhood, Lack of proper guidance
24	Emotional/relational failures	10	Trusting the wrong person, Betrayal, Emotional failure, Exploitation, Hopelessness from past
25	Personality growth	2	Lack of maturity, Low tolerance for marital issues
26	Neuroticism/Borderline traits	5	Negative emotional responsibility, Harmful thoughts, Fear of hurting others, Avoiding arguments, Need for emotional support
27	Abandonment schema	4	Feeling incomplete, Fear of abandonment, Rejection anxiety, Poor identity awareness
28	Interpersonal sensitivity disorder	1	Concern about partner's suffering
29	Financial and economic issues	13	Heavy dowries, Missed opportunities, Fear of unmet needs, Low income, Lack of job, Economic instability, Inflation worries
30	Fear of unsuccessful marriage	7	Distrust of opposite sex, Pre-marriage promises, Fear of divorce, Witnessing marital issues
31	Escape from marital difficulties/constraints	13	Preferring peace, No pressure from spouse, Fear of commitment, Limitations, Family problems, Emotional pressure, Focus on future, Loss of freedom
32	Materialistic view	3	No assets, No car, No house
33	Economic issues	11	Need for independent home, Cost of marriage, Cost of weddings, Inflation, Poor financial readiness
34	Employment-related issues	10	Low income job, Job instability, Work stress, Fear spouse won't accept job, Job vulnerability
35	Negative role of families	16	Priority to older siblings, Cultural/religious pressures, Conservative upbringing, Overinvolved families, Family opposition, Lack of support
36	Age-related challenges	3	Losing interest in marriage with age
37	Emotional/relational challenges	5	Not finding a suitable match, Value mismatch, Partner inconsistency, Emotional uncertainty
38	Inner/personal traits	2	Shyness, Self-directed perfectionism
39	Lack of physical appeal	2	Overweight, Balding
40	Expectations and demands	4	Appearance expectations, Dominant female partner, Unrealistic demands
41	Partner's personality traits	2	Materialism
42	Low perceived importance of marriage	9	Personal decision, Work priority, Marriage seen as social/personal habit, Shift in values, Career focus
43	Desire for personal freedom	4	Leisure freedom, Planning flexibility, More personal liberty, Fear of lost autonomy
44	Fear of the future	9	Age gap with child, Financial stress, Faithless living, Self-doubt, Infidelity fears
45	Disinterest/indifference to marriage	4	Acceptance of current status, Fatalism, Not thinking about marriage
46	Hedonistic attitude and desire for comfort	9	Peaceful single life, Pursuing interests, Relationship variety, Pleasure-seeking, Minimal concern
47	Strong dependence on family	3	Belief in no independence in spouse choice, Lack of individuation

What actions and strategies are employed regarding the non-engagement of men in marriage?

Table 3

Strategic Dimension

Categories	Concepts	Open Codes
Improving livelihood	Efforts to improve economic conditions	Achieving adequate income, Purchasing a suitable car, Attaining financial stability before marriage, Securing a suitable job, Meeting financial requirements, Acquiring suitable housing
Improving mental and physical readiness for marriage	Physical improvement	Achieving an ideal body shape
	Psychological improvement	Creating the desire to marry, Creating the desire for commitment, Perceiving marriage as essential

Developing alternative relationships/actions	Positive thinking about the future	Hopefulness toward marriage, Economic and market improvement, Positive outlook on marriage, Interest and inclination toward marriage
	Easy sexual gratification	Non-emotional relationships with the opposite sex, Masturbation, Friendship with the opposite sex, Watching pornographic content, Multiple opposite-sex relationships, Inclination toward temporary marriage (sigheh)
	Strengthening relationships with family and friends	Feeling calm with family and friends, Feeling joy with family and friends, Emotional bonding with friends, Meeting emotional needs through family and friends, Receiving emotional support from friends
Establishing deep emotional or economic bonds	Engagement in occupational/leisure/social activities	Pursuing higher education, Chasing life goals, High involvement in social activities, Entertaining oneself via virtual space, Keeping busy with work, Keeping busy with sports
	Finding an emotionally compatible partner	Finding a suitable person
	Finding an economically compatible partner	A candidate without unreasonable expectations

What are the consequences of men's non-engagement in marriage?

Table 4

Consequences Dimension

Categories	Concepts	Open Codes
Psychological/Mental Consequences	Negative emotions/thoughts	Sense of aimlessness, Feeling of failure, Lack of personal satisfaction, Feeling behind peers, Guilt about opposite-sex relationships, Dissatisfaction, Considering emotional attachment unlikely, Regret over missed opportunities, Fear of judgment/negative views of singles, Negative self-perception, Fatigue from multiple relationships, Dissatisfaction with short-term relationships, Comparing oneself to married men, Hopelessness, Regret over past decisions, Concern for social dignity
	Emergence of depressive symptoms	Feeling depressed, Boredom, Nervous behavior, Lack of enjoyment in single life, Social withdrawal/avoidance, Decline in morale and motivation, Inclination toward death and annihilation
	Selection-related abnormalities	Feeling disillusioned about marriage, Avoiding marriage, Excessive strictness in selecting a spouse, Negligence toward marriage, Lack of enthusiasm for marriage, Obsessiveness in partner selection
Objective Consequences	Wasted time and energy	Wasting youthful energy, Wasting time
	Increased responsibilities	Undertaking family responsibilities, Assuming family obligations, Playing a central role in the family, Devoting oneself to the family
	Loneliness due to singleness	Psychological (emotional) loneliness, Loneliness
	Loneliness in older age	Psychological (emotional) loneliness in older age, Loneliness in older age
	Involvement in inappropriate relationships and actions	Excessive socializing, Involvement in harmful relationships, Becoming part of harmful social circles, Risk of addiction
	Lack of financial foresight	Wasting money, Failure to save money
	Reduced limitations	Having personal freedom
Environmental Consequences	Age-related issues	Intergenerational gap, Age gap with future children, Age gap with spouse, Lack of mutual understanding with spouse
	Behaviors/reactions of others	Humiliating behaviors by others, Expectations of others toward single men, Limited family interaction, Being compared to married individuals, Sarcastic comments from others

Furthermore, based on the results obtained in the domain of causes and contributing factors shaping the research model, a set of propositions is presented in the next section to establish a theoretical framework concerning the reasons behind the non-engagement of men in marriage, and the strategies employed by them to manage and interact with this situation.

Proposition 1: The characteristics, desires, and expectations of the potential partner, appearance-related problems, environmental issues, beliefs, fears, misperceptions about marriage, and emotional/relational difficulties (as causal factors) can have significant effects on the non-engagement of Iranian men in marriage.

Proposition 2: The non-engagement of Iranian men in marriage (as the central phenomenon) may lead to the

emergence of strategies for coping with the condition of bachelorhood or preparing for future marriage. These strategies fall within the categories of improving psychological and physical readiness for marriage, enhancing livelihood, developing alternative relationships and actions, and forming deep emotional or economic connections.

Proposition 3: Life priorities, along with individual attitudes and inclinations (as intervening conditions), can both significantly influence the central phenomenon (non-engagement in marriage) and shape the strategies adopted by men to cope with bachelorhood or prepare for marriage in the future.

Proposition 4: Experiential, environmental/external, and internal/psychological factors (as contextual conditions) can significantly affect the central phenomenon (non-engagement in marriage) as well as the strategies adopted to either cope with bachelorhood or prepare for future marriage.

Proposition 5: Objective consequences, environmental consequences, and psychological/mental consequences (as outcomes) may be affected by the central phenomenon (non-engagement of men in marriage). In other words, non-engagement in marriage can lead to the emergence of these outcomes across the three mentioned categories.

Proposition 6: The strategies employed by single men to cope with bachelorhood or prepare for future marriage (including improving psychological and physical readiness for marriage, enhancing livelihood, developing alternative relationships/actions, and forming deep emotional or economic bonds) can influence the consequences stemming from bachelorhood and the non-engagement in marriage.

Based on the presented propositions, the characteristics, expectations, and demands of the potential partner; appearance-related challenges; environmental pressures; erroneous beliefs and fears about marriage; and relational or emotional problems can have substantial impacts on the non-engagement of Iranian men in marriage. In particular, the high expectations of some women regarding wedding ceremonies and the often excessive demands for quality and quantity of married life can lead to disagreements or even dissuade men from pursuing marriage and family formation. These issues, when combined with certain personality traits in the potential partner, such as materialism, can easily hinder the formation of emotional bonds between men and women.

On the other hand, some men, due to low self-confidence, may be dissatisfied with their appearance or body shape,

which in turn negatively affects their ability to initiate interactions with women for the purpose of marriage. Additionally, career-related challenges, as well as the behaviors, actions, and attitudes of both the man's and woman's families, combined with significant financial and economic difficulties, constitute some of the most powerful factors that can directly dissuade an individual from pursuing marriage or lead to intense doubt and hesitation.

Furthermore, when an individual holds misguided beliefs, fears, or concerns about the difficulties of marriage, it naturally affects their ability to remain steadfast or make sound decisions. These concerns may include fear of being unable to fulfill the material needs of married life, avoidance of hardships (often exaggerated or imagined), or fear of marital failure and divorce. Moreover, some individuals, due to personality traits such as perfectionism or introversion, may struggle to establish healthy relationships with the opposite sex or maintain unrealistic expectations from potential partners. These issues, along with age-related challenges such as increased pickiness and reduced eagerness for marriage, further complicate the process of pursuing marriage and starting a family.

At the same time, the non-engagement of men in marriage may result in the development of coping strategies or preparation mechanisms for future marriage. These strategies, classified under improving mental and physical conditions, economic improvement, developing alternative relationships/actions, and building emotional or economic bonds, represent attempts by individuals to adapt to their current bachelorhood or to create the foundations for future readiness. Single men adopt various approaches in this regard. Positive thinking about the future, efforts to improve mental health and self-image, and working toward better physical appearance are among the strategies used to prepare themselves for marriage. Improving employment prospects and strengthening financial capacity are also considered key strategies to facilitate future marriage.

Conversely, other adaptive strategies reflect passive responses to prolonged bachelorhood, such as immersion in work, social or recreational activities, or satisfying sexual needs through temporary relationships or friendship with the opposite sex. These men may also choose to deepen family or friendship bonds in place of formal relationships.

The lack of desire to marry and the adoption of prolonged bachelorhood can lead to various consequences. Simultaneously, the coping or preparatory strategies adopted by single men may themselves influence the outcomes of remaining unmarried. These consequences—objective,

environmental, and psychological/mental—can be directly affected by men’s non-engagement in marriage. In practice, a single man may experience negative reactions or behaviors from others, sometimes in the form of sarcasm or even humiliation. Psychological and emotional outcomes such as depression or negative self-perception are among the most serious threats facing middle-aged unmarried men. However, the most tangible consequences are the objective ones: involvement in unsuitable relationships or activities, wasting time and resources, or emotional loneliness, which itself may contribute to depressive symptoms. Another important consequence is the increasing expectations others may have of them due to their perceived surplus time or energy. Financial mismanagement can also lead to significant economic losses.

Among the most influential factors that affect both the decision to remain single and the strategies related to marriage are life priorities, individual values, and personal tendencies. The lower the perceived importance of marriage and the higher the prioritization of other issues, the less likely a person is to engage in marriage. Furthermore, one’s attitude toward singlehood and marriage—including family dependence, fear of the future, desire for freedom, and overall marital inclination—play crucial mediating roles.

Additionally, experiential factors, environmental/external conditions, and

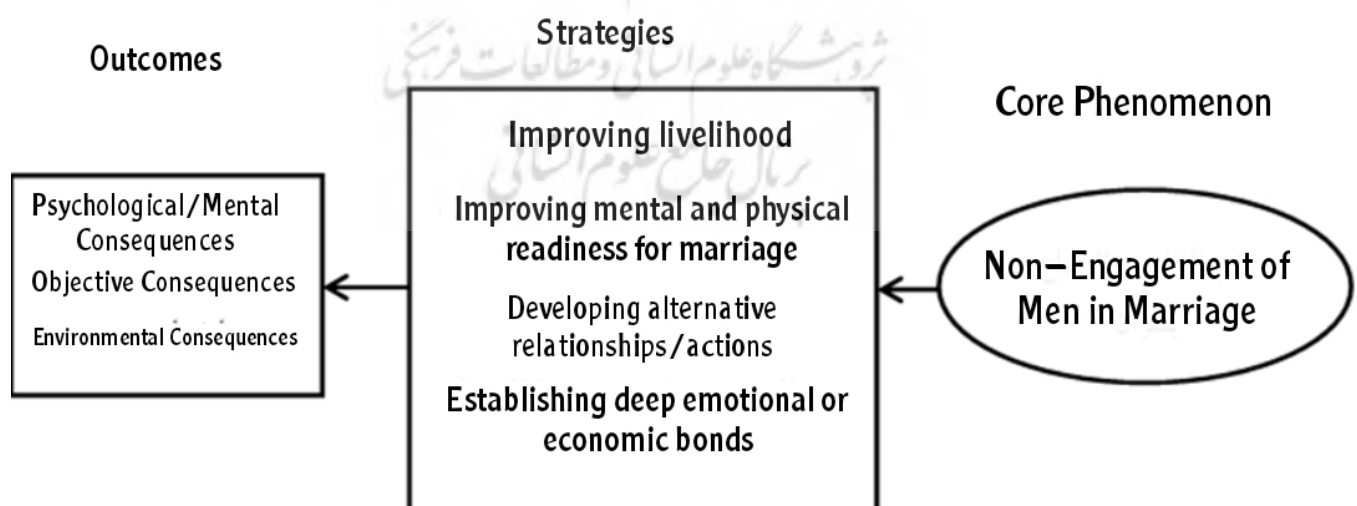
psychological/internal conditions also significantly shape the decision to remain single and the associated strategies. Among these, experiential factors are particularly important, as they can directly shape attitudes. Advice and past experiences—including failed romantic relationships or observing infidelity—play a major role. Financial and economic concerns, such as dowry expectations or inflation anxiety, also have a strong contextual influence on marriage-related decisions and strategies.

Finally, those with lower levels of personality development or psychological imbalances such as neuroticism may show greater avoidance toward marriage or family formation. In summary, a wide range of causal and contextual factors not only influence the decision and tendency toward singlehood but also shape long-term behavioral strategies for either eventual marriage or enduring bachelorhood. These factors may stem from personal beliefs, personality traits, or environmental conditions. Economic problems and family dynamics are among the most influential, while interactive experiences with the opposite sex and societal perceptions of marriage further compound the complexity of the issue.

Based on the findings, a research model for the non-engagement of men in marriage can now be proposed:

Figure 1

Model of Non-Engagement in Marriage Among Young Men Based on Extracted Categories



4. Discussion and Conclusion

As stated earlier, the main objective of this study was to identify the strategies and consequences associated with the

non-engagement of men in marriage. The findings indicated that the strategies dimension comprises four categories. It is noteworthy that this dimension includes 33 open codes with a frequency of 69, meaning that it encompasses 33 strategies

or actions aimed either at adapting to bachelorhood or preparing for marriage in the future. The first category involves improving livelihood, which includes efforts such as achieving sufficient income, owning a suitable car, attaining financial stability before marriage, securing a suitable job, fulfilling financial prerequisites, and acquiring appropriate housing.

The second category focuses on improving psychological and physical readiness for marriage. This includes achieving a desirable body shape and improving mental well-being, which involves fostering the desire to marry, cultivating commitment, and viewing marriage as essential. Positive thinking about the future also falls under this category, encompassing hopefulness about marriage, expectations for economic improvement, and a positive outlook toward marriage. The third category entails the development of alternative relationships and actions, including easy sexual gratification. This includes non-emotional relationships with the opposite sex, masturbation, dating, watching pornography, having multiple partners, and engaging in temporary marriage (*sigheh*). Furthermore, strengthening relationships with family and friends is included in this category, such as experiencing calmness and joy with them, forming emotional bonds, satisfying emotional needs through these relationships, and receiving emotional support from friends. Involvement in professional, recreational, and social activities includes continuing education, pursuing life goals, heavy engagement in social activities, being entertained by social media, and keeping oneself busy with work or exercise ([Javanmard et al., 2022](#)).

Finally, the fourth category involves forming deep emotional or economic bonds, which includes finding a suitable partner emotionally and economically. This refers to identifying a compatible emotional partner or one with realistic economic expectations.

When individuals perceive themselves as entrenched in long-term bachelorhood and as they approach middle age, their perspective and analysis of their situation naturally diverge from their younger years. They may attempt to adopt strategies to either prepare for marriage or embrace long-term or even permanent singlehood. On one hand, they might try to improve their livelihood and income or enhance their psychological traits and behaviors to meet the demands of a successful marriage. On the other hand, some may adapt to their current condition and prepare themselves for prolonged bachelorhood through developing alternative relationships—such as multiple relationships or temporary marriage—or by strengthening their same-gender

friendships. Some single men reduce or even remove marriage from their priorities by immersing themselves in work, leisure, or social activities.

Additionally, the consequences are categorized into three domains. This dimension contains 55 open codes with a frequency of 87, signifying 55 identified consequences of not marrying or continuing bachelorhood. The first category includes psychological and emotional consequences. Negative thoughts and emotions discussed here include a sense of aimlessness, feelings of failure, personal dissatisfaction, lagging behind peers, guilt about relationships with the opposite sex, general dissatisfaction, doubts about forming emotional bonds, regret over missed opportunities, fear of judgment, negative self-perception, fatigue from multiple relationships, dissatisfaction with short-term relationships, comparisons with married men, hopelessness, regret over past decisions, and concern about maintaining dignity. Also included are symptoms of depression such as feelings of depression, boredom, irritability, lack of enjoyment during bachelorhood, social withdrawal, and reduced morale and motivation. Selection-related disorders include disillusionment with marriage, avoidance of marriage, excessive strictness, negligence, lack of enthusiasm, and obsessive partner selection.

According to the findings of this study, the non-engagement of single men in marriage can lead to consequences such as excessive pickiness and difficulty in selecting a partner. This finding aligns with that of Fakhraei and Pourtaghi (2015), who reported a significant relationship between young people's pickiness and their delayed marriage. In other words, the higher the level of pickiness in single men, the more likely they are to experience delayed marriage, which in turn may further reinforce future pickiness. Additionally, Apostolou et al. (2019) showed that single individuals experience more negative emotions and that there is a correlation between being single and dissatisfaction with life ([Apostolou et al., 2019](#)).

The second category involves objective consequences. This includes wasted time and energy, such as squandering youthful energy and time. Increased responsibilities are also present, including taking on family responsibilities, assuming caregiving roles, playing a central role in the family, and dedicating oneself to familial obligations. Loneliness due to bachelorhood includes both psychological and actual loneliness. Loneliness in older age also appears in both emotional and physical forms. Involvement in inappropriate relationships includes excessive socializing,

entering toxic relationships, and joining negative social circles. Poor financial foresight includes squandering money and failing to save. Reduced limitations are reflected in greater personal freedom. Age-related issues include generational gaps, age disparity with future children, age gaps with spouses, and difficulty in mutual understanding with a partner.

The third category pertains to environmental consequences. This includes others' behaviors and reactions, such as humiliating treatment, expectations of unmarried men, limited interactions with relatives, comparisons with married peers, and sarcastic remarks from others. Naturally, prolonged bachelorhood can lead to various outcomes for men. These may be psychological or tangible in everyday life. A man who has voluntarily or involuntarily remained single into middle age may experience negative thoughts and emotions such as aimlessness, perceived failure, or comparison with married men, especially in response to intrusive questions and criticism from others. These thoughts and experiences may lead to depressive symptoms. Moreover, delayed marriage can result in later challenges during and after marriage, including significant age differences with children or behavioral compulsions in partner selection. Single men are also at high risk of becoming involved in unhealthy relationships and, due to greater financial freedom, may be more prone to financial mismanagement. Ultimately, feelings of loneliness—especially in older age—can pose serious threats to one's daily functioning and mental health.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

This study had certain limitations. One primary limitation pertains to the scope and domain of the research. The study focused solely on the non-engagement of men in marriage. Entry criteria included men aged 33 to 45, while exclusion criteria involved individuals with physical or mental disorders, including disabilities or diagnosed psychiatric conditions. Therefore, the study only represents a specific segment of single men and cannot be fully generalized to the broader population of single Iranian men. It is evident that individuals with disabilities and those with mental health challenges represent a substantial portion of the population, especially given the increase in psychological disorders in Iran over the past decade due to economic pressures. Future research should include a wider range of age groups and individuals with diverse physical and mental conditions. This would enhance the generalizability of the findings and

address the current study's limitations. By including a more diverse sample, researchers can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to non-engagement in marriage among men. Future research may also benefit from a more in-depth investigation of the cultural and social influences on men's marital attitudes and behaviors. A closer examination of cultural components such as beliefs, values, and social norms surrounding marriage can help identify barriers and offer targeted solutions to address them.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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