

Research Paper

The Hidden Side of Students' Marriage at an Iranian University: A Qualitative Study of Achievements and Barriers



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ABSTRACT

Background: The celebration of university students' marriage ceremonies in Iran nearly dates back three decades, but its positive and negative aspects require further reconsideration. This study is intended to explore those aspects in the words of university students who married during their studies at the university.

Methods: In this qualitative study, a qualitative content analysis method was used to evaluate the experiences and perceptions of students. Sixteen university students (8 couples) were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed at Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Iran, in 2016. The participants, who were newly-wed couples with an age range of 18 to 28 years, attended a semi-structured in-depth interview.

Results: The analyzed data emerged as four major categories (and eleven subcategories), including (a) inspirational and prompting factors (membership in the student unions, enhanced opportunity to know peers, attitude change towards marriage on the campus, and peers sharing experiences of marriage on the campus), (b) existence of supportive resources (existence of social support, and existence of economic support for marriage on the campus), (c) barriers and failing marriages (barriers against marriage on the campus and causes of failure), and (d) achievements in marital life (social maturation, enhancing life goals, and maturational development in the married life).

Conclusion: University students' marriage on campus offers couples a successful married life in the future. Social maturation and development in married life are the fruit of such marriages; however, economic problems and low social and family support are still among the concerns for university students wishing to marry at the university.

Keywords: Marital adjustment, Marriage, Student couples, University students

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1. Introduction

In the early Islamic tradition, marriage was recommended at age fifteen for boys and age nine for girls, around the approximate puberty age for the Muslim community over 1400 years ago. Although this is still practiced in some Arab cultures, modern Muslim communities have their demands [1]. In a modern Islamic community like Iran, children grow quite differently and get integrated into society at almost the university age (from age 18 to their 30s) [2, 3]. Despite sticking to the Islamic rules, there are university students who find their spouse on campus, in compliance with both the Islamic culture and the demands of their academic environment [4]. Iranian universities even propagate the culture by offering pre-marriage counseling services and holding annual celebrations for newly-wed couples with gifts and small loans to help them start their family [5].

In contrast, there may be a minority, who avoid taking the initiative to ask for the hand of a classmate or schoolmate in marriage; they have quite logical reasons and they believe that a solid financial backbone and permanent employment are required before marriage [6]. This is because the economic situation of the country does not permit marriage immediately after graduation as most people must work for a few years to save up; often these young job seekers wait for an arranged marriage, traditionally practiced by mediating the families [7].

These two perspectives may entail two types of couples: (1) cooperative couples who start their married life while still being university students and tolerate a double burden of life and study; and (2) perfectionist couples who do not marry until they graduate, and find a job to support their married life at a later age. However, both perspectives may be true on their terms. The former believes that the couple can start a simple life so that they gain solace during their studentship; they can also do part-time jobs together to build their life gradually and bit by bit. Their families often assist them in managing the wedding and living expenses until they find permanent jobs; they may follow their education at graduate or postgraduate levels too, but this will take significant time [8]. In contrast, perfectionist students keep on studying (usually to the highest possible levels) and wait for marriage until they end up in an almost safe and regularly-paid job; their families also have the same opinion. Although this is not investigated, the experiences of the authors suggest that these people often do spend rather than save enough money as expected. The difference is

that the former group has the chance to enrich and fortify their common life during the early years, develop mental health, avoid sexual abuse, raise children, and enjoy a real happy life simultaneously with their university education. The latter find their goal solely in education but they start their family much later, may face many social hassles during their youth, and may meet the generation gap in training their children too [1, 9, 10].

In the contemporary Iranian community, fast, widespread, and considerable changes have occurred, among which is the decline in the rate of marriage, lowered marrying age, booming rate of divorce and separation, and solo living, all with dire consequences [11]. However, the university atmosphere provides a unique setting for incepting marriage where group ceremonies are celebrated for student couples for popularizing the marriage as well. One basic goal in planning such group celebrations is said to be encouraging university students to get married by facilitating and preparing for marriage, lowering the costs and pruning extras, and prompting couples to adopt simplicity in marriage ceremonies. By developing its quantitative and qualitative aspects, this national plan is now gaining momentum among university students. There are pros and cons [4], but the positive and negative aspects of the plan still require further investigation.

The final goal in marriage may be conceived to be the formation of a healthy, sustainable and convergent family, and directing couples toward happy mental health. If marrying on campus is associated with disadvantages, achieving those great goals may appear unattainable.

To meet this end, a qualitative study can reflect the experiences and stories of the former group with valuable insights. In other words, instead of listing several advantages or disadvantages of either perspective, this qualitative study will shed light on understanding and propagating this rich experience; the model may apply in similar contexts too. Therefore, this article is a qualitative study of couples who simultaneously studied and married on the same campus and explores their lived experiences at Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Iran.

2. Methods

Participants

This qualitative study was conducted by conventional content analysis. Participants were couples who simultaneously studied and married at Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Iran. First, a list of would-

be participants was obtained from the university registrar's office with details of age, major, phone numbers, e-mails, etc. The participants were purposively recruited. The inclusion criteria dictated that the participants had passed at least two semesters at the university, six months had passed their marriage, voluntarily attended the interviews, and wished to share their experiences verbally. Variety was sought from the participants and they were invited to the interviews via official letters. The interviews were arranged at the most convenient time for the couples; however, all interviews were done at the same office with the least possible noise and interruptions. Also, their commuting to the faculty and back was controlled by the university transportation system so that it interferes less with their classes or field training. The number of participants was determined at the point of saturation where almost the same themes came to be repeated by the participants and almost no new ideas seemed to appear [12, 13]. In sum, 16 participants (eight couples) were interviewed with semi-structured interview questions. Their age ranged from 18 to 28 years (Table 1).

Interviews

The interviews took from 30 to 60 minutes (average 45 minutes) and all were conducted by the first author. The setting was calm and noise-free; the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. To get the richest answers, the interviews were conducted in Persian (i.e., the Iranian formal language nationwide), and the participants were allowed to review the printed questions for a couple of minutes before the interview was recorded. To minimize the effects of stress, each couple was free to choose who (either the husband or the wife) comes first to the interview room; however, there was no lapse of time between each couple's interview.

Interview questions

The interviews started with warm-up questions and gap fillers, as is customary in Iranian culture. Some initiating questions were how did you select your spouse? What criteria did you have in mind? Did you think about marriage before admission to the university? How about traditional marriage? Can you compare them? What reactions did you get from family and people around you? Do you find it a successful experience? The questions were open-ended and the interviewer followed each question with another probing question to help the participants provide further details, e.g. Can you explain more about that? What do you exactly mean? Can you give examples for that?

Interview analysis

The audio files of the interviews were saved onto a computer; the authors listened to the contents of the files and discussed the main points. Audio files were transcribed verbatim onto Microsoft Word files, checked and re-checked for accuracy, and then summarized and analyzed by conventional content analysis, which relies on a subjective interpretation of written texts. Regular categorization, codes, and themes are associated with this method. Content analysis is beyond extracting objective textual data, where hidden themes and patterns can be explored from among the participants' verbal protocols [14]. Having listened to the audio files and getting immersed in the contents for days, the researchers found a general portrayal of a provisional model; themes were extracted, key ideas were highlighted, and various codes were categorized based on their interrelationships. To enhance the data validity, multiple strategies were applied: expert judgments were sought for the revision of the codes and categories; primary codes were returned to the participants for revision and approval; also, experts in qualitative research were consulted about the resulting codes.

3. Results

The participants of this qualitative study were couples who simultaneously studied and married at Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Iran. The number of participants was determined at the point of saturation [12, 13]. Altogether, 16 participants (eight couples) were interviewed with semi-structured interview questions. Their age ranged from 18 to 28 years; their average age was 23 years (Table 1).

After data analysis, 520 codes were extracted into 4 main categories and 11 subcategories (Table 2). The main categories included (1) inspirational and prompting factors, (2) the existence of supportive resources, (3) barriers and failing marriages, and (4) achievements in marital life.

Inspirational and prompting factors

This category emerged into four subcategories: (1) membership in the student unions, (2) enhanced opportunity to know peers, (3) attitude change toward marriage on the campus, and (4) peers sharing experiences of marriage on the campus.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Couples	Row	Age	Gender	Major
1	1	18	Female	Nursing
	2	23	Male	Nursing
2	3	23	Female	Medicine
	4	25	Male	Medicine
3	5	21	Female	Medicine
	6	24	Male	Medicine
4	7	22	Female	Environmental health
	8	23	Male	Environmental health
5	9	24	Female	Medicine
	10	28	Male	Medicine
6	11	23	Female	Midwifery
	12	25	Male	Operating room
7	13	22	Female	Medicine
	14	24	Male	Medicine
8	15	20	Female	Midwifery
	16	23	Male	Public health



Membership in the student unions

Involvement in student unions is one of the inspirational factors in university marriages, which often leads to knowing one's partner from behavioral, ethical, and emotional perspectives. The unions include the Red Crescent, Leadership, and the Islamic Society. Upon mutual attraction, one can keep an eye on the actions and reactions of the beloved one, and compare the output with one's mental image of an ideal half. The following statement openly indicates one's supervision of a specific person involved in the student's union, to whom he is attracted:

"Our familiarity occurred mostly in the leadership union, in a religious ceremony, and also in a series of sessions, she used to attend sessions, ... I saw her behavior and actions, and compared them with my criteria, she matched most of my criteria..." (Male participant 6).

Enhanced opportunity to know peers

University marriages start to happen in places where students frequently attend and interact with each other, including informal classes. The team works before, during, and after classes, and preparation for academic assignments and presentations provides them with opportunities to get to know one another. Also, students of medical sciences find this issue more alluring in clinical training where small groups of both genders interact with each other in six-hour shifts. Such opportunities are created in situations leading to further recognition of one's interests, tastes, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as sensitivity to moral and behavioral issues. One participant puts her experience this way:

"...well, we became familiar at university, indeed we were classmates, but were not friends before we married, we had no relationships, but we observed the behavior of each other in the classes we had ..." (Female Participant 7)

Table 2. Categories and subcategories of the formation of marriage on the university campus

Categories	Subcategories	Further Subcategories	
Inspirational and prompting factors	Membership in the students' unions	Involvement in students' unions	
		Involvement in leadership unions	
	Enhanced opportunity to know peers	Involvement in the Red Crescent and the Islamic Society	
		Getting to know peers in classes and field training	
		Keeping an eye on one another's behavior before marrying	
	Attitude changes toward marriage on the campus	Negative attitude toward marriage before admission to the university	
		Partner's behavior and manners leading to attitude change	
		Attitude changes in the cordial academic environment	
	Peers sharing experiences of marriage on the campus	The role of religious beliefs	
		The multiplicity of choices at the university	
The experiences of senior married couples			
Existence of supportive resources	Existence of social support	The experiences of married classmates	
		The experiences of married couples from other majors	
		The effect of the leadership union	
		Mediation of some university professors	
		Mediation of classmates and friends	
	Existence of economic support	Parents' psychosocial support	
		Financial support to families	
		Student loans at the university	
		Income from part-time employment	
		Partners' uncommitted relationships	
Barriers and failing marriages	Barriers against marriage on the campus	Inability to tolerate economic hardships	
		Families' disagreement	
		Lack of psychosocial support by families	
	Causes of failure	Marrying in the first year of education	
		Marrying despite families' disagreement	
		Incongruity in religious, financial, and cultural aspects	
		Low familiarity with each other's interests and beliefs	
		Social maturation	Mutual understanding
			Developing social relationships
			Formation of commitment and responsibility
Enhancing life goals	Educational synergism		
	Planning and creating common goals		
	Acquiring further peace of mind in marriage		
Maturational development	Feeling happy		
	Independence and financial achievements		
	Complementing one another's defects and limitations		
		Developing life skills	



Attitude change toward marriage on the campus

The participants' experiences suggested that their attitude toward marriage before university admission had not been positive, and was associated with a disappointing perspective because they had erroneously attributed such marriages to transient crushes ending in failing marriages. Also, they felt that due to inefficient economic conditions and less stabilized situations, managing such relations seemed to be almost impossible. However, becoming a university student, with some maturational changes, provided an atmosphere in which they started to show interest in the opposite sex and their behavior and manners, leading to change in their worldviews. Additionally, limitless friendship opportunities led participants to a positive attitude toward marriage at the university. Religious attitudes and sensitivity to specifically discovering one's better half contributed to the development of such changes in attitude. One participant, for example, provided the statement below:

"Before admission, I never thought about marrying here at the university, but a while passed and in classes, in IT courses, something developed in our mind, and my wife now had a place in my feelings and thoughts, I felt I needed to change that attitude, and start to think about marriage... What attracted me was his modest behavior, gentle look, and attitude, ...these all caught my attention..." (Female Participant 5)

Peers sharing experiences of marriage on the campus

Most participants believed that some factors facilitated or even prompted their intention of marrying at a university, which may be listed as sharing the success stories of marriages by senior students, modeling classmates and seniors, attending group celebrations of students' marriages, and witnessing successful marriages at the campus. For instance, the following statement reflects sharing such an experience:

"This classmate had already married but financially he was not so strong, but he trusted God who says your share of the world is with me.... perhaps I did not dare to, venture to marry if he was not on my way and if he did not share his experiences..." (Male participant 4)

Existence of supportive resources

This category included two subcategories: (1) the existence of social support, and (2) the existence of economic support for marriage on the campus.

Existence of social support

The participants thought that social support was required in the formation of university marriages. Their experiences highlighted the effect of the leadership union on university marriages since students referred to this union as clients for pre-marriage counseling, mediation in marriage, creating a safe place for further advice, talking to their families, and many other roles. Also, the role of some professors in mediating and helping marriage shape was emphasized by some participants. In these cases, professors acted as advisors too. Some, however, preferred to ask classmates for mediation, but almost all of them considered the fostering role of their parents as the main support in university marriage. For instance, the following statement reflects the decisive role of parents in marriage:

"I did not know him at all, at the beginning I noticed his frequent visits to the leadership union, he talked to the chief and negotiated with me, asked me for my parents' phone numbers, and called them personally, he talked to my parents ..." (Female Participant 3)

Existence of economic support

The experiences of the participants reflected the fact that financial and economic resources were the most important concerns of the couples at the beginning. The financial support of the families in providing dowry and renting an apartment was of higher priority, especially if the men had not already passed their obligatory military service, and their employment status was undetermined after graduation. Some participants also had the imagination of economic independence after graduation. A male participant described his current situation as follows:

"We are supported by our families, I receive more money from my father, he provides me with more money than my siblings..." (Male Participant 2)

In addition to family support, other resources such as university loans, scholarships, mortgage loans, and other options are available for university students, being effective specifically for newly-wed couples. Opportunities for part-time work at the university are lucrative too. A female participant felt that these are supportive:

"These facilities at the university can even support our lives with no need for family support; loans for housing and basic life support can support a simple life at the beginning..." (Female Participant 1)

Barriers and failing marriages

This category emerged as two subcategories: (1) barriers against marriage on the campus and (2) causes of failure.

Barriers against marriage at the campus

Barriers against marriages at the university are described by the participants; among these, one main barrier seems to be the threat of uncommitted relationships with no intention of getting married. They mainly complain of procrastinated promises to marry in the upcoming years of education, often leading to separation, broken relationships, disrespect, family disagreement, etc. One participant described the problem as follows:

"After a long time, they will play roles for one another, you want to keep her aligned and attracted, and you reflect some characteristics to attract her and make her happy, these are not your innate character, this is not your real personality ..." (Male Participant 12)

The inability to manage economic problems was also among the emerging obstacles, especially for those raised in high-income families and those who would not anticipate economic stability shortly. For example, the statement below describes such a situation:

"If I see the girl is not accustomed to terrible economic conditions, for example, she is likely to spend a lot of money, or needs very special conditions, very fantastic trips ... I would never recommend marrying at university for them..." (Female Participant 13)

Families' disagreement was another barrier to successful marriage at the university. Families expect their children to marry after their graduation so that the marriage does not hamper their educational achievements (particularly if they studied medicine). Additionally, marrying at a young age for less mature boys and girls, the existence of financial problems, housing issues, the military service obligation for boys, long years of education, and unspecified future employment were among the concerns put forward by the participants in their interviews. Some of these barriers, they extended, can be overcome by insisting on one's intention, convincing parents by proving their capabilities, and eventually obtaining their approval.

"My family said at the beginning that it is early to marry, they said you must study for your degree and you should pass your military service too..." (Male Participant 10)

Causes of failure

Participants believed that the academic environment was different from that of the high school or college; they had fewer limitations and were likely to have emotionally affected choices. Breaking up the relationships became likely if the duration of the relationship with no commitment was longer, and also worsened if economic problems arose. More importantly, the incongruity of values regarding culture, religion, and financial resources affected the success of the marriage.

"They became friends by a simple acquaintance, and got married soon, they had no similarity in manners or behavior, they were from different majors and did not match by religion or attitudes, we saw their marriage ended soon..." (Female Participant 9)

Achievements in marital life

Subcategories emerging from this category included (1) social maturation, (2) enhancing life goals, and (3) maturational development in married life.

Social maturation

One major accomplishment in university marriage was stated to be the couple's social maturation. They contended that mutual understanding grew because of fewer age differences, similar majors, and empathy. University marriage helps them develop family relations with the parents and siblings of one's spouse and raises responsibility and mutual commitment.

"Since we were in a close age range, we almost understand one another, with much fewer cases of misunderstanding, we're responsible for our commitments, and never blame the other..." (Female Participant 15)

Enhancing life goals

An achievement in university marriage is an educational breakthrough for couples. Their experiences showed a synergistic effect resulting from joint educational activities; they felt they spent more time studying their lessons, avoiding the wastage of time in fruitless interactions with less committed peers, and allocated more time to their progress. For these couples, more time is left for planning and investing in their common interests. One participant shared her experience as follows:

"He helps me with studies and assignments, he finds books and prepares classroom notes from his friends, we have competitive attitudes and try to take over each other in studying, so we improve day by day to see better results, this is effective, we try more and more, it also has effects on our routine life too, we now dare to take part in most social activities too..." (Female Participant 7)

Peace of mind and tranquility enhance in university marriages, a sense of happiness and complacency appears, and economic independence is approached with more effort. They start small money-making activities and try more and more to get independent from their parents and tend to support their own newly-founded family.

"In our major, we can make money from the second year on, I was doing errands for EMS for a couple of years and earned some money to buy a fridge, an oven, and other things, and some gold too for my wife, I supported other costs too, picnics and clothing and so on.... I felt really independent..." (Male Participant 6)

Maturational development

The participants expressed their experiences in complementing one another's defects and limitations in their married life. Learning from each other contributed to the fill-in and fortified weaknesses in their personality. In addition, life skills develop gradually and help them control their anger and stress, and develop cordiality between the couple and their respective families to achieve the optimal goals in this joint journey of happiness. One participant expressed her experiences as follows:

"What seemed highlighted for me after marriage was a wider scope and vision I gained about my society, politics, culture, etc. Before that, I had some beliefs too, about religion, praying, fasting, etc. It opened my eyes to a bigger world, very effective, before that I had no concern for the things around me, but now my husband helps me understand what goes on around me..." (Female Participant 5)

4. Discussion

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of couples who simultaneously studied and married while on campus at Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Iran. After content analysis, the main categories emerging from the data included (1) inspirational and prompting factors, (2) the existence of supportive resources, (3) barriers and failing marriages, and (4) achievements in marital life. The results, in brief,

showed that studying at the university provides an opportunity for marriage, with some social and economic support from the university. Barriers leading to the failure of marriage at the university included the inability to tolerate financial hardships, families' disagreement, lack of financial and psychosocial support, marriage in the first year of education, marriage despite families' disagreement, religious and cultural incongruity, and less familiarity with one another's characteristics. Also, the results revealed some achievements for this type of marriage, including social maturation, enhanced educational breakthroughs, and evolution in marital life.

Among the most effective inspirational and prompting factors paving the way for university marriage are involvement in student unions, interaction with peers at the university, joining social events, and sharing stories and experiences by successful couples, which altogether help enrich their motivation to marry. Getting to know peers from cultural, religious, economic, familial, and social perspectives also prepares them for blissful marriages. In some studies, higher degrees of satisfaction are observed in student couples who prioritized early marriages, chose spouses from almost the same religious and sociocultural levels, had some knowledge about their characteristics, or had chosen their spouses personally with less traditional orientations, and had personal housing facilities [15]. Also, another study showed that socioeconomic, educational, religious, and emotional congruity together with reasonable age differences can all enhance marriage adjustment and satisfaction [16].

Another study has also stressed the role of prior knowledge of couples' characteristics in the success of university marriage and considered this knowledge as a sustaining factor in conjugal life; however, factors leading to breakups include hidden aspects such as personality and mental problems and family disparity conflicts [6]. It is also reported that couples married at a university in comparison with couples with mismatching educational levels reported higher satisfaction rates. Similarly, this satisfaction is also associated with the couple's attitude toward their marital life, their mentality, and mindset; mismatching mentalities and disagreement between husband and wife can create irritability and disturb the tranquility in a family.

The results of this study also emphasized the role of social support - the second main category - in the university, which agrees with Ghanimati and Mahdavi, and Gold, who showed that the supportive role of universities and higher education institutes are conducive to positive adjustment, goal achievement, and survival in

the social and personal systems [17, 18]. In this study, the social and economic supporting resources constituted the dimensions, which facilitated marriage; social support resources included the unions, the mediation of professors, classmates, and friends, as well as the psychosocial support of parents. In addition, the economic support came from family support, university loans, and part-time jobs. Economic status is by far among the major factors affecting the success of marriages, and most previous studies have already discussed the role of economic support [19, 20]. Dire consequences may come from bad economic conditions, and most partners involved in such situations often avoid marriage commitments [21]. This would be aggravated if their families also avoid bearing responsibility for financially supporting the newly married couples. Economic problems at the beginning appear undefeatable for the couples, especially if they are still students and have no regular income. Normally, in a traditionally masculine society, only men are considered responsible for financially supporting a newly-founded family [4].

After marriage, student couples will encounter other crises such as renting or buying an apartment [22, 23], which turns marriage into an apprehensive experience for them. Also, employment is another serious concern for them [24]. Studies also report other obstacles such as dowry, military service obligations, and employment for men [25], which are consistent with the present study findings.

The third main category emerging from data analysis was barriers and the fear of failing marriages. For example, developing relationships with no intention of marrying (which may lead to sexual exploitation and severe emotional collapses), loss of chastity, inability to tolerate bad economic conditions, families' disagreement, and lack of financial and psychosocial support emerged as barriers against successful marriages from the interviews of participants in this study. Families sometimes disapprove of university marriage and, in most cases, disagree with conditions such as military service obligations, sociocultural disparities, unemployment, economic instability, and incongruity of families, as well as socioeconomic and religious status; these are all conditions causing disappointment for families. However, stressful reactions to cultural differences and their likelihood to impair marital success are causes of concern [21], which conform to the findings of this study.

The decision to marry as a first-year student, marriage despite families' disagreement, cultural and socioeconomic incongruity, religious divergence, and ignorance of one another's characteristics caused failure in university marriage, which were also described in a study by Banijamali et al. reporting marriage at a younger age, poverty, lower educational levels, low income, undue intrusiveness, the experience of parents' divorce, and financial dependence as leading threats in marital failure [26].

Achievements in marital life were the fourth category in the emerging model. Probably, marital satisfaction is the main achievement of a blissful life. Khodayarifard et al. researched religiosity and marital satisfaction and found a relationship between these variables. A significant relationship is also reported between spirituality and marital satisfaction [27, 28] and between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction [26, 29]. Mutual understanding and a positive attitude can also have supportive effects. However, longer lapses between marriage and a couple's independence from their parents can impose negative impacts on the success of this holy treaty, which is also reported in Mazaheeri et al's study [4]. Among the positive outcomes of university marriage, educational achievements, social maturation, academic breakthroughs, and evolution in marital life were described by the participants. Our findings are in line with another study focusing on the adaptability skills of couples [4]. Often creativity can complement educational achievements with achievements in real life by exposure to money-making skills and finding ways to survive during the early stages of marriage; educational achievements help them develop a sense of concentration on tasks to cope with emotional and physical stress [30].

5. Conclusion

The results of this study led to the exploration of the positive and negative aspects of marrying while the couple is on campus. The results also showed that being a university student provides an opportunity to get to know peers of both sexes and that marrying on campus is associated with some socioeconomic support. Among the achievements of such marriages are social maturation, educational progress, and evolution in conjugal life. Also, this study indicated that marrying in the first year of university education, lack of support from families and their disapproval of their marriage, the incongruity of the couple in sociocultural, financial, and religious aspects, and low familiarity with each other's interests and mentality can lead to the failure of marriage at the

university. Also, much stress comes from economic and housing problems, military service for men, and an unforeseeable employment future. Similarly, earlier research shows that lasting marital satisfaction depends on the similarity among a couple's values, culture, religion, personality traits, and economic status [31].

This study provided us with an insight into the success and fears of failing marriages of couples who simultaneously studied and married while on campus at an Iranian university. The focus on university marriages also illuminates the fact that this is different from the traditionally arranged marriage on the one hand, and other types of marriage in other settings (i.e., white marriage, campus marriage, etc.). The findings and the emerging model were rich in portraying dimensions of the phenomenon we studied qualitatively; however, conducting a quantitative study based on our findings is suggested for further research. In addition, it must be reminded that, eventually, the nature of a relationship might change during the years after marriage to take on newer meanings [21]. Therefore, longitudinal studies swelling on the outcomes of such marriages may be desirable. Maybe couples start to learn to enjoy life by starting a family and raising children, which was not dealt with in this study. The findings may be useful for family counselors and planners to consider intervention programs on their journey to lasting marriages [32].

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

The research proposal (Code: IR.MEDSAB.REC.1394.45) was submitted to the Research Committee of Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Iran, and approved in 2016 (ID: 94173).

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Authors' contributions

All authors equally contributed to preparing this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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