

From Dreams to Possibilities: The Role of Gender and Family Income in Aspirations among Youth in the City of Yazd

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Abstract

Understanding what youth aspire is widely considered to be a critical step towards recognizing further changes in societies. This article explores young people’s aspirations, including personal and collective desires, in a less-studied social setting, Yazd in Iran. This paper also examines the differentiating roles of gender and family income for the importance and chance of accomplishment attached to these ambitions. The data for this study comes from an initial explanatory phase followed by a survey comprising 2700 youth in Yazd. Our findings suggest that the marriage-based and political aspirations are the most and least important dimensions, respectively. We also found that the weight given to aspirations and chance of their realization are generally, but not consistently, different in terms of gender and family income. Accordingly, young women commonly attended more to their ambitions, whereas perceiving them as less reachable than young men. In most cases, youth from low-income families considered their desires less accessible than others. Drawing an importance-expectation matrix for each gender group, ‘having a healthy body and soul in aging’ was introduced as a critical aspiration with the widest gap. We discuss the results and implications vis-à-vis contextual and structural conditions in which the youth are embedded.

Keywords: Youth Aspirations, Importance-Realization Gap, Gender, Family Income, Iran

Introduction

Youth is a period of the life course in which the future orientations of adolescents are specified, explored, and brought to the fore. It is a time when people can think, dream, and plan for their future (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). This period of transition to adulthood is usually associated with changes in identity, self-awareness, and cognitive flexibility (Rutter & Rutter, 1993; Furlong, 2012). The basics of physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and social maturation are formed in this period, opening up opportunities for the adolescent to develop skills and prepare for the future. Additionally, during this period, individuals develop a thinking capacity that promotes and lays the foundation for strategic thinking (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). The individual's system of social values is also formed, providing the basis upon which the person can guide and evaluate their own and others' behaviour.

Furthermore, a sense of self-flourishing and a clearer understanding of personal and social positions and the formation of wishes, desires, hopes, and expectations are developed in this period (Boyd, Steiner, Skinner, Coyne-Beasley, & Perrin, 2015; Freake, Barley, & Kent, 2007). These developmental processes then encourage specific aspirations for future. The present research focuses on antecedents of, i.e., gender and family income, as well as how the youth experience these aspirations. Although extensive research has been carried out on youth aspirations (e.g., Agger et al., 2018; Eccles, 1994; Kirk et al., 2013), no single study, to our knowledge, exists that provides a systematic view of all things that youth may aspire to - not only those that associate with personal needs but also those related to collective duties.

Accordingly, this study contributes to the growing area of research by presenting a comprehensive account of youth aspirations in a less-studied social context: Yazd, a traditional city located in Iran. In doing so, we extend previous research on youth aspirations in several

ways. First, we put our efforts to present a comprehensive review of youth aspirations by adopting a two-stage mixed-method approach. Thus, we investigate both the most and the least important dimensions of youth aspirations. Second, we examine the differentiating effect of gender and family income on these aspirations. Third, employing the importance-possibility matrix, we identify critical social and political domains demanding attention by policymakers. Last but not least we also contribute towards a more universal understanding of youth aspirations by focusing on a non-WEIRD (Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic context; Henrich et al., 2010).

Social Psychological Dimensions of Youth Aspirations

Understanding and evaluating socio-psychological aspects such as recognizing desires and the realization of aspirations is considered critically important in the social policymaking domains (Berrington et al., 2016; Schoon, 2010). This is because aspirations embody idealistic choices for the future and tap into underlying values (Berrington et al. 2016: 731). Our starting point is that while some of the physical and psychological processes of youth outlined above are important, aspirations also depend on the specifics of social situations. For instance, Appadurai argued that aspirations are the product of individual’s interactions with the with the social environment in “the thick of life” (2004: 67).

Majority of early research has been mainly on academic and educational dimensions (Crowley & Shapiro, 1982; Perry & Vance, 2010; Kirk et al., 2012; Hart 2016, Berrington et al., 2016). Some of the studies focused on how aspirations are related to a range of social domains, including specific migrant, ethnic, and/or 'racial' groups (e.g., Buttaro, Battle, & Pastrana, 2010; Van Mol, 2016) while some others investigated the role of the social class, socioeconomic status, and income in terms of aspirations (Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Strand, 2011). Yet, others have

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3 focused on psychological and motivational variables (Macbrayne, 1987; Schaefer & Meece,
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5 2009). Research has also investigated the role of peer influences on youth and their aspirations
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7 (Salikutluk, 2016; Rosenqvist, 2018) and gender (Carroll & Brayfield, 2007; Blackhurst &
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9 Auger, 2008). With regards to gender, however, research has been inconclusive. Some research
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11 shows no evidence on gender and aspirations (Perry, Przybysz, & Al-Sheikh, 2009; Berrington et
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13 al. 2016) while some others have emphasized the significant role of gender (Kenkel & Gage,
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15 1983; Blackhurst & Auger, 2008) in determining the content and direction of aspirations.
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19 Our understudied context has widely been recognized as a traditional city where the
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21 gender roles are regulated in line with traditional values (Askari Nadoushan et al., 2009; Zare
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23 Shahabadi & Taher, 2016). Modarresi Yazdi et al (2017) argue that pervasive traditional beliefs
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25 led to the social isolations of young women in Yazd. Mobaraki et al. (2019) for instance confirm
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27 a high level of gender inequality which is mainly rooted in pre-existed power relations, gender
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29 norms, and gender ideology. *Young women in Yazd face several challenges. They are embedded
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31 in a context that encourages and reinforces traditional values. Their families prioritize marriage
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33 and having and raising children at an early age. This in turn limits these young women's career
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35 chances and hence their social mobility - a prerequisite for any achievement in modern life. On
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37 the other hand, they are confronted with modern society with completely different cultural and
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39 social values (Zare Shahabadi & Taher, 2016). Furthermore, due to long-lasting economic crises,
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41 Iran has experienced pervasive inequality which further delineated the class and social status
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43 boundaries (Financial tribune, 2018). Thus, we believe that these two key dimensions, gender
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45 and family socioeconomic status play an important role in determining aspirations.*
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52 Research suggests that individuals' aspirations do not necessarily match the expectations
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54 towards achievements (Khattab, 2014) and this gap might have consequences for the youth
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(Elliot, 2009; Doyle, Kleinfeld, & Reyes, 2009; Buttaro, Battle, & Pastrana, 2010; Beal & Crockett, 2010; Yoon, 2016). Youth with greater expectations and aspirations are likely to have higher levels of educational attainment (Arbona, 2000) while a substantial gap between expectations and aspirations may increase the possibility of delinquent behaviour among adolescents (Knight et al., 2016; Mahler et al., 2017). Beyond this literature, research by Roberts and Evans (2013) and Hart (2016) also argues that aspirations can be much more than the narrowly defined notion of educational aspiration. Indeed, Hart (2012) signals how a more comprehensive view of aspirations might include desires such as "I want to be debt-free;" "I want to get out of this city;" "I want to be a drug dealer;" "I want to be a good Muslim;" "I want to go to university;" "I want to find inner peace." This issue, in particular, calls for more in-depth studies that could enable us to better understand the antecedents of such aspirations. To address this gap, we start off by exploring the meaning and content of aspirations and we then move on to confirm these with a large scale survey.

In the present research, we draw on these extended conceptualizations of aspirations and turn our gaze to the youth in the city of Yazd, Iran. We go beyond educational achievement and investigate different domains of aspirations. More specifically, by examining all categories of young people's aspirations, we tease out the effects of gender and income on certain aspirations. Furthermore, we identify differing critical and problematic domains across gender, young men and women.

Their substantial contributions notwithstanding, most of these studies are designed by researchers from the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) countries, using data from WEIRD samples yet generalizing to the entire human population (Heinrich et al, 2010). It is therefore imperative to focus on the specific content of aspirations, identifying and

prioritizing the domains of aspirations in Iran can significantly add to our understanding of youth aspirations in different cultures across the world. It is noteworthy to mention that Yazd is the capital of Yazd province where 90% of the population live in urban settings. What is more, Yazd is recognized as one of the most historical and traditional cities in Iran. Throughout history, due to its location in the heart of the desert, people in Yazd, in comparison to other Iranian cities, have been less affected by ethnic or religious conflicts (Tashakori-Bafghi, 2012). Hence, the social and cultural elements of the town, to a large extent, have preserved their traditional nature. Still, in the last decades, the experience of industrial development, globalization trends, and the arrival of immigrants mainly from Afghanistan led to many cultural changes (Askari-Nadoushan, Ruhani & Sobaghchi, 2018). Studying youth aspirations in such a culturally and socially setting has the potential to contribute to the youth studies literature by extending our understanding of individuals' aspirations who are embedded in more modern or more traditional contexts.

Moreover, by highlighting the gap between aspirations and the expected accomplishments we explain how the structural inequality could be traced via what young people desire (Knight, Ellis, Roark, Henry & Huizinga, 2016). As a study about the global south and produced by scholars from the global south, this study heeds the recent calls (Bhat, 2018; Cuervo & Miranda, 2019) to decolonize the knowledge in youth studies as well as contributing toward a more universal and democratic understanding of aspirations in general.

Theoretical Context

Youth aspirations embody what young people think, their expectations, and to some extent their desire for social change or continuity (Hart, 2016). While some may wish to maintain the circumstances of their lives as they are, others may dream about better life conditions. In recent decades, there has been a considerable amount of research on the role of social and psychological

factors in explaining youth aspirations. Following Ray (2003) and St Clair and Benjamin (2011), aspirations arise from and are embedded within the social context, while the degree to which others influence individuals differs (Slack, 2003). Hart (2016) uses Bourdieu's concept of '*habitus*' as a set of basic, deeply interiorized master patterns (Fries, 2009) that orient behaviors in everyday life to theorize the relatedness of aspirations and context. The *habitus* represents internalized social structures influencing the individuals' future lives. People adjust their aspirations to be in line with their *habitus* and the cumulative life experiences through which *habitus* is shaped (Brown, 2011).

Hence, differences in youth aspirations can be attributed to the differences in their lived experiences and the ways social structures influence youth attitudes. These include but not limited to life course experiences (Berrington, Roberts, & Tammes, 2016), gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Schoon, & Eccles, 2014) and they might limit access to economic, social, and educational resources.

Socialization as a learning process throughout the life course (Cromdal, 2006) is another useful concept for explaining aspirations. Related to the socialization process, according to Gottfredson (1981), youth are expected to choose and aspire to careers that are more compatible with societal, familial, and peer expectations. Accordingly, gendered differences in socialization can result in differing aspirations within generations, particularly for those cultures in which boys and girls are treated in significantly different ways. Indeed, generally, it can be argued that boys and girls have different career aspirations and career choices (Fabes et al., 2014). Furthermore, aspirations can be considered a way to view the world without barriers, like dreams rather than expectations. Actually, given that there is oftentimes considerable distance from

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3 attainability, aspiration can be seen as a protective coping mechanism to cloak the actual lack of
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5 achievements (St Clair and Benjamin, 2011).
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8 Research has also looked into expectations of the realization of aspirations (e.g., Boxer,
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10 Goldstein, DeLorenzo, Savoy, & Mercado, 2011; Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2008; Kirk et al.,
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12 2012). This relates in part to what Hart called the "*Ideal Self*", which refers to the "representation
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14 of one's personal aspirations and goals" and plays a crucial role in self-evaluation. Hart (1992:
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16 71) described the Ideal Self as "one facet of the projection of the self into the future". Aspirations
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18 and expectations are thus related but distinct concepts, as aspirations refer to those things youth
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20 desire to achieve idealistically, while expectations represent the possibility of attaining them
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22 realistically (Kirk, Lewis, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2013; Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001). Thus, the
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24 aspiration-expectation gap reflects the difference between abstract and concrete attitudes (Doyle,
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26 Kleinfeld, & Reyes, 2009). While both aspirations and expectations are, to a different extent,
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28 nourished in the social context, we can expect expectations to be more restricted by realistic
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30 appraisals. Thus, inconsistencies between aspirations and expectations can be referred to as
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32 perceived barriers (Perry, Przybysz, & Al-Sheikh, 2009). [As such](#), the importance-expectation
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34 gap of aspirations is another reflection of agency-structure duality. Drawing on Giddens' theory
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36 of structuration (2010), the influence of social structures on a society's youth can be reflected in
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38 how far their perceived possibilities (or expectations) are from what they are eager to achieve.
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40 From this perspective, we expect to witness a bigger gap between aspirations' importance and
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42 expectations, potentially subject to limitations such as gender roles and inter-family restrictions.
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50 In addition, individuals evaluating the degree of accessibility to their aspirations may take
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52 into account a wide range of other criteria or potential barriers, including subjective self-
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54 evaluation of one's capabilities (Schoon & Eccles 2014; Fraser & Garg 2011; Bandura 1997;
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Kabiru et al. 2013; Correll, 2004), the degree of importance of an aspiration (Ray, 2003; Hart 1992), background characteristics such as age, gender and social status (Berrington, Roberts & Tammes 2016; Blackhurst & Auger 2008), past experiences (Schoon & Eccles, 2014; Amborse 2003), the experiences of reference groups or significant others (Chavira, Cooper, & Vasquez-Salgado, 2016; Sewell, Haller & Ohlendorf, 1970; Kabiru et al. 2013; Buchmann & Dalton 2002; Salikutluk 2016); or individual perceptions about macro-structural barriers (Schoon 2015; Buchmann & Dalton 2002). As for academic aspirations, Boxer et al. (2011) point out, *that* individuals from economically disadvantaged families adapt their expectations according to the barriers they face. In other words, in the absence of resources that support aspirations, youth face more difficulties in overcoming economic and social obstacles to achievement (Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Schoon, 2006; Trusty, 2002). Hence, we hypothesize that family income *influences* the importance and perceived achievement of aspirations. Accordingly, youth from low-income families tend to assess their aspirations as less achievable than youth from high-income families.

We also argue that young women, compared to young men, experience different barriers *that result in a wider aspirations-realization gap. Research shows that women factor in gender role stereotypes and early parenthood* (Eccles, 2005; Schoon, Martin, & Ross, 2007) to adjust their expectations. Research has also evinced that women tend to *have* competitive goals while young men's are oriented toward economic independence aspirations (Habraken, 2018). A panel study on the Ethiopian youth by Favara (2017), *for instance*, reports that women are less prone to aspire for academic education than men. People gradually develop those aspirations that are more matched with their predominant and socially accepted gender roles (Eccles, 1994). On the other hand, Fraser and Garg (2011) *suggest that individuals would be motivated to achieve*

specific aspirations if they perceive these aspirations as attainable. Consequently, the discrepancy between the ideal self and actual self would be minimized. This in turn will result in a narrower gap between hopes and expectations.

According to the strain theory (Agnew 1985), the distance between aspirations and the perceived chance of achieving them creates a tension and exerts pressure on young people. Besides, such a strain is associated with delinquency (Farnworth & Leiber, 1989; Ostrowsky & Messner, 2005; Knight, Ellis, Roark, Henry, & Huizinga, 2016; Mahler, Simmons, Frick, Steinberg, & Cauffman, 2017), poorer mental health (Paat, 2016); or with grievance (Folger, 1986) eventually leading to significant the gap across the social status ladder and higher level of societal resentment in general.

This body of research and theory points to the need to understand how young people evaluate the attainability of their aspirations and to examine the gap they perceive between expectations and aspirations. In this study, we explore aspirations with widest gap between the importance placed on them by youth and perceived possibilities of attaining those aspirations.

Whereas considerable literature has developed around the theme of the aspiration-expectation gap, this research mainly focuses on specific sets of aspirations such as educational and career aspirations (e.g., Boxer, Goldstein, De Lorenzo, Savoy, & Mercado, 2011, Perry & Vance, 2010; Perry & Raeburn, 2017). With some exceptions (Giuliani et al., 2017), focusing on the one or two other specific dimensions of ambitions (e.g., Calder & Cope, 2004). In reality, youth ambitions are likely to encompass broader domains (Hart, 2012). Therefore, in the present research, we first employed exploratory interviews with open-ended questions to grasp all that youth consider as aspirations. We then tested the effect of gender and family income on each category of these aspirations. Next, we examined the extent that the importance placed on

aspirations and expectations of realizing those aspirations go hand in hand. Last but not least, using an importance-expectation matrix, we identified those aspirations requiring emergent attention from policymakers.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted the mixed-method approach, including an exploratory phase followed by a quantitative survey design. The first phase allowed us to explore what Yazdian youth aspire to whereas the second stage provided the opportunity to test the hypothesized relationships among variables of interest. The explanatory stage was organized via conducting 35 interviews with 15-18 aged youth. In this step, we asked the participants what they aspire and informed them that they were welcomed to mention as many aspirations as possible. Thus, we identified around 300 aspirations. Dropping out the repeated items, we classified 142 left aspirations into 18 main dimensions based on the similarities and differences of contents. Consequently, this stage provided us with the initial understanding of all that youth aspire.

At the second stage, we developed four items to measure each 18 explored dimensions of aspirations. To construct the measures, we tried to utilize the exact statements used by youth as much as possible. We also consulted ten local scholars to assess the validity of provided items associated with each aspiration’s category. Then we carried out a survey among Yazdian youth aged 15 to 18. The [most recent general census before the current study \(General Census of Population and Housing, 2016\)](#) estimates the overall population of youth in Yazd at 68,196. We used Cochran's formula (considering the margin of error equal to 2%) to calculate a representative sample size (2,500). Nevertheless, to supplement for possible unfilled or incomplete questionnaires, we decided to recruit 3,000 participants. The questionnaires were distributed among students of targeted high schools. The schools were selected according to the

multistage random cluster sampling, leading to 2712 on-paper gathered questionnaires (Response rate = 90%). The number then decreased to the 2700 ones, dropping those with data below 70%.

The importance of aspirations and the perceived chances of realizing them were measured via the items devoted to each 18-category of aspirations. At first, four components were developed to measure each dimension of aspirations, meaning 72 items to measure the 18 categories of aspirations. The designed questionnaires were then distributed among students of selected students asking them to fill them out in the presence of distributors. The respondents were asked to rate the importance/possibility of each item on a 10-point Likert scale from 1 (low: importance/chance of realization) to 10 (high: importance/chance of accomplishment).

Before hypothesis testing, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were run to evaluate the validity of developed constructs (via AMOS, version 24). Initial analysis displayed that the model fit was not satisfying fit ($\chi^2 (1936) = 7.13, p < .001$, CFI = .878, NFI = .861, RMSEA = .048, SRMR = .070). Dropping 19 items with lower loading factors (below .50), the model goodness of fit improved to an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 (1281) = 6.21, p < .001$, CFI = .919, NFI = .905, RMSEA = .044, SRMR = .041) and all items loaded onto their respective latent variables (AVE = .76, considering .50 as a threshold; Kline, 2011). Although the calculated relative chi-square was significant, RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI in the case of complex models (Hair et al., 2019), a good fit is indicated by above .90 for CFI and NFI; .08 or lower for RMSEA and SRMR (Brown, 2015).

Table 1 reports information about the constructed categories, developed items, and the calculated Cronbach's alphas for each dimension. All the alphas are above the threshold level of acceptability (above $\alpha = .70$) with only occupational category of aspirations with two items ($\alpha = 0.63$). The questionnaire also included questions about respondents' age, gender, family income,

and educational field. To measure the family income, the respondents were asked to indicate the monthly payment of their family on the provided ordinal scale. Then the collected answers were divided into the two main categories of low and high income via considering a cut-off point based on the country's economic situation.

Table 1

Aspiration Categories, Developed Items, and Calculated Alpha Coefficients

No.	Aspiration Categories	Items: Aspire to/for	Coefficient Alpha
1	Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achieve top academic rank (in school, entrance exam, Olympiad, etc.)• Admission at well-known universities• Continue education to the higher levels	0.86
2	Occupational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a high-paying job• Have a job with a high level of authority and effectiveness	0.63
3	Marriage-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marry with a good-tempered, loyal, and kind person• Marry with a beautiful/handsome person	0.71
4	Nationalistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Iran becomes the most powerful country in the world• Iran becomes the wealthiest country in the world• Iran becomes the world's most cultured (the most ethical and humane) country in the world	0.87
5	Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perform permanent and everlasting religious practices and draw nearer to God• The Rise of Imam Zaman (12th Imam of Shiites, a branch of Islam)	0.71
6	Transnational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Know multiple international languages• Gain access to world-famous brands• Have a world-influential personality	0.70
7	Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access the latest software• Have a high-tech mobile• Have new digital gadgets like a tablet	0.80
8	Wealth-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get rich• Have a luxury and expensive car• Live in a big house in an expensive neighborhood• Have a <u>large</u> amount of pocket money	0.87
9	Art-based Fame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Become a famous author or poet• Become a famous artist	0.71

10	Sport-based fame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a football player (like Chris Ronaldo or Lionel Messi) • Get the national, world, and Olympic medals 	0.70
11	Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a member of parliament • Become president • Become a senior manager of government • Become a politician 	0.91
12	Altruistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spreading peace and friendship • Have the opportunity to express love and kindness to all humankind • Reach peace 	0.78
13	Beauty-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a beautiful and enchanting face (beautiful lips, nose, and eyes) • Have an attractive body • Have a beautiful voice • Have stylish clothes 	0.87
14	Travel-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel to all parts of Iran • Travel continuously to foreign countries and sightseeing • Presence at the everlasting and hearty parties 	0.75
15	Independency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a separate room at home • Have a high degree of freedom of action, far from parental supervision • Have independence in make relationships with friends • Have decision-making power in all matters 	0.81
16	Health-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not get any illnesses, disabilities, and health problems • Have a balanced mental health 	0.73
17	Prestige-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a high prestige in the family • Have a good reputation in the neighbourhood • Have a high prestige among friends • Have a high social status in society 	0.87
18	Food-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat a variety of foreign foods and fast food • Eat and experience a variety of foods in different restaurants • Experience a variety of drinks in several restaurants 	0.86

Analysis

Final sample consisted of 2700 youth, including 1229 young men (45%) and 1468 young women (55%) while three participants declined to respond to the question on gender. The mean age of the sample was 16.15, including young people aged from 15 to 18 years old [15 years old (26%), 16

years old (42%), 17 years old (24%), and 18 years old (8%), and 3.9% of sample size did not report their age]. The results showed that 79% and 21% of the sample considered themselves as low- and high-income families, respectively. Table 2 shows the results of the Friedman test conducted to examine the equality of mean scores between aspirations dimensions. There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of dimensions (Chi-Square = 9253.94; $P < .001$). Accordingly, the marriage-based and the political aspiration have been the most and the least important dimensions, respectively. Following the marriage-based, health-based, academic, and prestige-based categories posited the most crucial categories that young people wished.

Table 2
The Mean Scores of Aspiration Categories, Friedman Test

No.	Categories of Aspirations	Means	SD
1	Marriage-based	9.09	1.74
2	Health-based	8.92	2.03
3	Academic	8.83	1.89
4	Prestige-based	8.80	1.73
5	Spiritual	8.71	2.03
6	Physical	8.62	1.90
7	Occupational	8.52	1.94
8	Travel-based	8.41	2.01
9	Altruistic	8.37	2.12
10	Wealth-based	8.34	2.10
11	Nationalistic	8.32	2.28
12	Independency	7.91	2.14
13	Food-based	7.89	2.40
14	Technological	7.77	2.43
15	Transnational	7.70	2.47
16	Art-based Fame	5.97	3.07
17	Sport-based fame	5.66	3.27
18	Political	4.93	3.20

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine whether there was a mean difference between the young men and women regarding their aspirations. After controlling

for age, family income, and educational fields, we found a statistically significant effect of gender on the perceived importance of aspirations, $F = 21.31$, $p < .0005$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.854$, partial $\eta^2 = .146$. We report the differences associated with each category of aspirations in Table 3. Interestingly, except for two categories of aspirations, including political and sport-based fame, young females care more about their aspirations. Similarly, the equality of mean scores for the perceived chance of attainment based on the youth gender was tested. Our data generally supported the significant difference in perceptions of possibility ($F = 18.00$, $p < .0005$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.879287$, partial $\eta^2 = .121$), but the outlined difference was not significant for all category of aspirations. What is more, young men, in all significant relationships, perceived their aspirations as more reachable than young women—noting that only significant relationships ($p < .05$) are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

MANOVA Results for the Importance of Aspirations and Their Perceived Possibility of Realization Based on the Youth Gender (age, family income, and educational fields are adjusted).

Importance of aspiration:	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Academic	Male	8.48	2.15	62.60	0.000
	Female	9.13	1.59		
Occupational	Male	8.42	2.00	5.07	0.024
	Female	8.62	1.86		
Marriage-based	Male	8.92	1.92	10.60	0.001
	Female	9.20	1.58		
Nationalistic	Male	8.18	2.36	5.61	0.018
	Female	8.45	2.20		
Spiritual	Male	8.52	2.18	7.67	0.006
	Female	8.82	1.93		
Wealth-based	Male	8.27	2.13	3.89	0.049

	Female	8.46	2.07		
Sport-based fame	Male	6.41	3.23	111.71	0.000
	Female	5.01	3.16		
Political	Male	5.45	3.16	57.66	0.000
	Female	4.47	3.17		
Peace	Male	8.24	2.27	9.38	0.002
	Female	8.54	1.94		
Physical	Male	8.35	2.06	37.54	0.000
	Female	8.85	1.71		
Travel-based	Male	8.22	2.12	16.20	0.000
	Female	8.58	1.87		
Independency	Male	7.58	2.35	45.85	0.000
	Female	8.18	1.94		
Health	Male	8.77	2.07	8.09	0.004
	Female	9.02	2.01		
Prestige	Male	8.61	1.89	26.63	0.000
	Female	8.98	1.53		
Food	Male	7.75	2.54	9.64	0.002
	Female	8.05	2.24		
Possibility of realization:					
Occupational	Male	6.73	2.55	9.13	.003
	Female	6.39	2.51		
Transnational	Male	6.21	2.43	10.62	.001
	Female	5.87	2.28		
Wealth	Male	6.75	2.54	4.35	.037
	Female	6.51	2.51		
Sport-based fame	Male	5.55	2.95	165.44	.000
	Female	4.03	2.74		
Political	Male	4.64	2.93	49.78	.000
	Female	3.81	2.74		

We also tested whether there is a significant difference in the perceived importance of aspirations based on family income when the effects of age, gender, and educational fields were adjusted. Our results showed (Table 4) that there was overall a significant difference in the importance of aspirations based on the youth's family income, $F = 4.62$, $p < .0005$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.964$, partial $\eta^2 = .036$. However, the outlined relationships were not significant with respect to

all dimensions. Accordingly, youth from low-income families considered academic, spiritual, and sport-based fame categories more important than others whereas youth from high-income families considered more importance to transnational, independency, prestige-based, and food-based ones. Besides, we found similar significant relations when considering the possibility of realization as independent variable: $F = 6.61$, $p < .0005$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.949$, partial $\eta^2 = .051$. In most categories, including academic, occupational, transnational, technological, wealth-based, travel-based, independency, prestige-based, food-based, individuals from high-income families perceive their aspirations as more realizable. Meanwhile, individuals from low-income families, rather than others, considered the nationalistic and spiritual categories more obtainable.

Table 4

MANOVA Results for the Importance of Aspirations and Their Perceived Possibility of Realization Based on The Youth Gender (age, family income, and educational fields are adjusted).

Importance of aspirations:	Family income level	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Academic	L. I.	9.1486	1.64	12.986	0.000
	H. I.	8.7974	2.10		
Spiritual	L. I.	8.7939	1.97	20.772	0.000
	H. I.	8.2665	2.32		
Transnational	L. I.	7.7653	2.24	4.374	0.037
	H. I.	8.0270	2.16		
Sport-based fame	L. I.	5.7227	3.28	6.987	0.008
	H. I.	5.4851	3.21		
political	L. I.	5.0093	3.21	7.924	0.005
	H. I.	4.6576	3.14		
Independency	L. I.	7.8712	2.16	4.228	0.040
	H. I.	8.0131	2.19		
Prestige-based	L. I.	8.7714	1.74	6.040	0.014
	H. I.	8.9476	1.66		
Food-based	L. I.	7.8650	2.398	4.146	0.042
	H. I.	8.0949	2.390		

Possibility of Realization:					
Academic	L. I	6.9472	2.41632	3.823	0.051
	H. I	7.1802	2.25000		
Occupational	L. I	6.4776	2.54175	7.008	0.008
	H. I	6.8579	2.49959		
Nationalistic	L. I	6.4394	2.56912	34.910	.000
	H. I	5.6075	2.87170		
Spiritual	L. I	7.1496	2.47093	16.344	0.000
	H. I	6.5972	2.64669		
Transnational	L. I	5.9756	2.35247	4.104	0.043
	H. I	6.2628	2.40591		
Technological	L. I	6.5530	2.48342	9.083	0.003
	H. I	6.9815	2.57075		
Wealth-based	L. I	6.5227	2.54293	12.518	0.000
	H. I	7.0180	2.44957		
Sport-based fame	L. I	4.7882	2.96326	4.668	0.031
	H. I	4.6592	2.86804		
Travel-based	L. I	6.6140	2.42862	5.449	0.020
	H. I	6.9420	2.42531		
Independency	L. I	6.3576	2.34233	8.857	0.003
	H. I	6.7201	2.41759		
Prestige-based	L. I	7.2005	2.27753	4.160	0.042
	H. I	7.4567	2.42811		
Food-based	L. I	6.7990	2.56814	12.417	0.000
	H. I	7.2902	2.60204		

L.I: Low-income family; H.I: High-income family

We also found a significant positive relationship between the importance and expectations to the achievement of aspirations ($r = .36, P = .000$). This means that the more the youth considered aspirations achievable, the more they care about it and vice versa. To better understand those aspirations with the widest importance-expectation gap, we drew the matrix of importance-realization for the first 20 crucial aspirations (Diagrams 2 & 3 for men and women, respectively); the importance level on the vertical and perceived realization on the horizontal axis. At this stage, we decided to proceed with items rather than categories. This helped us provide more appropriate information about each aspiration as some items associated with aspirations have been already

dropped in the previous section to promote the fitness of model while testing CFA. The highlighted area called 'A' indicates those aspirations with the most extended break between importance and the chance of realization (Martilla & James, 1977). Given the difference in what young men and women desire, we drew the diagrams for each gender group separately.

For young men, three aspirations emerged as critical: a healthy body and soul in aging, high-paying jobs, and not to get any illnesses, disabilities, and health problems. Young women, on the other hand, deemed four aspirations as critical: having a healthy body and soul in aging, getting admission from well-known universities, reaching peace, and achieving top academic rank. The shared aspiration for both men and women posited in the A area was having a healthy body and soul in aging.

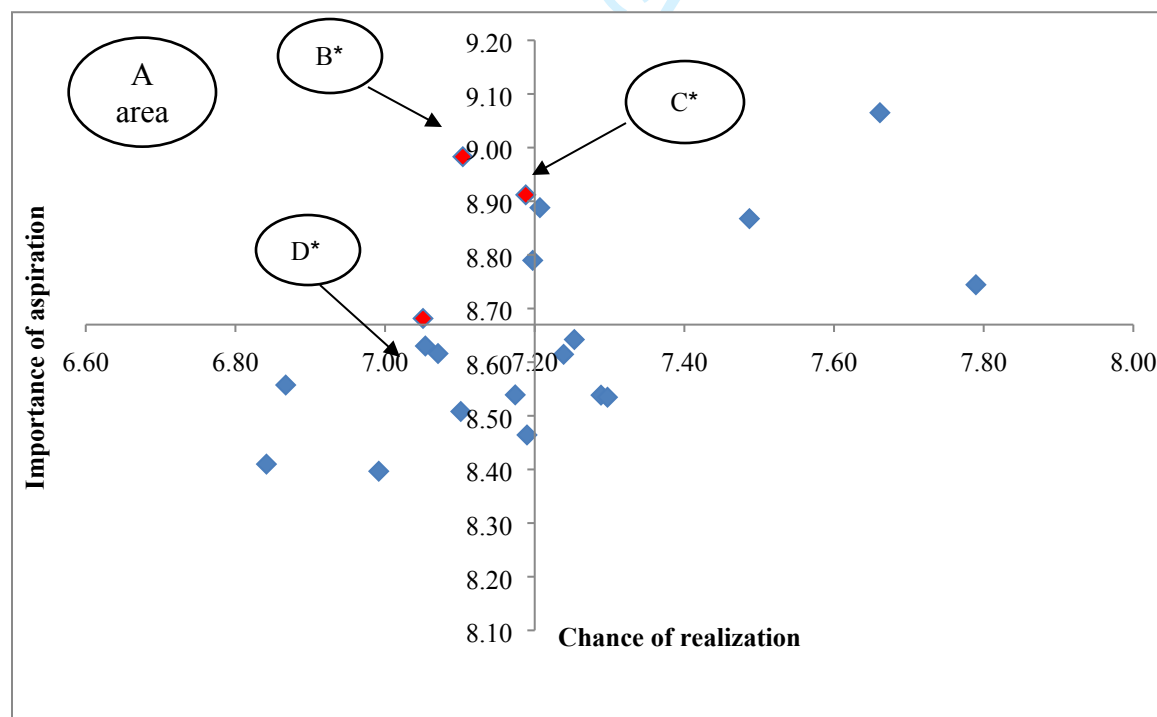


Diagram 1. Importance-realization matrix of top 20 aspirations of young men

B*: Aspire for a healthy body and soul in aging; C*: Aspire for high-paying jobs; D*: Aspire for not to get any illnesses, disabilities, and health problems.

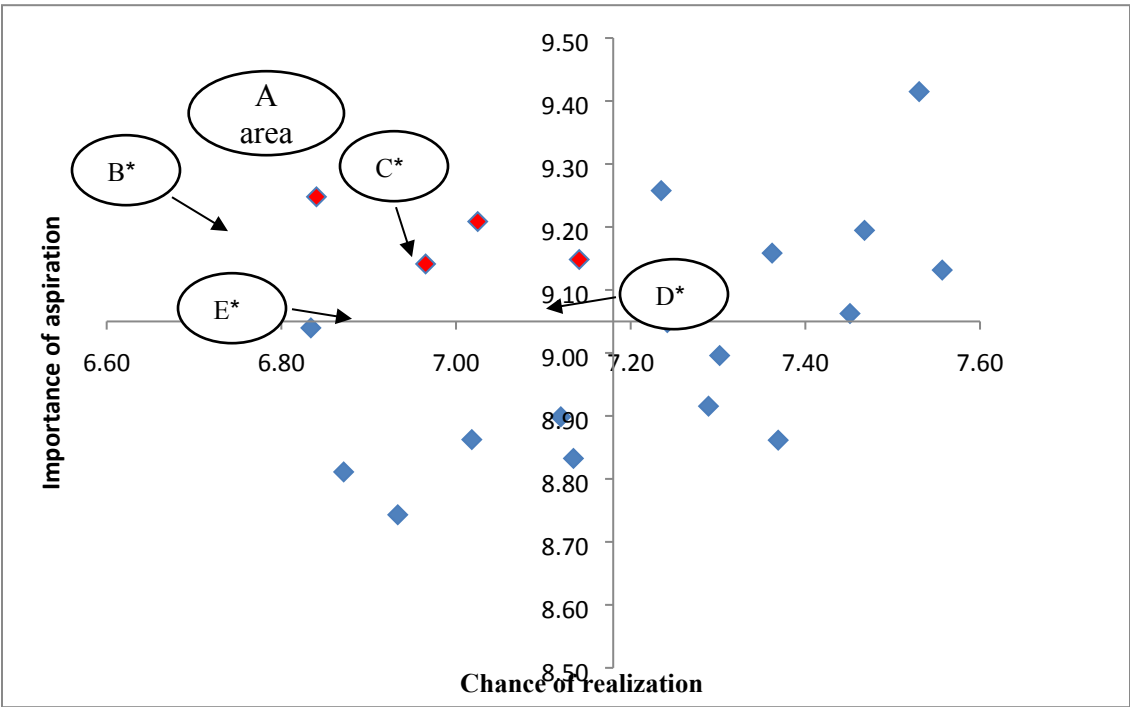


Diagram 2. Importance-realization matrix of top 20 aspirations of young women

B*: Aspire for a healthy body and soul in aging; C*: getting admission from well-known universities; D*: Aspire for reaching peace; E*: Aspire for achieving top academic rank.

Discussion and conclusion

The present study was primarily designed to explore what youth aspire for their future in a non-Western non-WEIRD context. The second aim of this study was to examine whether the importance and perceived expectations attached to the aspirations were different in terms of gender and family income. This study has identified the marriage-based, health-based, and academic aspirations as the most critical and political, sport-based fame, and art-based fame as the least essential dimensions of aspirations for youth. One of the significant findings to emerge from this study is that whereas in most cases, young women care more about their ambitions than men, they

perceive a lower chance to attain them in the future. Broadly, we show that the importance of aspirations is different according to the family's socio-economic status. Accordingly, youngsters from high-income families, in general, perceive their aspirations as more attainable than those from low-income ones. Moreover, to have a healthy body and soul in aging was recognized as a shared aspiration with the widest importance-expectation gap.

Taken together, the results of this research support the idea that gender plays an essential role in what youth desires and expectations of triumphing them in the future. Our findings align with previous studies (Kenkel & Gage, 1983; Carroll & Brayfield, 2007; Blackhurst & Auger, 2008), verify the difference in both importance of aspirations and expectation to fulfil them among gender groups. Contrary to the studies arguing that young women consistently have higher aspirations than men (Schoon et al., 2007), we found heterogeneous effects across gender. There are a set of ambitions that young men consider more important than women. On the other hand, in general, young women consider their aspirations as less feasible than young men. Neither aspirations nor expectations are formed in a vacuum; women in society experience more real-life restrictions than men, particularly in traditional social settings as studied here (Askari-Nadoushan et al., 2018). These results reflect those of Elias et al. (2018), who also found that the aspirations seem less realizable for women than men (see also Armstrong & Crombie, 2000). The inconsistency between the importance of aspirations and the possibility of their accomplishment can be attributed to insufficient capacity. Accordingly, people do not formulate an ambition that is perceived inaccessible in reality (Dalton et al., 2016). Moreover, our results stand against what was found by Habraken (2018), who argues that young men consider economic independence as more important. Our results suggest the opposite, that is, young women see their desires to achieve financial independency more

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Our results are also in line with earlier observations that show the economic situation of youth to be more relevant to what they aspire to (Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Fuller, 2009). Youth from low financial status families deem more importance to the academic, spiritual, sport-based fame categories, while transnational, independency, prestige-based, and food-based ones are believed to be necessary to those from high-income families.

We created importance-expectation matrices to introduce those aspirations with the highest importance but least expectations for men and women. Having a healthy body and soul in aging is at the critical area; that is, the broadest importance-expectation gap might be explained via referring to the contextual feature of Yazd. It is pretty usual for Yazdian youth to live with their grandparents and care for them. This could motivate lead youth to familiarize themselves with the aging difficulties. Consequently, on the one hand, young people in Yazd find being healthy crucial but, on the other hand, not attainable.

To the young men, having a well-paid job is another e critical aspiration. This can be understood via noting that men are yet widely recognized as the primary breadwinners of the family in Iran. At the same time, there has been an ever-increasing unemployment rate in recent decades in Iran (Statista, 2020). Consequently, young men are forced to get a job while working positions are challenging and competitive. Concerning the other critical aspiration of young men: staying health, disabilities, and health problems, more research is needed to explore the reasons behind these aspirations.

Two of the critical aspirations for young females are related studying at prestigious universities. This finding may be explained by the fact that universities are publicly approved mobilization tools, meaning that there is a cultural consensus on recognizing academia as the facilitator of socioeconomic status promotion and mobility. Non-academic positions are more open

to men than women; hence women, in comparison to men, care more about educational attainment. Thus, might be the reason behind young women's tendency to consider getting an academic degree as essential. On the other hand, the goal seems not attainable to young women. Iran's public education system is highly competitive, meaning that only a low proportion of secondary students being admitted to universities. The low acceptance rate of public universities aside, young women also face a challenge in terms of spatial mobility. The most prestigious universities are located in the capital Tehran. This requires young women to live far from their families for several years and this is not a culturally accepted practice.

Moreover, women are supposed to get married at an earlier age in Yazd (Askari-Nadoushan, Fotuhi-Tafti, & Mandegari, 2018; Askari-Nadoushan, 2018). This, in turn, deprives them of educational opportunities. The other critical aspiration was to reach peace. This finding can be understood via considering Iran's geopolitical situation: located in the Middle East, surrounded by several threats such as the rise of fundamentalist groups.

Our data comes from young people aged from 15 to 18 years old. As such the generalisability of our findings to young people belonged to other age groups is subject to certain limitations. Moreover, we did not measure the consequences of existed importance-expectation gap. Hence, future studies could investigate the long-term effects of such breaks for middle age, mainly via longitudinal designs.

Notwithstanding the limitations, the research we report here adds to our understanding of the content of youth aspirations in a non-WEIRD context. First, we provided comprehensive information on youth aspirations in a traditional social setting rarely studied before. Second, our results support the idea that gender and economic status of the family are relevant but not always significant differentiating factors for all dimensions of aspirations. Moreover, we also elaborate on

the most crucial domains of youth aspirations and the resulting importance-expectation gap. Given the individual and societal consequences of such a gap, this issue in particular demands attention from policymakers. Research tells us that what youth aspire to could be potentially represented in their behaviour (Azmat et al., 2013) and actual achievements (Khattab, 2015; Qian & Blair, 1999; Sewell & Hauser, 1980). Hence findings we present can be employed to develop policies aiming to improve social welfare via addressing what is considered essential by youngsters.

Further to the problematic nature of aspirations-expectations (Knight et al., 2016), low aspirations are also regarded as a critical building block of deviant behaviour (Agnew, 1985; Hirschi, 1969). As we found here, the political domain is concurrently the least important and less reachable domain of aspirations. Youngsters likely view the political sphere too unreachable than aspirable.

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