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Future Studies on Policies to Increase the Total Fertility Rate in Iran using Scenario Methodology

Rahim Khodayari Zarnagh[1*], Sanaz Borzoeipour[2], Mahtab Nikpour Dehkordi[2]

[1]Department of Health Policy and Management, School of Management and Medical Informatics Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran
[2]Student Research Committee, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

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***Corresponding Author:**
Dept. of Health Policy and Management, School of Management and Medical Informatics Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Population and related discussions are among the complexities of human societies and constitute one of the most important economic and social components of any planning and policymaking process worldwide. Population policies, which are subject to change, play a crucial role in the economic and social development of society. The total fertility rate is one of the most significant indicators of demography. Given the declining trend of this rate below the replacement level, there is an urgent need to adopt effective and efficient policies. Therefore, this study explores the future of policies aimed at increasing the fertility rate through scenario writing methods. By providing a clear and comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape the future, this research assists policymakers in designing efficient and effective interventions to enhance the fertility rate.

Methods and Materials: This study represents a form of future research that employs approach with a 10-year horizon. The scenario writing process consisted of two main components: the first component involved identifying scenario logic through five initial steps, including focal issues, key factors, external ends, critical uncertainties, and scenario logic. The second component, which included secondary steps such as scenarios, implications, and options, concentrated on developing the actual narrative, solutions, and policy options for the scenarios.

Results: Six main categories identified a total of 106 drivers. Most drivers belonged to the social category, whereas the technology category had the fewest drivers. After eliminating less essential factors, validating trends, and categorizing key uncertainties, we selected four scenarios based on critical uncertainties (social and political developments and economic situation), which significantly impacted the future fertility rate. We ultimately determined future scenarios of the fertility rate using the Cross-Impact Matrix and the Scenario Wizard software, identifying desirable scenarios. We listed various scenarios based on the index score of the total impacts and the inconsistency coefficient. We wrote a related story and narrative for each scenario and selected a relevant and appropriate name.

Conclusion and Discussion: According to the findings of the current study, social, technological, environmental, economic, political, and health factors significantly impact fertility. Additionally, key drivers within each category were identified and discussed, which have been corroborated by various studies worldwide. The primary factors contributing to the decline in fertility rates include the increase in women's education levels and employment opportunities, which should be carefully considered in policymaking. Government policies that support women's education and employment—such as extending parental leave, enhancing maternity leave, and providing financial incentives—should also aim to promote higher fertility rates.

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