



## The narrative analysis of decision-making process to remarriage

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### Abstract

This study was done to investigate female heads of household's decision-making process for remarriage and its barriers. Since an important part of these women's life was not researchable through questionnaires and details of their life would be omitted, it's felt the need to do qualitative work; therefore, it's a qualitative study by narrative analysis strategy in which we used both thematic analysis and structural analysis by using semi-structured interviews with 9 women in Gonabad. The results of this study showed these persons strongly felt the lack of husband due to the variety of needs, but barriers to remarriage have a deterrent role in the final decision to remarriage and this structural pressure is to the extent that put women in conflict for making final decision and this conflict will increase over time. In the final, 9 of them had feeling the need, tending to remarry, social perceptions, expectations originated from emotions, expectations originated from position, subjective norms and evaluating and expecting benefits.

**Keywords:** Decision-Making, Remarriage, Narrative, Thematic

### Introduction

Women are half of the human resources of a country, a bunch of them are female heads of households. Hosseini, Frozan and Amirferyar [1] concluded that 77% female heads of households under coverage of Tehran welfare organization do not have a complete mental health. They also concluded that 55% of women in their study had a low self-esteem and 54% suffered from a high anxiety, 53% were not in a good physical condition and 49% had depression. Momeni zade [2], Moeedfar and Hamidi [3], also mentioned low quality of life, economic problems and psychological disorders on female heads of households in their researches. The results of Malek Motiee's

master thesis [4] showed that more than 50 percent of these female heads of households tend to remarry and variables of age, marriage value, and the reference groups' evaluation about remarriage indirectly and through other variables affect the tendency to remarry. As Rezaee Qadi [5] has examined, this group of vulnerable people in social and cultural dimensions, especially in psychological dimension needs to become empowered, one of the ways of psychological, cultural and social empowerment of these women is their remarriage. According to Charati et al [6], having single parent alone is one of the major factors threatening the family

structure, especially if children live in a female-headed family. In the functional view, being a single parent for whatever reason is a disorder. The results of exploratory interviews with the deputy of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (RA) and the deputy director of Family Empowerment in Gonabad showed that this issue (the remarriage of female heads of household) in closed societies such as Gonabad, in which friends and families prevent remarriage of a woman. Head, who is the breadwinner of family or cannot permit her to remarry in accordance with the prevailing condition of the society, should be examined further. In addition to put emphasis on remarriage and its importance, he expressed 4 types of priority about the causes of tending to remarriage in female heads of households. According to his statements the first priority for female heads of households tending to remarry is economic debate. The second major priority is the emotional aspect of it. The third priority is sexual instinct and its needs. The fourth priority is foresight, although the more effective one in the current situation is the emotional aspect of remarriage. He defined female heads of households in three categories: 1- derelict divorced women: women who have been separated from their husbands, which unfortunately is growing strongly. 2- derelict widows 3- old single women who need support, this group fortunately has been supported as female heads of households in Gonabad. According to the deputy empowerment of Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (RA) statements, the reasons of paying little attention to female heads of households are as follows: difficulties in relief issues, traditional help and resisting, changing the approach, lacking of sufficient knowledge in organizations and cultural weakness. The following are barriers to intervention in his opinion: a cultural problem, people's point of view, stigmatizing the helper, lack of adequate support and other reasons like social pressures and social control. According to figures provided by him, 1800 women are female heads of households among 7000 clients in this city.

Many researches have been done recently among female heads of household that mostly refers to their problems and few of them have addressed the issue of remarriage and its barriers. Malek Motiee [4], and other studies [2,7-12], are researches which have been done in this area in Iran. Charati study et al [6] in Boshehr, in which from interviews with 93 female heads of household aged 40-26 who have at least one dependent child, concluded that the number of surviving children from a previous marriage and people's attitudes toward remarriage for these women are major barriers in this field. The female heads of household families' attitude in this sample (72%) has a direct impact on their attitude toward marriage. In 63% of cases in which women had higher employment and social bases, they are less likely to remarry due to the loss of economic status or elimination of their need. This study examined factors very similar to those of the present study. The research of Nazeri and Saraee [13] in Tehran also examined economic, social and cultural barriers of female heads' remarriage with 378 women as samples. The results showed that there is a correlation among economic, cultural, social attitudes and wrong stereotypes about female heads of household's remarriage and these women's unwillingness to remarry. Winnifered [14] in his master thesis was concentrated on the livelihoods of the female-headed households in Uganda. Adelstein [15] also emphasized on female heads of household poverty and the effects of marriage and divorce consequences. Miwa [16] and Yima [17] studied the economic situation of female heads. The advantage of this study comparing to the previous studies are as follows:

- The reasons of female heads of household's tendency to remarry and its barriers.
- The discovery of the mechanism of decision-making process about remarriage and its consequences.
- Using a combination of content analysis and structural analysis.

The present study is consistent with some

of the theories such as Robert Shelley's Expectation States theory (according to Turner) and Peter Burke's Identity Control theory [18], each of them alone includes part of the effective variables and involving in this issue and in fact have been the theoretical guide of the researcher, however to get to reality in society, one cannot determine the decision making process according to the combination of these theories. On the other hand, due to

the sensitivity of the issue and limitations of statistical methods and questionnaires, to reach the purpose of this article we need careful and serious search about the final decision making process of female heads of household to marry again that led the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews with narrative analysis qualitative method was used for this reason. The conceptual model of this study is shown in Figure 1.

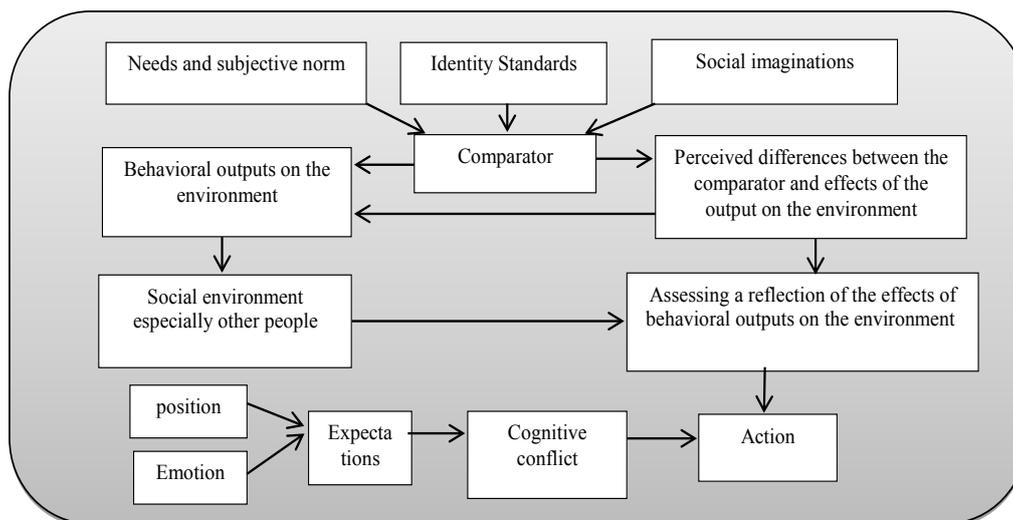


Figure 1 The conceptual model

## Method

As using qualitative methods (narrative research), it was not possible to study the lives of women heads of household as accurately as needed and they should express the story of their lives in detail so that we could extract effective variables through interviews, therefore the researcher used the qualitative method. Among qualitative methods, the narrative analysis is used that includes various types itself. In this paper, researchers use two methods to analyze the findings. The first method is thematic analysis that is similar to Grounded theory in which three-step encoding is used and in the second method is structural. Due to different time periods that samples left behind, the researcher structured their narratives generally and after individual analysis and summary of each of them in terms of contextual conditions, causer conditions and deterrent conditions, as well as descriptive analysis and a summary of their conditions in different periods of life, and then she conducted the final analysis of interviews.

This study is using qualitative method. After studying the situation of female heads of households and the conditions of interview with them, that 9 participants were studied as the final sample among them. The sample size was considered according to the "theoretical saturation". The narrative interview technique was used for data collection. Among the criteria for validation, in this study, we use narrative analysis and its subsidiary's strategies that are thematic analysis and structural analysis in two parts. In the first section, the analysis of qualitative data is done by using thematic analysis and thematic coding and extracting the qualitative model. In the second part, the structural analysis approach is used for the final conclusion. In the first part, each of the individual items separately deeply were analyzed, and during analysis, a system of contents is provided for analysis of individual cases. In the next step a thematic coding is conducted in order to

examine this content system more accurately that is very similar to the theoretical coding. After the cases were analyzed individually, the resulting content domains and categories that have been associated with individual cases are mutually controlled. A thematic structure is obtained through this mutual control that for enhancing comparability will be the basis to analyze other cases” [19]. Using several coders and referring to the respondents to verify the results of coding is one way to ensure the internal validity in qualitative research which this method was used in this paper. In this

research the researchers, based on the thematic coding with the helping of thematic analysis data analysis and finally new model in the first part would be gained and in the second part in structural analysis, general conclusion for all study subjects would be achieved which will be provided in the conclusion section.

**Results**

The marriage of most women was traditional. Table 1 shows the distribution of age, employment and the number of children of the sample.

**Table 1** Sample distribution according to age of marriage

	Age	N	Job	N	Number of children	N
1	16 years old	2	Housewife	3	Childless	3
2	17 years old	2	School security guard	1	One child	4
3	18 years old	1	Working in a shop	3	2 children	2
4	20 years old	2	Bank clerk	1	3 children	1
5	Over 20 years old	2	University staff	1	Three and more	1
6	Total	9	Total	9	Total	11

After doing the thematic encryption, the similar and semantically homogeneous concepts are categorized as the major themes. These themes are of a higher level of abstraction and are the third step for encoding.

As specified in Table 2, 7 main themes were obtained through the conducted interviews which can be related to each other in the final model using available ideas. Two main themes are needs and tendency to marry that many interviewees clearly mentioned and emphasized on them. Needs could be a reason for tending to remarry. Evaluation and expecting of benefit can play both motivating role and deterrent role for remarriage. Maternal emotions and positive feelings toward others, and expectations caused by these emotions are considered as significant barriers to remarriage. In the cost-benefit analysis between motivating factors and deterrent factors, a person stay in conflict between the desire to remarriage and barriers of remarriage, because the female head of household on the one hand, tend to respond positively to the expectations of

her significant others, both to be confirmed by them and to act the subjective norms existing in this small environment. On the other hand even after inevitably accepting celibacy, they will not be confirmed because of the public imagination and public sense of danger that married women have against a widow. This duality puts woman in a cognitive conflict. On the one hand she is a mother and her maternal emotions has created expectations that prevent her from marrying again, on the other hand she has a position in society which has created expectations for her and if she does not respond to these expectations so she will be rejected. Also, the suffering caused by negative social perceptions and her multiple needs, encourage her strongly to marry again and she is always in this conflict for a final decision. This process is so complex that cannot be included in thematic or sub-thematic categories. The researchers by listening to the narratives of respondents tried to discover the mechanism of decision-making.

**Table 2** Triple encoding results

Row	First-grade sub-contents	Second-grade sub-content	Contents
1	Not being comprehended by children and significant others, not having, not having companion, needing calmness, needing affection	Social isolation	Feeling the need
2	Feelings of inferiority, depression, sadness, extroversion, a suffering lot of in the absence of the spouse, crying a lot in solitude	Felling pain	
3	The lack of help in the upbringing of children, the lack of role models for boys	Need to accompany in the upbringing of children	
4	Having financial dependence to family, Being unemployed, resolving financial problems by marriage	Financial need	
5	Remembering memory of the spouse, feeling extreme loneliness, not having a spouse and loneliness	The empty place of husband	Tending to marry
6	Being satisfied with a bad husband, tending to marry again, not being filled the place of husband not having pleasure,	Feeling permanent emptiness	
7	Limitations in relationships, restrictions on gatherings, loneliness in public, lack of support	People's abstention	Social perceptions
8	Inappropriate treatment of Gonabad's people, neglecting the widow	Removing sanctity from a widow	
9	Being vilified by others, distrusting of others, bad look of public to a widow	Feeling threatened in community	
10	Feeling of psychological unsafety for children in a remarriage, concerning for the health of children, being glad with children, missing children	Being dependent on children	Expectations originated from emotions
11	Heartfelt attraction to previous husband, having a kind ex-husband, not finding alternative to ex-husband	Continued dependence on ex-husband	
12	To attend to children's emotional needs, wanting children, to be afraid that children become suffered, maternal devotion, caring for children	Altruistic dedication	
13	The spouses of the female heads of household's married children disagree to their remarriage, little and unmarried children oppose to their mother remarriage, their suitors reject their children	Children are barriers to remarriage	Expectations originated from position
14	Family disagree to their remarriage, significant others disagree to remarry, the relatives threaten them to cut ties if they remarry, their father threatens them with deprivation of inheritance if they marry again, the close and far relatives feel shame about their remarriage	The negative look of others to remarriage	
15	Positive perceptions of society to not remarried widow, people's positive feelings about the widow dedication for their children, expecting a lonely widow responsibility towards children, expecting widow to bear loneliness	A widow find dignity for not remarry	Subjective norms
16	Child support more than the support of a widow, a lot of attention to maternal affection towards their children, forgetting the multiple needs of widows, expecting to care fatherless children in any condition by the mother, believing widows should not marry widows for a lifetime, a widow fall into trouble for taking care of children, believing that a mother should tolerate pain and trouble for the sake of raising children, Bite the bullet after the death of her husband	Social beliefs	
17	Distrust, negative experiences, previous trauma, improper options	Fear of the future	Evaluating and expecting benefits
18	The husband's family cut off their relationship after the men take an instrumental and abusive look at death of him, widows, men abuse widows	The negative attitude of people toward a widow	
19	Shutting the mouths of the people, lacking of social security for spouseless, being the victim of men, their children do not suffer from fatherless, being independent	Suffering a lot from spouseless	

**Discussion**

According to the results of this study, the researcher can draw the ultimate model based on the Bodon’s individualism methodology and compare it with related theories. Bodoni believed the people action should be examined in their context and environment. But in the two mentioned theories, the environmental variable was not considered. Bodon has summarized the social transformation process in three main elements; "Interdependence, Environment, Output" [20]. Bodon considers the system of interdependence as the unit of analysis, whereas in the two mentioned theories, the unit of analysis is a person.” The central element of the process is composed of an interdependence system which contains the categories of social agents that include individual variables and

communication variables. The second main element in this process is the “environment” which itself include a collection of variables. The third element was formed from products or outputs of the interaction system” [20]. These collections of elements in the environment or in the interdependence system or outputs may be related to each other and influence on each other. Presence or absence of such relationships creates three major processes. The presence or absence of "recursive relationships" is the separated element of these three processes from each other. Bodon’s processes include repeating processes, cumulative process and switching process herein the subject of the study is closer to Bodon’s cumulative process that it is depicted in Figure 2.

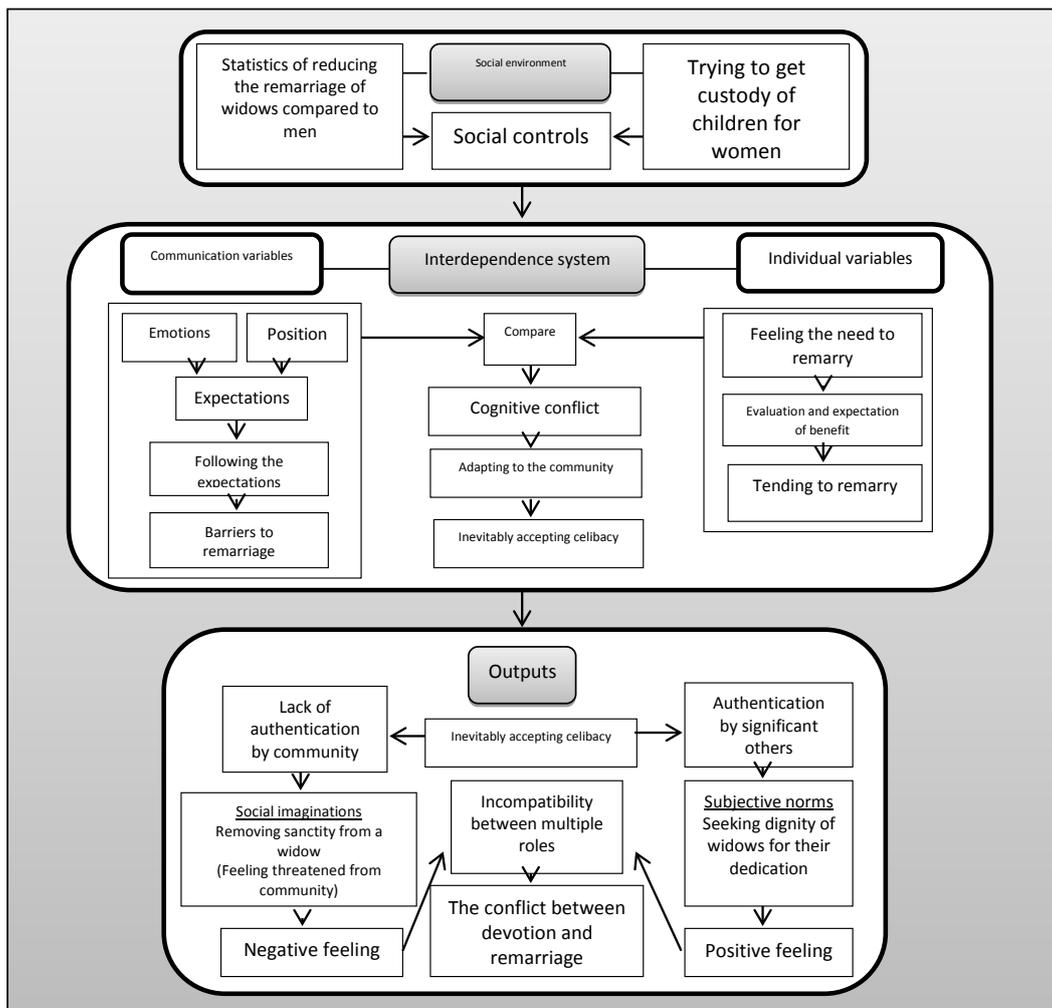


Figure 2 The final research model

Cumulative processes are "the second type of process that has feedback effects and act exclusively from outputs to the interaction system (or interdependence)", that means "they do not make any direct or indirect change in the environment"[20]. So the difference between Bodon's model the two mentioned theories is that Bodon could explain the female heads of households decision-making process by a micro and macro combination, but Burke's identity control theory and the expectation states theory have many restrictions in explaining the decision-making process and only constitute part of the study process. Female heads of household sample live in environment in which there are different social pressures.

Bodon put social human against economic human. The social human cannot always act his priorities, but he does a work those habits, intrinsic values and more generally, different moral, cognitive and formal situations forced him to do. That is, part of the choices of an actor is determined by the structure of her social status and her position in this position. He regards an actor as a person who has autonomy; this autonomy is different depending on the various environments in which the actors live [21].

Human sociability and autonomy is shown in both "Peter Burke's Identity Control theory" and "expectation states theory". According to Burke, people would enter meanings and expectations by role in their identity in context. He knows the identity as a cybernetic control system where people want to adjust their behavior in a way that others feedback show they have confirmed identities provided by those people [18].

According to Burke's theory, here female heads of households act as a comparator or evaluation criteria for approval or disapproval of themselves and direct their behaviors. A female head of household has needs which keep her tending to marry again. These women, who are in a relatively young range of age, feel multiple needs severely in the absence of husband. The results of our study are similar to that of Malek Motiee [4] and Zahed and Kheiri Khameneh [8] in this sense. If we suppose financial need as a need to have safety, the results of this

study are close to that of Momeni Zadeh [2], Sadeqhi Fasaee and Isari [7] and Fallahi Gilan and others [11]; and since emotional needs in women is effective on their mental health, it can be said from the aspect of next possible outcomes which this result is the same as Rabiee's conclusions [10].

These needs would lead female heads of households to evaluate benefits (similar to the results of research Abedi Aghziarat and [12] and to expect benefits from remarriage. A woman who feels the need to remarry, evaluate her options, in this way she may either find a good option or not, because women are afraid because if they remarry in an unsuitable conditions and with a wrong man, the evil of remarriage increases and their problems get bigger than before. On the other hand, according to "expectation state" theory, affections towards her children and significant others and position, make expectations from their side to her that create barriers to remarriage.

This deterrent role is so strong and has penetrated at the heart of the community that having children no matter how small is one of the biggest barriers against remarriage. Remarriage especially for women with children is very ugly and unpopular in viewpoint of both their younger children under 15 years old and their married children and their spouses. Perhaps one can say this factor in Gonabad society act very strongly as the biggest barrier to remarriage of women. In this way, women compare these two (the desire and barriers to remarriage) and since according to identity control theory, the woman seek approval of others and she choose conformity to community that lead her to accept celibacy.

This behavior of the comparator has outputs. On the one hand by accepting celibacy, she is confirmed by the significant others and has positive feeling, on the other hand negative social perceptions about a widow, create threatening feeling from the part of the community members that leads to strong negative feelings in her. This dual situation, according to Burke's theory, result

in incompatibilities between the multiple roles of the individual person and puts woman's again in a conflict that whether chooses to remarry in order to be accepted and respected by the community or forgets herself to get the confirmation of her significant others and her emotions, therefore this sequence is existed always in the final decision and puts her in pain. Thus, this process is a cumulative process which its negative effects become more severe day by day. In a lot of research has been stated about female heads of household's empowerment while empowering may only be able to provide financial aspect and economic independence of women, but other needs would be remained that must be provided with the existence of another person.

The results of structural analysis in thematic analysis (based on the model of (based on the model of Labov and Waletzky).

In this type of analysis, the researcher first identifies and analyzes the main variables for each of the narratives, and then by obtaining their common points, general structure would be concluded. At the end of narratives, the parts of this structure are mentioned. This method is useful for two reasons; first, this method provides an analytical approach to how to form the narrative in different time periods, and second it describes the performance of various elements of narrative (according to the Nematian). [22]

In this section, the life period of each female heads of households have been analyzed separately and the life process over time for each female head is specified. A title is determined for each of these periods that represent the main problem of them in the considered period. In each period, the contexts and conditions involved in the tendency to remarry are determined. Finally the process of tending to marry again for each of the female heads of households is analyzed. These conditions and contexts are distinguished from each other in three categories:

As we show in table 3, each of samples in four lifetimes and in causer, contextual and deterrent conditions determined which of the conditions in which stage they have experienced. For

example, the first sample, mentioned raising children as a deterrent factor to woman's remarriage in the first period and financial problems as contextual conditions, taking job and financial independency as deterrent conditions in the second period, growing and marrying of children as contextual conditions and becoming alone again as causer conditions in the third period. As the same way, other samples have passed similar situations like this one.

**Deterrent conditions:** these conditions occur as the main and most important conditions in each life period of female heads of households that lead to an unwillingness to remarry.

**Causer conditions:** Conditions that could lead to remarry, but when would face with obstruction eventually led to the tendency to remarriage.

**Contextual conditions:** these are conditions that underlie the causer conditions and deterrent conditions to create the desired effect.

In Table 3, a summary list of the living conditions of the samples shown. The final section of this study is the structural analysis of the narratives including consecutive parts. The main elements in a narrative structure include:

**Abstract:** that introduces and summarizes the details of characters, time, place and events (a summary of the story).

**Orientation:** that determines the details of characters, time, place and events (who, where and when)

**Complication:** that expresses the main events and what actually happened. (what happened and what took place after that)

**Evaluation:** making the actions meaningful (describe the usage and the concept of actions and events, why and how this story is interesting?)

### **Conclusion**

tells what happens finally (finally, what happened? Solution)

**Coda:** that connect the previous stories to the present story of the narrator's life (Elliott, 2006, according to Nematian) [22].

**Table 3** *The summary of life conditions of the samples*

Life periods	Triple conditions of the first sample			Triple conditions of the second sample		
	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions
First period	-	-	Raising children	-	-	The education and marriage of children
Second period	Financial problems	-	Taking job and financial independency	-	Children's loneliness because of woman working	Taking job and financial independency
Third period	Growing and marrying of children	Becoming alone again	-	-	Life problems	-
Periods of life after death of husband	First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third
	Loneliness period	Raising children and financial problems	working periods of woman	Loneliness period	The Education and marriage of children	Working
Life periods	Triple conditions of the third sample			Triple conditions of the fourth sample		
	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions
First period	-	-	Raising children	Emotional and financial problems	-	Working
Second period	Children's education and the need for companion	Children's education and the need for companion	-	-	-	-
Third period	-	Marrying of children and becoming alone again	-	Emotional tension and loneliness	-	-
Periods of life after death of husband	First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third
	Loneliness period	Having little children	Children's education	Loneliness period	Working	Financial problems
Life periods	Triple conditions of the fifth sample			Triple conditions of the sixth sample		
	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions
First period	-	-	Education and raising children	-	-	The period of raising children
Second period	Financial problems	-	-	Marrying of children	-	-
Third period	-	Lack of emotions and being affected	-	Becoming alone again and problems	-	-
Periods of life after death of husband	First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third
	Loneliness period	Children's education and their existence	Financial problems	Loneliness period	Raising children	Children's marriage

Continue Table 3

Life periods	Triple conditions of the seventh sample			Triple conditions of the eighth sample		
	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions
First period	-	-	Having little children	Financial problems and needing affection	-	-
Second period	Working	-	-	Financial and emotional problems	-	Taking divorce and becoming alone again
Third period	-	Emotional vacuum period	-	-	-	-
Periods of life after death of husband	First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third
	Having little children	Working	Emotional vacuum	Remarriage	Taking divorce and becoming alone	Emotional and financial problems
Life periods	Triple conditions of the ninth sample					
	Contextual conditions	Causer conditions	Deterrent conditions			
First period	-	-	Crisis of fear			
Second period	Life problems	Life problems	-			
Third period	-	Emotional vacuum	-			
Periods of life after death of husband	First	Second	Third			
Loneliness period	Crisis of fear	Life problems	Emotional vacuum			

Given that in the present study, the researcher used a combination of narrative studies and thematic analysis, she passes up the analysis of each narrative separately and is satisfied with the final structural analysis. The structural analyses of samples are summarized in Table 4 below.

Therefore, taken together the similarities between samples as shown in table 4, an overall process in lives of female heads of household can be seen that is shown by structural elements of narratives. In the first stage, all women first for some time experience being heads of household as well as widowhood that takes different time for each of them. In these periods, women are thinking about how to take new responsibilities and its difficulties and do not ever think to remarry. In the second stage, which these women encountered with new responsibilities and try to comply with them,

their family and their children are everything they have so they are afraid of losing them. In the third stage, the conditions of life become in a way that situations are provided for deciding to marry again; the reaction of women to this situation can be different in ways which were discussed above. on one hand their problems tend them to remarry on the other hand social and cultural constraints are deterrent factors, in this regard women go forward to the next step which is patience and dedication so they try to forget their desires and needs and keep others satisfied from themselves and become the family hero, but they still feel the emptiness created by the absence of a husband and try to forget it by taking different responsibilities such as educating and taking job and ..., so solve somehow the problem of their loneliness. Here their feeling of success is because they were

able to sacrifice themselves in order to have their significant relatives beside themselves as well as to protect their children from being hurt. Finally, in the final stage the power of these pressures is to the extent that with all

interest and need they tell in their narratives, they have to accept widowhood and they are looking for an alternative for a husband who does not exist and proceed in the process of self-discovery.

**Table 4** *The narrative levels of the process of tending to remarry among female heads of household and its barriers*

Plots that form the narrative of female heads of household's remarriage	Structural elements of narrative
Confusion caused by accepting new responsibility and not thinking to remarriage	Income of narrative: the beginning of householders and widowhood
Fear of losing their children and family	Introduction of narrative: dealing with new responsibilities and adapting to them
Socio-cultural constraints caused by the social environment	Critical action: mechanism of deciding to remarry
The female head tries to become a champion of family	Narrative assessment: dedication to support family members
A sense of accomplishment comes from devotion to family	Engaging in side-responsibilities
Self-discovery	Ending: Accepting widowhood and finding alternatives

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### Contribution

Study design: BA, ME

Data collection and analysis: ME

Manuscript preparation: BA

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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