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Letter to the Editor: Factors Affecting Men’s Health in Iran

Amir Biglar Beigi¹ and Karen Kow Yip Cheng¹

Dear editor,

We would like to share my concerns over the health of Iranian men with regard to religious, cultural, and societal conditions of Iranian society, which affect their physical and mental well-being. In Iran, the accepted norm dictates that men are the primary breadwinners of their families; thus, they face extreme pressure from their families to provide sustenance for their wives and children. With this in mind it is dreadful to know that the number of jobs available to men in the Iranian job market has been on the decline, and new job opportunities have been offered to women. While women have become more active in the social arenas, the patriarchal family structure make men the sole breadwinner of their families, so Iranian men are in the stressful situation of financially supporting their families. Studies have shown that the rate of heart disease is high among Iranian men, signifying that many of them suffer from poor health.

Moreover, because of the rigorous traditional gender roles governing Iranian society, more hazardous jobs in factories and mills are still performed by men. No matter in what physical conditions a man is, heavy work requiring a great deal of stamina is invariably assigned to men. Women usually take jobs demanding less hazardous physical jobs. Thus, men are prone to many injuries on such jobs. Many male workers are physically injured in Iranian factories on a daily basis. Such workers endanger their mental health as well, since notwithstanding the injury, patriarchal family beliefs governing Iranian society continue to put utmost pressure on them to support their families financially.

From a religious point of view, Islam, as the dominant religion in Iran, has several negative effects on men’s health. First, Islam encourages men to have concurrent sexual relationships, which increases their risk of HIV infection. In addition, men are not only free to marry more than one woman, but they are strongly encouraged to do so by religious leaders, which can also increase their vulnerability to one of the most dreadful infections affecting many individuals’ health: HIV/AIDS infection. This is of particular concern, considering the fact that sex education in Iran is still viewed as a taboo topic. Thus, many men are not aware of the protective benefits of using a condom while having concurrent sexual relationships. It is estimated that in the near future, in Iran, the number of HIV-positive men will greatly increase. Finally, because Islam forbids sexual relationships between men, many homosexual men are involved in hidden sexual relationships, which result in increasing the risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS among this population. There are no official figures on the number or health status of homosexual men in Iran, and their health issues are still unknown to the public.

As a result of the cultural, societal, and religious structures of Iranian society, the outlook for men’s health in Iran is not promising. The factors affecting men’s health in Iran should also be included in studies investigating men’s health in other geographical locations. Studying the impact of social, cultural, and religious conditions of various countries could potentially shed some light on the factors involved in men’s health based on geographical regions. It is hoped that more comparative studies will be conducted to contrast the social, cultural, and religious factors affecting men’s health in different countries.

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