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IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING SOCIAL HARMS AFFECTING IRANIAN CHILDREN: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract
This study identifies and prioritizes key social harms affecting Iranian children. A comprehensive analysis of these issues has not been previously conducted. Using a qualitative approach, the research employs documentary analysis and secondary data from three field sources covering 2013 to 2019. Based on reports such as *"Identification of Child Protection Priorities in Iran"* and *"Identification of Child Protection Priorities in 31 Provinces"*, twelve major issues were identified: (1) child sexual abuse, (2) general child abuse, (3) orphaned children, (4) homeless children, (5) child prostitution, (6) child labor, (7) additional abuse cases, (8) children with addicted parents, (9) lack of education, (10) children associated with prostitution, (11) stateless children and (12) malnutrition. The findings emphasize that while pathological studies are crucial, overemphasizing them may lead to a narrow understanding of children's social and cultural conditions. A balanced approach, integrating child sociology and pathology, is necessary for a more accurate and holistic perspective on children's well-being in Iran.

Keywords
Child, children's problems, children's harms, child pathology, Iranian society.

1. Introduction

Childhood is a fundamental stage of human development, shaping personality, mental capacities and even physical health, with long-term effects throughout life. Every society adopts specific policies and strategies concerning children, reflecting its cultural, social and legal foundations. In developed societies, childhood is recognized as a crucial phase for national growth, serving as a basis for education, workforce development and long-term planning.

The well-being of children is not only a reflection of individual circumstances but also an indicator of a society's broader social and developmental status. When the condition of children in a society is unclear, neglected or disconnected from historical and cultural contexts, it signals structural deficiencies at both micro and macro levels. On a micro scale, it reflects instability in child welfare and protection, while at the macro level, it indicates a lack of attention to sustainable human development, serving as a warning for policymakers and stakeholders.

In recent years, discussions surrounding children's issues and social harms in Iran have gained increasing attention. These concerns are at the center of debates among governmental, civil and academic institutions, as well as international organizations such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Public discourse has highlighted various

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pressing issues, including child labor, early marriage, sexual abuse, lack of access to education, the status of immigrant children (particularly Afghan children) and legal identity challenges (Reports of the Coordination Council of the National Authority of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Iran, 2015-2019).

Although some level of these challenges exists in every society, a key question arises: which of these issues are considered significant social harms within the Iranian context? As Durkheim (2017) suggests, a certain degree of deviance is present in every normal society. However, when social problems exceed acceptable thresholds, they become abnormal and demand intervention. Therefore, distinguishing between natural social issues and severe social harms is essential for effective policy responses.

Despite the significance of this topic, research on children's social harms in Iran remains fragmented. Existing studies are either scattered across different articles or focus on specific aspects without providing a comprehensive overview. The lack of a coherent framework hinders the ability to systematically identify and prioritize children's social harms.

Research Questions

This study aims to address the following key questions:

1. What are the major social issues and harms affecting Iranian children?
2. How frequently do Iranian children experience these social harms?
3. Which social harms are considered the most critical and require immediate attention?

The research's empirical background

Numerous studies have been conducted on children, particularly concerning their social issues and vulnerabilities. Several sources have attempted to examine the harms and challenges faced by Iranian children. One of the notable works in this area is Postman (1982), who explores the role of media in shaping childhood experiences in *The Disappearance of Childhood*. Additionally, research such as Karimi and Rahmani (2020) investigates how children's social harms are represented in Iranian social documentaries post-Islamic Revolution, providing valuable insights into the portrayal of these issues in media.

Other works, including Shahbazi and Hosseini (2019), offer a more pathological perspective on childhood issues in Iran, presenting scattered studies rather than a comprehensive, unified approach. Research conducted by Ghasemi and Ahmadi (2021) further discusses child labor, domestic violence and the effects of divorce on children, mostly focusing on working children, immigrant children and those deprived of education. These studies are often published in fragmented articles rather than as systematic analyses of Iranian children's problems.

Despite these valuable contributions, a comprehensive, data-driven study that systematically identifies and prioritizes social problems affecting Iranian children is still lacking. No research has holistically examined children's issues within Iranian society without pre-existing assumptions about what constitutes a problem. This gap highlights the need for a grounded approach based on the social and cultural realities of Iranian society. Therefore, this study aims to provide a coherent framework for identifying and categorizing social harms specific to Iranian children. By doing so, it seeks to inform policymakers and researchers about localized issues that require urgent attention.

Conceptual Basis of Research

Child:

Defining childhood and determining its age range is crucial, as it not only identifies the target group but also influences legal frameworks and child rights policies. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, Article 1), a child is defined as any human being under the age of 18. This definition is widely accepted internationally, with childhood spanning from birth to just before turning 18.

In Iranian society, influenced by both legal and Islamic frameworks, a child is considered any human from conception until before the age of 18. This period includes three main stages:

1. **Embryonic stage (fetal period)**
2. **Infancy**
3. **Adolescence**

These three stages collectively contrast with adulthood and each has distinct yet interconnected rights. In general, childhood is characterized by the absence of serious legal responsibility, the need for support and legal leniency (Alizadeh & Hosseini, 2021). The milestones of birth and puberty are key transition points within childhood, dividing it into different developmental stages (Shaban, 2010). However, modern studies emphasize that childhood is not merely a biological phase but a social construct influenced by cultural, political and economic factors (James & Prout, 2015).

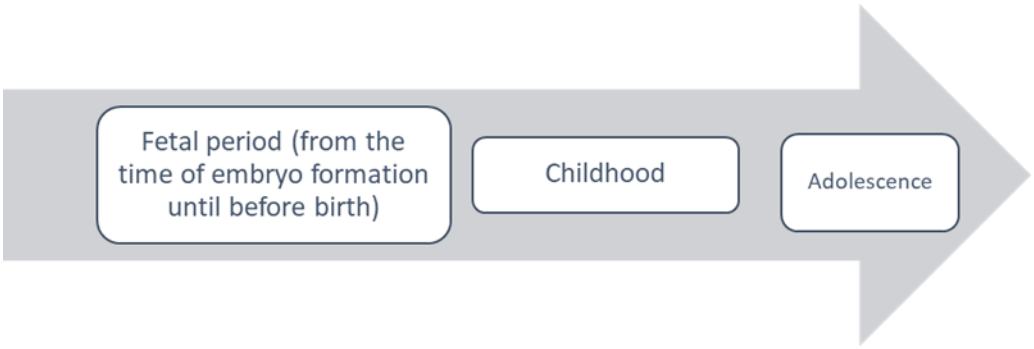


Chart 1. Stages of childhood in Iranian society

Social problems and harms:

Social problems are broadly defined by sociologists as situations that conflict with the values of a significant number of people, leading them to believe that corrective action is necessary (Best, 2017). From this perspective, a social problem is something that a large portion of society finds undesirable, believes should be addressed and assumes that specific individuals, organizations or institutions are responsible for resolving (Loseke, 2019).

Several sociologists argue that a phenomenon qualifies as a social problem when it meets the following four criteria (Macionis & Plummer, 2020):

1. It is perceived as problematic - society recognizes it as a challenge.
2. It is widespread - the issue affects a substantial part of the population.
3. It is changeable - solutions or interventions can improve the situation.
4. There is societal will to change it - people demand action.

Sociologists classify social problems into two categories:

- Deviance-related issues, which arise from the incompatibility of individuals with dominant social norms (Giddens *et al*., 2021).
- Structural social problems, which stem from societal institutions themselves, such as poverty, inequality or systemic discrimination (Best, 2017).

Social Harms:

Social harm refers to any form of individual or collective action that violates the moral principles and formal or informal norms of society, often resulting in legal prohibitions or social disapproval (Seddiq Sarvestani, 2016; 2019). It is broader than crime, as it includes economic, political and cultural harms that may not necessarily be illegal but negatively impact individuals or communities (Hillyard & Tombs, 2017).

2. Research Method and Materials

This study employs a qualitative research design using documentary analysis and secondary data analysis to examine social problems and harms affecting Iranian children. The methodology is structured in two key phases:

1. Source Selection:
   - A systematic review of books, articles and research reports was conducted to identify the most comprehensive and empirical studies.
   - Three key sources were selected, including two related studies from Markazi Province, which were combined due to their methodological similarities.
2. Data Analysis:
   - In Phase One, each source was analyzed individually to extract relevant data on children's issues.
   - In Phase Two, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify common themes and priority issues across sources.

Table 1. Comprehensive list of empirical field sources that cover children's issues and injuries in Iran from 2013 to 2019

No	Source	Research Method	Executioner	Year	Domain
1	Identifying child protection priorities in Iran	Combined (quantitative and qualitative)	National Authority for the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the Ministry of Justice	2013-2016	**National**
2	The report highlights the most significant child protection issues in 11 provinces, including Tehran, Mazandaran, East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Lorestan, Hamadan, Semnan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Bushehr, Fars and North Khorasan and Markazi .Province[2]	Combined (quantitative and qualitative)	Children's Rights Committee in Governorates	2017-2018	**Provincial**

[2]In 2017-18, the researcher was assigned by the National Authority for the Convention on the Rights of the Child to establish and operate the Children's Rights Committee of Markazi Province (Arak City). She was responsible for conducting a research project that focused on identifying priorities for the protection of children in Markazi Province during her one-year assignment.

3	Identifying child protection priorities in 31 provinces	Combined (quantitative and qualitative)	The National Authority for the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Ministry of Justice and the Children's Rights Committee in the Governorates	2018-2019	**National**

A qualitative content analysis approach was used, employing thematic coding to categorize findings systematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The prioritization of social harms was based on four key criteria: prevalence, severity, policy attention and cultural sensitivity (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The study aligns with international definitions of childhood (UNCRC, 1989), but also considers Iran's legal framework, which defines childhood from conception to 18 lunar years (Sajadi *et al*., 2019). This dual perspective is crucial for understanding policy implications and sociocultural dynamics.

3. Analyzing the findings of research

In the research *Identifying Child Protection Priorities in Iran*, in which the present researcher participated as an observer, the first stage involved reviewing all existing studies, including articles and books related to Iranian children and adolescents. The issues raised in these sources regarding Iranian children were extracted. Subsequently, a team of experts, with representatives from all 31 provinces, was assembled. The extracted issues were presented to these experts, who, using the Delphi method and several rounds of round-robin discussions, were tasked with refining and completing the list (Iranian National Authority for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2019). Through these discussions, the list of issues and vulnerabilities affecting children was finalized. The table below presents the finalized list under discussion.

Table 2. Injuries and issues of children in Iran

Priority	Children's groups	Priority	Children's groups
1	Children who have been sexually abused.	33	Children experiencing critical situations due to natural and man-made disasters
2	Maltreated children	34	Children with death sentences
3	Homeless children	35	Children Exposed to Violence
4	Child prostitutes	36	Children behind Bars
5	Street children	37	Children with HIV-infected parents
6	Unaccompanied children	38	Children with personality and mental disorders
7	Substance Abuse Children	39	Illegitimate children
8	Children Impacted by Addiction	40	*Children* with no *identity*
9	Out-of-*school children*	41	Children with specific diseases
10	*Children* of Female Sex Workers	42	Children with Hepatitis
11	Children who run away from home	43	Children with abandoned and sick parents
12	Children with parents who engage in sexually deviant behaviors	44	Children with physical and motor disabilities
13	Refugee and asylum seeker children	45	Children engaged in work in households

14	Criminalising children	46	Children engaged in work in workshops
15	Child-headed households	47	Children living in quasi-families
16	Beggar children	48	Parents who are not yet 18
17	Street-working children	49	Children with i*ntellectual disability*
18	Children Residing in Prison With Their Parents	50	Children who come into contact with the legal system.
19	Children who have been released from prison	51	Transgender Children
20	Trafficked children	52	Children undergoing puberty.
21	Victimized children	53	Children with sensory impairments
22	Children whose parents are in prison	54	Children from temporary Marriages
23	Children infected with HIV	55	Children who are not yet puberty-aged
24	*children who experience parental separation and divorce*	56	Children who marry under the age of 18 (forced or non-forced)
25	Children Exposed to Violence	57	Children without citizenship
26	Children who are out of school (dropouts or do not attend school)	58	Children who reside in border regions
27	Children living in vulnerable areas	59	Children who are under the guardianship of someone other than their parents
28	Children with criminal parents	60	Foreign immigrant children
29	Poor children	61	Nomadic children
30	Children with Incurable diseases	62	Ethnic minority children
31	Malnourished children	63	Religious minority children
32	Children living in deprived areas		

In the second stage of the research *Identifying Child Protection Priorities in Iran*, statistics and frequency data related to each of the 63 identified harms and issues affecting children in Iran were extracted. This phase focused on gathering information from all subordinate bodies of the three branches of government in Iran that have representatives in the Coordination Working Group of the National Authority for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as these entities hold relevant statistics and data.

Representatives from these bodies provided comprehensive national-level statistics and information concerning children. A secondary analysis of the provided data within the framework of the research plan offers insights into the status of Iranian children in relation to each identified harm and issue. The findings are presented in the table below, with averages closely reflecting the overall trends.

Table 3. Average injuries and problems of children in Iran

Priority	Children's groups	Average	Priority	Children's groups	Average
1	Children who have been sexually abused	82.85	33	Children experiencing critical situations due to natural and man-made disasters	69.85
2	Maltreated children	81.26	34	Children with death sentences	69.19

3	Homeless children	80.86	35	Children Exposed to Violence	68.92
4	Child prostitutes	80.66	36	Children behind Bars	68.73
5	Street children	79.93	37	Children with HIV-infected parents	68.56
6	Unaccompanied children	79.19	38	Children with personality and mental disorders	68.24
7	Substance Abuse Children	78.86	39	Illegitimate children	68.09
8	Children Impacted by Addiction	78.73	40	*Children* with no *identity*	67.92
9	Out-of-*school children*	77.05	41	Children with specific diseases	67.81
10	*Children* of Female Sex Workers	76.25	42	Children with Hepatitis	67.70
11	Children who run away from home	75.86	43	Children with abandoned and sick parents	67.51
12	Children with parents who engage in sexually deviant behaviors.	75.85	44	Children with physical and motor disabilities	67.23
13	Refugee and asylum seeker children	75.70	45	Children engaged in work in households	65.71
14	Criminalising children	74.69	46	Children engaged in work in workshops	65.61
15	Child-headed households	74.67	47	Children living in quasi-families	65.10
16	Beggar children	74.46	48	Parents who are not yet 18	64.61
17	Street-working children	74.26	49	Children with i*ntellectual disability*	63.63
18	Children Residing in Prison With Their Parents	73.54	50	Children who come into contact with the legal system.	63.30
19	Children who have been released from prison	73.33	51	Transgender Children	63.04
20	Trafficked children	72.48	52	Children undergoing puberty.	62.24
21	Victimized children	72.43	53	Children with sensory impairments	61.55
22	Children whose parents are in prison	72.29	54	Children from temporary Marriages	60.73
23	Children infected with HIV	72.29	55	Children who are not yet puberty-aged	60.57
24	*children who experience parental separation and divorce*	72.12	56	Children who marry under the age of 18 (forced or non-forced)	60.25
25	Children Exposed to Violence	71.44	57	Children without citizenship	58.26
26	Children who are out of school (dropouts or do not attend school)	71.36	58	Children who reside in border regions	58.04
27	Children living in vulnerable areas	71.12	59	Children who are under the	56.89

				guardianship of someone other than their parents	
28	Children with criminal parents	70.99	60	Foreign immigrant children	53.32
29	Poor children	70.51	61	Nomadic children	50.99
30	Children with Incurable diseases	70.32	62	Ethnic minority children	44.80
31	Malnourished children	70.07	63	Religious minority children	42.51
32	Children living in deprived areas	70.07			

As indicated in the table above, approximately 10% of the identified issues have an average score of 50, while the remaining 90% have an average of 60 or higher. This suggests that the challenges and harms faced by children in Iran are extensive, making prioritization a complex task.

In the next phase of the research, based on the study *Identifying Child Protection Priorities in 11 Provinces of Iran*, the list of identified issues was presented to the Child Rights Committees within the Women and Family Affairs Offices of the provincial governors. These offices were required to collect and report statistical data and relevant information regarding each issue within their respective provinces. This stage of the research aimed to provide a more localized and precise assessment of children's issues compared to the previous national-level analysis.

Selection Criteria for Provinces

The selection of the 11 provinces - Tehran, Mazandaran, East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Lorestan, Hamedan, Semnan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Bushehr, Fars and North Khorasan - was influenced by factors such as underdevelopment rankings, geographical location and ethnic diversity. The ranking of underdevelopment was determined based on national research analyzing economic, social, cultural and health indicators. This analysis identified Sistan and Baluchestan as the most underdeveloped province, while Tehran/Alborz was classified as the most developed. The study included 11 provinces that were randomly selected from lists of both developed and underdeveloped regions.

To ensure a representative sample, the proportion of individuals under the age of 18 from 2011 to 2016 was used to determine each province’s share in the study. The statistical findings provide an overview of the prevalence and severity of identified issues and harms affecting children across the selected provinces.

Table 4. Average injuries and problems of children in 11 provinces

No	Children’sGroup	Average										
		North Khorasan	Fars	Bushehr	Sistan and Baluchestan	Semnan	Hamadan	Lorestan	Kurdistan	East Azerbaijan	Mazandaran	Tehran
1	Children who have been sexually abused.	88.27	83.03	82.28	75.58	89.50	66.67	86.59	72.63	88.89	86.96	85.42
2	Child Abuse and Neglect	83.27	85.64	81.68	80.42	71.50	83.73	77.73	89.37	86.67	75.26	78.47
3	Homeless Children	80.88	84.41	78.28	79.68	83.33	65.47	87.27	84.89	82.22	83.74	78.85

4	Child prostitutes	88.62	81.33	78.12	73.05	90.67	54.67	84.77	78.16	86.67	88.83	80.97
5	Street Children	78.65	82.54	77.92	74.84	75.50	80.53	78.86	82.63	76.11	83.70	80.17
6	Unaccompanied children	82.00	85.79	72.60	86.37	71.67	80.93	78.86	78.53	75.00	74.30	77.48
7	Substance Abuse Children	86.15	77.72	75.80	71.42	89.50	54.73	82.27	76.32	90.00	88.48	79.21
8	Children Impacted by Addiction	82.81	81.74	81.20	66.84	64.83	87.53	75.05	84.16	87.78	75.43	76.67
9	Out-of-*school children*	78.73	81.87	79.52	82.11	70.00	64.20	82.50	70.16	88.33	76.43	73.55
10	*Children* of Female Sex Workers	81.35	77.82	77.88	62.21	79.17	64.40	79.00	80.00	78.89	84.87	73.82
11	Children who run away from home	80.96	77.54	76.92	60.42	64.33	70.07	82.86	80.95	84.44	70.26	76.26
12	Children with parents who engage in sexually deviant behaviors.	81.15	78.87	77.76	56.26	85.33	67.27	84.09	77.89	75.00	77.70	74.11
13	Refugee and asylum seeker children	77.50	80.67	76.00	80.47	81.00	65.20	74.32	71.32	74.44	71.87	75.71
14	Criminalising children	81.12	77.28	73.76	75.11	81.50	58.27	75.00	66.84	85.56	76.57	74.00
15	Child-headed households	77.69	80.54	69.56	84.11	71.50	57.73	72.05	75.79	79.44	65.48	76.48
16	Beggar children	80.19	76.51	61.80	65.37	74.17	74.73	78.82	64.95	85.00	80.91	75.97
17	Street-working children	73.62	76.28	65.36	76.47	80.17	74.13	81.59	66.05	79.56	74.91	74.50
18	Children Residing in Prison With Their Parents	65.85	79.28	70.16	74.63	68.17	54.60	77.27	75.79	84.44	76.87	74.38
19	Children who have been released from prison	80.23	75.44	74.56	66.42	81.17	38.93	75.91	68.79	80.56	72.74	77.65
20	Trafficked children	75.54	72.49	66.72	77.05	87.00	47.07	76.82	68.68	84.44	66.13	76.80
21	Victimized children	78.46	72.56	64.56	75.42	69.00	59.27	71.55	72.00	80.00	74.04	74.24
22	Children whose parents are in prison	76.27	75.08	75.24	68.89	69.33	58.60	75.73	73.58	82.78	70.61	69.95
23	Children infected with HIV	74.27	72.46	75.96	60.89	92.17	60.33	81.59	72.63	71.11	72.96	70.92
24	*children who experience parental separation and divorce*	79.31	70.18	74.60	72.47	61.83	83.47	75.91	77.63	66.67	71.70	65.80
25	Children Exposed to Violence	74.42	70.38	68.48	66.05	74.50	59.73	76.91	70.16	79.44	71.61	73.33
26	Children who are out of school (dropouts or do not attend school)	73.81	77.64	70.00	74.11	60.17	68.00	78.55	52.37	85.00	72.70	68.95
27	Children living in vulnerable areas	76.08	66.03	66.16	67.53	78.50	66.07	82.05	66.84	71.00	69.70	73.67
28	Children with criminal parents	75.69	73.87	73.20	63.26	75.50	58.67	71.50	74.05	83.11	67.09	69.88
29	Poor Children	78.08	77.72	64.76	86.32	71.33	65.80	72.23	64.11	66.11	58.61	67.92
30	Children with Incurable diseases	82.08	70.77	67.20	78.95	90.33	55.60	68.18	69.21	88.89	69.57	64.41
31	Malnourished children	79.23	72.23	66.56	58.11	76.00	64.87	76.77	60.79	74.44	67.52	71.35

32	Children living in deprived areas	70.96	74.72	64.56	85.84	66.67	68.73	78.86	65.26	61.67	58.65	68.70
33	Children experiencing critical situations due to natural and man-made disasters	76.23	71.33	63.20	64.37	87.33	44.33	80.18	70.53	88.89	58.26	72.58
34	Children with death sentences	75.35	68.82	59.68	72.89	75.33	55.07	72.45	59.74	74.44	62.61	75.39
35	Children Exposed to Violence	73.65	68.41	68.68	57.74	74.83	74.07	69.32	61.32	81.67	69.17	69.20
36	Children behind Bars	73.19	70.74	72.36	65.89	56.50	50.67	70.45	67.37	74.33	60.70	72.30
37	Children with HIV-infected parents	78.00	67.85	71.76	50.37	66.17	62.40	74.00	85.26	69.44	67.30	64.59
38	Children with personality and mental disorders	74.35	68.59	70.60	60.63	69.50	62.13	75.45	67.32	81.11	67.30	64.62
39	Illegitimate children	75.19	68.95	68.08	54.16	67.33	66.33	75.23	81.05	79.44	61.13	64.05
40	*Children* with no *identity*	69.12	67.23	63.12	70.32	64.50	45.20	75.00	69.63	61.67	66.52	72.95
41	Children with specific diseases	67.31	69.95	64.36	61.26	90.50	56.87	69.32	72.37	80.00	67.61	66.94
42	Children with Hepatitis	69.69	69.87	71.00	56.00	87.33	53.80	74.27	74.74	72.22	65.39	65.08
43	Children with abandoned and sick parents	68.92	67.33	63.96	72.47	57.00	57.00	71.64	77.11	82.78	65.30	64.88
44	Children with physical and motor disabilities	66.15	62.69	64.40	62.58	50.67	50.40	70.36	74.21	72.22	61.61	76.29
45	Children engaged in work in households	65.12	68.23	61.44	67.95	72.00	63.47	73.41	59.47	74.44	60.52	65.20
46	Children engaged in work in workshops	66.92	66.23	60.28	57.37	76.17	64.60	74.27	58.16	73.00	61.04	68.23
47	Children living in quasi-families	75.92	64.28	67.40	57.11	73.83	59.27	76.14	61.58	69.44	56.83	62.92
48	Parents who are not yet 18	67.00	64.56	63.00	57.11	55.00	45.00	64.77	66.79	80.00	60.09	70.61
49	Children with *intellectual disability*	72.12	60.41	62.12	58.53	46.67	53.40	67.18	70.21	72.56	62.39	64.23
50	Children who come into contact with the legal system.	61.08	57.56	58.88	65.21	73.00	41.33	74.00	53.95	71.11	78.74	65.47
51	Transgender Children	65.58	61.85	47.28	64.16	87.17	47.47	70.68	68.84	67.78	62.91	64.94
52	Children undergoing puberty	70.15	65.13	64.32	55.47	53.00	45.87	76.14	49.21	58.33	66.65	61.24
53	Children with sensory impairments	65.96	59.21	61.00	56.84	46.50	53.27	68.32	64.47	72.22	61.09	61.64
54	Children from temporary Marriages	59.23	63.69	56.52	61.89	61.50	49.87	68.18	62.11	66.67	60.09	59.76
55	Children who are not yet puberty-aged	68.46	61.03	57.08	71.95	62.17	46.80	67.18	67.63	60.00	54.87	56.03
56	Children who marry under the age of 18 (forced or non-forced)	62.50	58.82	61.84	54.11	48.33	46.87	53.41	49.42	65.00	61.96	69.67
57	Children without citizenship	54.92	64.26	51.60	54.26	71.67	35.60	66.36	56.95	46.67	49.78	65.86

58	Children who reside in border regions	61.23	57.36	57.52	65.32	71.83	39.53	63.73	61.05	58.33	44.09	60.30
59	Children who are under the guardianship of someone other than their parents	60.58	58.38	56.96	56.63	46.33	54.00	66.00	58.95	66.11	49.87	53.77
60	Foreign immigrant children	56.50	55.33	51.20	46.05	42.50	41.73	58.64	48.16	43.33	47.61	60.47
61	Nomadic children	55.88	53.85	54.08	61.68	62.00	33.20	50.59	49.74	45.00	44.57	49.73
62	Ethnic minority children	49.38	39.69	45.88	44.21	52.50	39.53	42.27	51.26	37.78	34.57	49.76
63	Religious minority children	50.19	37.41	47.00	42.95	52.33	25.20	40.68	42.89	37.78	33.70	47.91

Strengthening Community-Based Child Protection Systems

- Developing community-led child protection networks to identify and support at-risk children.
- Training local volunteers and leaders to recognize early warning signs of abuse and neglect.
- Encouraging community-based alternative care models (such as kinship care) to provide stable environments for children in crisis.

Implementation and Policy Recommendations

1. Multi-Sectoral Collaboration

- Government, NGOs and international organizations must work together to ensure comprehensive child protection policies.
- Coordinating between health, education and legal sectors to provide integrated child welfare services.

2. Data-Driven Decision-Making

- Establishing a national child protection database to track cases of abuse, homelessness and exploitation.
- Regularly conducting child welfare assessments to monitor trends and evaluate policy effectiveness.

3. Advocacy and Legislative Reforms

- Engaging civil society and media to raise awareness of child protection issues.
- Advocating for policy reforms to strengthen existing child protection frameworks.
- Ensuring children's participation in policy discussions to reflect their needs and perspectives.

4. Conclusion

This study has systematically identified and categorized the most pressing child welfare challenges in Iran, revealing their deep interconnections and structural roots. The findings indicate that issues such as child abuse, sexual exploitation, homelessness, lack of legal identity and child labor are not isolated phenomena but are instead reinforced by broader socioeconomic inequalities, legal gaps and institutional shortcomings. The overlap in prioritized concerns across multiple research phases underscores the systemic and entrenched nature of these harms, necessitating urgent and coordinated interventions.

A key contribution of this research is its integrated framework, which not only classifies child welfare issues but also emphasizes their interdependent nature, demonstrating how economic, legal and social vulnerabilities interact to perpetuate harm. This reinforces the need for multisectoral interventions that go beyond family-centered solutions and instead engage legal, educational, healthcare and social welfare systems in a holistic manner.

The proposed protective plan outlines a structured response encompassing prevention, intervention and rehabilitation strategies. It highlights the importance of strengthening legal protections, increasing access to education and social services, expanding mental health support and enhancing economic assistance for at-risk families. Moreover, addressing these challenges requires sustained policy reforms, community-driven initiatives and ongoing research to ensure interventions are evidence-based and adaptable to emerging child welfare concerns.

Ultimately, this study underscores that protecting children's rights is a collective societal responsibility. Policymakers, civil society organizations and international bodies must work collaboratively to dismantle systemic barriers and create an environment where all children-regardless of their circumstances - can thrive, free from harm and exploitation.

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