

## Examining the Presentation of the Balanced Family Model in the National Media

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### ABSTRACT

Projecting an Islamic-Iranian balanced family model is a way of dealing with the domestic problems in the existing Iranian families. As a strategic theoretical basis, this can be best undertaken by the national media (TV and radio), which serve as a major subcategory of the cultural system of the country and a pervasive source of informatics and awareness-raising. In this regard, the present study seeks to examine the application of the Islamic-Iranian balanced family model advertised in the national media. The study is a qualitative one conducted on the basis of the grounded theory. In the first step, the national policy statements of the Islamic Republic of Iran and those of the national media are examined in the field of family. In the second step, structured and semi-structured interviews are performed with seven senior experts and executives of the national media so as to find practical ways of creating a balanced family and identify the challenges involved in the presentation of the corresponding model. To deal with these challenges, certain solutions are also recommended. Future research in this field may focus on how applied the balanced family model is in the TV and radio programs and then compare the results with the findings on the media in other countries.

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## Introduction

As a socio-emotional unit, family is a center of growth, wellbeing, development, and sometimes harms that can cause either the flourishing or the failure of an individual and his or her interpersonal relations. It is also the major pillar of the social structure, whose health or disorder accounts for the stability or disintegration of the society (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2005). In the Islamic-Iranian culture, too, family is the basic element of the social system. According to the plan declared by the Islamic Republic for a 20-year horizon, Iran will be a developed country with many enhanced traits, such as the stable family institute. Over the past few decades, the family institute has undergone various changes under the impacts of gradual micro and macro social, cultural and political developments through modernization processes as well as factors such as mass media, whose qualitative and quantitative growth is required for movement toward modernity. In some cases, these changes have seriously harmed the health, stability and function of the family (Strategic Research Center, 2010). The harms can be coped with and controlled through identifying the features of a desirable family which is built upon Islamic-Iranian norms, the factors of the national culture, and Islamic teachings. Promoting the religious and cultural values that are compatible with the Iranian society can theoretically and practically modify and direct the existing social realities in the intended manner. Besides, to predispose the discourse of the Islamic-Iranian balanced family and generalize it from the level of elites to the public mass of the society, both TV and radio channels should address the entity, features and necessity of such a family type. Unfortunately, the studies conducted on family issues in recent years lack methodical unity because they have adopted different approaches based on sociological, psychological or Islamic paradigms, each presenting a different family model. Therefore, despite the difficulties involved, it is necessary to go beyond these disconcerted research procedures by offering a comprehensive model for an Islamic-Iranian balanced family.

It is to be mentioned that the methodical disunity of the studies on family patterns has deprived the national media of a clear-cut family model to offer. Indeed, the media program producers just present different and conflicting models to the audience, and their unawareness of the subject leads to some personal interpretations that are in contrast to the traits of a balanced family sought in the Islamic-Iranian culture. The important role of media, especially TV and radio, in introducing a correct family model is understandable once they are considered as a tool rising from a culture, affecting that culture, and having certain specialized applications. According to Inglis (1998), media refer to any mode of conveying messages by means of a transmitter. They are also sometimes called channels because they serve as a messenger to mediate the



relationship between the sender and the receiver of the message. In this respect, TV and radio channels play the role of institutional catalysts (Vindal, 1997).

The media in a country play various roles including shedding light on issues, culturalizing, contributing to the dynamicity of the society, inducing changes in the values of the society, interacting with different parts of the society, monitoring affairs, being a major subcategory of the cultural-educational system of the country, supplementing the educational function of the family, and being a great source of awareness raising and education. Therefore, to put the Islamic-Iranian pattern of family to practice, it should be used as a theoretical and strategic basis for producing TV and radio programs. The use of this pattern in the national media should seriously be considered as an imperative task under the macro media policies. In this context, the present study aims to examine how and to what extent the government-supported balanced family model is applied by the national media. The model is already plotted in another study by the author of this article. Moreover, certain solutions are proposed in order to cope with the challenges facing the media in this case.

## **Literature review**

### **Effect of media on the family culture**

As highly important means of conveying social values, norms and attitudes, mass media play considerable roles in shaping the family culture. As emphasized by numerous studies, media can both reinforce the family solidarity and create cultural challenges.

**Effect of media on the family socialization:** As Saleh (2001) states, mass media have been of effects even in closed societies such as Saudi Arabia, and they have led to cultural changes worldwide. Also, according to Arsand (2007), family members can benefit from media to enhance the interactions among them, but the efficacy of the media depends on the parents' skill and discretion. Regarding the use of media, Morrison and Krugman (2001) believe that the common selection and watching of films by the members of a family promotes their intimacy and communication. Moreover, watching TV jointly can trigger discussions within the family about different subjects.

**Media and the power structure in the family:** Some researchers have evaluated the role of media in representing and reproducing the power structure in the family. Amirpanahi (2005) believes that media, especially TV, are of influence in shaping the power patterns in families, but they necessarily do not help to adjust or change those patterns. In this context, Niroumand and Farhangi (2008) emphasize that television not only fills individuals' leisure time but also

plays a fundamental role in their socialization and the transmission of social norms.

**Television as an inducer and reflector of social change:** As stated by Jafarzadeh Pour et al. (2009), TV plays a dual role; it serves like a mirror to reflect social values and patterns, and it may cause changes in those values in the long run. Similarly, Ashraf Nazari et al. (2015) have shown that mass media play key roles in the representation of culture and identity as well as the direction of public opinions. As they also assert, the national media in Iran use cultural and identity-based ways and means to present the official discourse of the Islamic Republic.

**Dual roles of the media in social developments:** From the viewpoint of Qhasemi (2009), mass media can be both the facilitators of cultural changes and the stabilizers of social structures. In other words, they can challenge social structures by reflecting social realities and inducing cultural modifications as well as prevent social gaps through correct management. In his research on the necessity of television, Akhgari (2011) considers it as an inseparable part of the modern life which results in the change of man's mode of thinking and his perception of the world. As Eskandari (2011) sees it, media cannot influence the family institute unless they first manipulate the basic beliefs and then the values and norms of the society. This indicates the role of media in the cultural engineering of the society.

### **Modern media and the changes in the family**

Researchers have also paid attention to the effects of modern media, especially the Internet and social networks, on the family structure. For instance, Boroon (2022) has shown that the Internet has made families more dynamic by changing the style of social interactions. In addition, an article published in 2023 suggests that media can promote the cultural literacy of families through appropriate trainings and thus assist the educational and state-run institutes in creating a healthier society. In contrast, a study conducted in 2023 showed the detrimental role of the modern media and social networks; they increase violence among children and change the behavioral patterns within the family. Child violence is believed to be affected by the family status and the contents of the media and social networks.

Based on the aforementioned research findings, media play undeniable roles in the socialization of family members and the stabilization or alteration of family values. In such circumstances, Islamic patterns of media utilization underline peace and tranquility in the family and the reinforcement of its foundations. If not managed properly, the media may undermine family relationships. Due to their dual effects, the newly-emerging media and social



networks have a range of functions, from raising awareness and enhancing cultural literacy to making perturbing changes in family interactions. Hence, it seems necessary for authorities to adopt conscious media policies and for family members to use media purposefully indoors.

### **Theoretical framework**

In his cultivation theory, Grabner (1998) points to the gradual and long-term effects of media especially television on the formation of the audience's mental image of the world around and their conceptualization of social realities. As the theory assumes, watching TV has its own independent role in this act of conceptualizing the social realities. The main tenet of the theory is that the longer people watch television, the more similar their beliefs and assumptions about life and society are to the repeated and constant messages given in art and entertainment programs. In this regard, Chomsky (2005) analyses the role of mass media in the current politics and offers to distinct interpretations of democracy. The first one considers democracy as a system in which the citizens can actively and significantly take part in the management of their crucial affairs and have an access to free, clear and impartial information. This interpretation of democracy is consistent with the definitions provided by dictionaries and political theories. The second interpretation, however, considers democracy as a system in which the decision-making processes and the control on the media are monopolized by the political and economic elites. In this system, the media are not a means of informatics; rather, they serve to reproduce and stabilize the power structures and deter the citizens from real and conscious participation in making decisions on their sociopolitical life. From Chomsky's point of view, this interpretation of democracy is nowadays widespread in modern societies, where the mass media practically and theoretically engineer the public opinions and direct them to the interests of power structures. Those who advocate this approach believe that, in today's world, no social movement or collective action can begin or last unless the mass media stimulate or facilitate it.

In this regard, the 'spiral of silence' theory introduced by Noelle-Neumann (1993) explains how media affect the public opinions. According to it, mass media shape up the public views and attitudes in three ways. First, they project a picture of the stream of thoughts that are dominant in the society. Second, they highlight the direction and change of the public opinions and implicitly inject the spreading thoughts into the public. Third, they impart the sense that expressing certain ideas may lead to social reprobation while holding other ideas brings social approval and support.

Based on the three theoretical frameworks mentioned above, namely Grabner's cultivation theory, Chomsky's media control and Noelle-Neumann's

spiral of silence, this study examines the presentation of the balanced family model in the Iranian national media.

## Methods

This research is a qualitative study based on the grounded theory. In such studies, selection of an appropriate approach helps the research process forward (Danaeifard & Emami, 2007). Therefore, with regard to the subject of this study, the 'emergent grounded theory' proposed by Glaser (1992) was found proper enough to select. In this approach, axial coding necessarily does not lead to Strauss's paradigmatic model, but it allows]the conceptual ordering of the collected data. This type of ordering organizes a set of saturated data in a number of steps (Strauss & Corbin, 2011). In the grounded theory, the data are collected from two main sources. The primary sources include interviews, which are often recorded, participatory and non-participatory observations, interviews already documented in the field, and diaries. The secondary sources include comparative personal experiences related to the literature of the field (Monadi, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The literature involved is either technical or non-technical. Technical literature contains research reports and philosophical as well as theoretical articles. Non-technical literature consists of biographies, diaries, documents, recorded materials, reports, and catalogs (Iman & Mohammadian, 2008). Researchers can use a combination of these sources to collect data (Salsali et al., 2003).

Documented statements are also a source of data collection (Glaser, 2002). In this study, at first, the family-related national policy statements of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the documents belonging to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) were examined. Then, through in-depth semi-structured interviews with a number of senior executives in the national media, the concepts and categories of how to present a balanced family model in the media were extracted. To analyze the data, they were coded.

It is to be noted that an Islamic balanced family model is already designed in another research by the author of the present manuscript. The model has three components including a) pre-marriage requirements (e.g., familiarity of the two parties, status similarity), b) family structure (with a woman as the wife or mother, a man as the husband or father, children, and probably other members such as grandmother and grandfather), and c) family functions (including biosocial function, social control, support, education, and economic function). To ensure the feasibility of these categories and their consistency with Iranian views and values, the model structure was compared to the results of the research on the values and attitudes held by Iranian people. The research was conducted by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance in a series to check the trend of changes in 2001, 2003, and 2016. The companions showed no





conflict between the model categories and the studied views and values. Conversely, there was evident agreement between them. Moreover, the author's lived experience confirms the correspondence of the proposed balanced family model to the values and attitudes of Iranian families.

## **Findings**

### **1. Place of family in upstream documents**

The introduction of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, approved in 1979 and modified in 1989, emphasizes the lofty place of family. According to it, family is the basic unit of the society and the main haven for man's growth and ascension. Also, as an important principle, agreement on ideology and ideals before marriage predisposes the family members' sustainable evolution. The Constitution postulates the fulfillment of this purpose as a duty of the Islamic government. As Principle 10 of the Constitution states, "Since the family is the basic unit of the Islamic society, all the corresponding laws, regulations and plans should facilitate family formation, maintain the sacred status of the family, and consolidate its foundations based on Islamic ethics and laws". In line with this ideal, the Prospective Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the 2025 Horizon has been drawn up in such a way as to protect the family institution from poverty, corruption and discrimination as well as provide it with a desirable environment.

#### **1.1. The general policies of the forth and fifth development plans**

The first phase of the general policies of the four future five-year development plans is devoted to the reinforcement of the family institution, placing special emphasis on the status of women. As Item 14 in the sociopolitical section of the Perspective Plan states, "Attempts should be made to promote the place of family and woman in social arenas, to protect their religious and legal rights in all respects, and to pave the way for their constructive roles". Similarly, Item 15 calls for attempts to eliminate the job, marriage and housing concerns of the youth as well as protect them from social harms. In addition, the social policies in the Fifth Development Plan demand the solidification of family foundations and the enhancement of women's domestic and social roles.

#### **1.2. Objectives and principles of family formation and the corresponding enhancement policies as approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution**

In its session 564 on June 28, 2005, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution approved the objectives and principles of family formation and the policies for family enhancement as follows:

1. One of the signs of divinity is the dichotomous nature of everything in the world. As for man and woman, they are of parity in terms of humanity but of disparity in physiological aspects. As a masterpiece of creation, this dichotomy ensures the evolution and survival of human beings.

2. Despite their divinely predestined natural differences, man and woman should have fair human, social, economic and cultural rights.

3. Family is the fundamental unit of the society in which humans grow and evolve. The laws and regulations in the country should facilitate raising a family, maintain its sacred position, and support the stability of family relationships based on Islamic ethics and laws.

4. Marriage results in intimacy, kindness and peacefulness between a man and a woman. This is complemented with the children's respect and obedience and the parents' mercy and good rearing.

5. All the members of a family, especially the parents, should feel responsible for protecting the family against harms and hazards. They should also enable one another cognitively and behaviorally to live virtuously and get close to God.

6. As major social features of humanity, education and affection originate from the family. In this regard, it is important to note the central role of the mother in providing love and care and that of the father in education and sustenance.

### **1.3. Iranian-Islamic family model**

Recently, models of an Iranian-Islamic family have been the subject of discussions in the 'Iranian-Islamic civilization' discourse. An Iranian-Islamic family is the one the social and cultural constituents of which stem from desirable historical family instances and the teachings of Islam. A model for such a family claims to be healthy and ethical owing to its compatibility with religious teachings and sociocultural circumstances. Of course, this model cannot be widespread unless the Iranian-Islamic lifestyle flourishes in the society. The major goals of proposing an Iranian-Islamic family model are as follows:

a) Ensuring the central role of family in the prosperity of individuals and the society

b) Eliminating the current flaws of families from the society



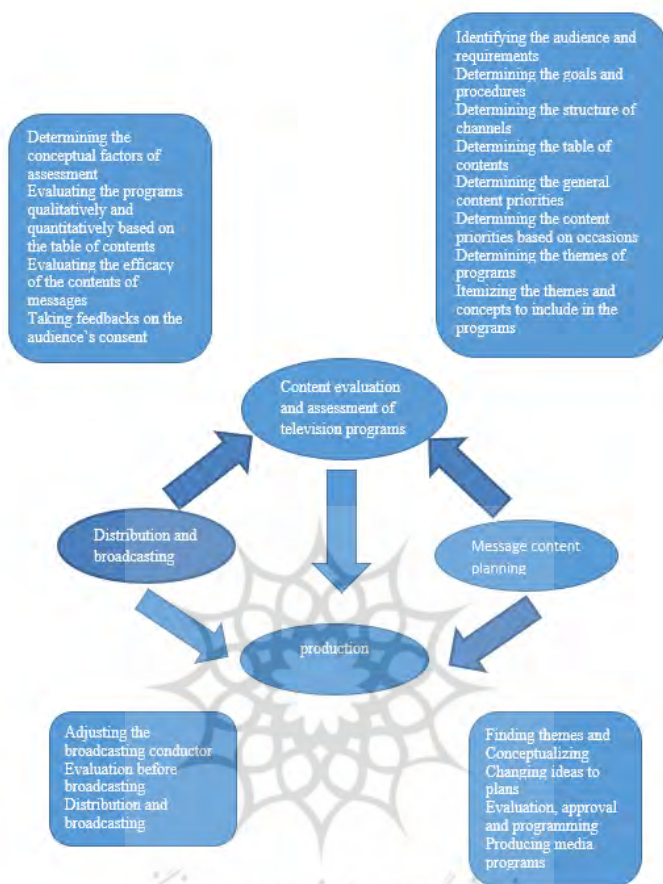


- c) Reinforcing the interpersonal emotional relations in the family
- d) Facilitating the process of marriage
- e) Reducing the effects of Western patterns on the lifestyle of Iranian families.

## **2. Place of family in the documents, policies, and program production priorities of the IRIB**

A significant mission of the IRIB, or Seda va Sima, as an unrivaled state-run speaker which serves based on the official policies of the country, is to underpin the position of family by introducing Iranian-Islamic patterns through appropriate programs. In the process of providing messages for the audience of the national media, the deputy of research, planning and supervision identifies the potential audience and its needs, and then the corresponding goals and procedures are determined for the production of programs. This process involves several steps, including setting the duties of each channel, writing a list of the contents to broadcast, prioritizing the contents in general, prioritizing the contents based on occasions, deciding on the thematic aspects of programs, itemizing the contents to offer in sequence, pinpointing the best items, conceptualizing them, giving them to a group of experts for evaluation, approving them if proper enough, dedicating the corresponding budget, producing the programs, evaluating them after production, and, finally, broadcasting them. As explained, setting the macro policies of the national media and deciding on the content of programs are the responsibilities of the deputy of research, planning and supervision. This organ also receives and evaluates any other content proposed by the other deputies of the organization. The chart below shows the cycle of managing and engineering the content of an intended message.

Over the past years, the national media have fulfilled the mission of introducing the factors of an Iranian-Islamic family by preparing several protocols for content policies and program production regulations. These protocols have been delivered to the TV and radio channel managers and then, through them, to the executives of different work groups in each channel, who are the closest to the production crew. The distributed instructions are based on religious thoughts and the goals and ideals of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



**Figure 1. Cycle of the management and engineering of message contents**

The design and programming center of IRIB published the book *Objectives, domains, priorities and policies of production, preparation and broadcasting* to explain the macro and micro goals and policies pursued through producing different types of programs as well as the rules governing them. In this regard, one may specifically refer to the production of programs about family issues for both TV and radio channels. The aforementioned book is considered as an upstream document in which the micro goals and program production priorities are in line with the macro goals. The book also delineates the ways of attaining those goals.

The design and programming center of the general content planning office under the research, planning and supervision deputy of the national media (2017) has provided an initial list of the contents (including the domains,



categories, instances, and conceptual approaches accepted by the IRIB Organization) to be documented in an integral comprehensive protocol of information. This national media content outline is devised to accurately plot a content framework and integrate the themes intended for the programs. This integration allows the common understanding and interpretation of the contents. Some of these contents are classified under 27 major themes and some others under 110 minor themes. Also, the concepts included in each program are explained in detail under the corresponding major theme. Totally, there are 1500 conceptual axes in this framework. As for the families-related subjects, they lie in two main contextual axes under the codes 'educational' and 'social' with the subcodes 'ethics' and 'family and population'.

In 2016, the national media planning office determined the content priorities of the parliamentary affairs deputy office and the provinces for each field of program production in the provincial centers. The major functions of this deputy office include turning the ideas of Imam Khomeini and the present supreme leader into a discourse, promoting Iranian-Islamic lifestyle, creating public motivation to enhance the national unity and security, injecting hope and liveliness into the society, and strengthening the foundations of the family (by teaching life and communication skills based on Islamic principles, facilitating the process of marriage, and paving the way for the increase of population). These purposes have been documented as a set of instructions for program production in the national media. The instructions have to be put to practice as content priorities by the IRIB television, radio, news office, and planning units in individual fields of production. Such priorities, defined under macro fields of action, are adopted depending on the nature of the media units. For instance, contents on family are dealt with only on certain channels.

**Table 1. The policies on the family-related contents devised by the programming deputy of the national media and adopted by the channels**

IRIB channel	Conceptual domain	Concepts for program production
TV channel 1	Reinforcement of family foundations	Promotion of married life skills, Modeling perfect families, Childrearing by an instructive mother and a responsible father, Cultivation to reduce the rate of divorce
TV channel 2	Reinforcement of family foundations	Promotion of married life skills, Modeling perfect families, Childrearing by an instructive mother and a responsible father, Cultivation to

		reduce the rate of divorce
	Growth of population	Cultivating for marriage and higher childbearing, Elimination of the obstacles to population growth
	Discipline and responsiveness	Representation of the family role in the discipline and responsiveness of the society
TV channel 3	Islamic-Iranian lifestyle	Promotion of Islamic lifestyle with a focus on social responsiveness and discipline, simplicity of life, and contentment
TV channel 'Qur	Islamic-Iranian lifestyle	Explaining the parameters of lifestyle from the viewpoint of the Qur'an so as to improve the quality of life with respect to social discipline and responsiveness
	Nutrition and health	Training the culture of healthy nutrition with a focus on the Islamic-Iranian lifestyle (presenting a proper nutrition model at individual, familial and social levels)
TV channel 'S	Health of family and society	Creating peace of mind in the family with a focus on ethical principles, and the safety and health of the environment, Preparing the society for the policies of population growth and family stability
	Ethical behavior	Enhancing moralities with a focus on such issues as trial, hope, blessing, avoidance of divorce, simple life, and contentment, Advertising abidance to law and social order
TV channel 'Tehran'	Reinforcement of family foundations	Launching a discourse to make marriage the top priority of the youth, Advertising easy marriage, Modeling and presenting perfect families, Presenting married life skills
TV channel 'Ofoqh'	Islamic Revolution discourse	Discourse of Imam and the leader about life issues, Current studies on the supreme leader and his mottoes for new years
TV channel 'Koodak va Noujavan'	Islamic education	Encouragement of thinking, Methods of studying and learning, Elucidating the Qur'anic culture with a focus on politeness, sincerity and honestly



**Table 2. Policies and solutions set by the IRIB supreme council of family**

Problems	Solutions
1. Failure to implement the policies of the organization in producing programs about family	- Establishing a family policy-making and planning council with the aim of family convergence, stability and ascension
2. Lack of defendable and integrated policies and viewpoints about family	- Establishing think rooms for elites in the national media to deal with woman and family issues
3. Inconsistency of the theoretical foundations of the media in the field of education with the task of program production	- Preparing a family charter in the national media
4. Presentation of a nonintegrated model of family	- Constant identification of problems in the field of family and the ways to cope with them
5. Inattention to the capacities of the Iranian family for policy making and planning	- Establishing think rooms with the presence of experts and technicians in each channel based on its mission to produce telefilms, series, and the like in comic and narrative genres as well as robust analytical, scientific, political, and social documentaries
6. Presentation of nonnative family models	- Establishing a supervision unit for family programs to constantly monitor them and to optimally coordinate them from production to broadcasting on all the channels
7. Conflicts between the direct and indirect messages of the media	- Drawing up the parameters of program production in the field of family according to the supreme leader's viewpoints
8. Tradition-modernity confusion in the proposed models	- Revision of policies, instructions and regulations of the media in the field of family
	- Pathological examination of production and supervision related to programs about family
	- Prioritizing the family and its interests in the corresponding policy making and planning
	- Adopting a systemic position in the media to strengthen the family institution and optimize its functions
	- Establishing a bank of research to coordinate the studies on family in different units
	- Making various models of Islamic lifestyle
	- Determining the parameters of an efficient family

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Growth of filiarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discouraging the illogical demands of children and the passivity of parents</li> <li>- Placing no emphasis on filiarchal aspects</li> </ul>
1. Spreading nuclear family models with their Western definition and traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- producing programs that make the convergence of family members and relatives possible</li> </ul>
2. Weakening of family relations network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoiding the radical display of the family members' individual activities</li> </ul>
3. Emphasis on individualism rather than the central role of family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having the presence of grandparents in family TV series</li> <li>- Promoting meritocracy in family management</li> </ul>
Radical emphasis on one's rights rather than duty and ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting ethics rather than the pursuit of rights in family relationships</li> <li>- Correcting the public attitudes about the rights and duties in the family and eliminating wrong notions in this regard</li> </ul>
Highlighting parental relations over marital relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing an efficient model of marital roles to spouses</li> <li>- Providing various models of an Iranian family for all walks of life, including social, economic, urban and rural segments, by using experts in religion, sociology and communications</li> </ul>
Advertising the values and lifestyle of rich urban families, usually those in Tehran, as a common family model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasizing the positive values and points of all social segments, as well as hinting the negative aspects of their lives</li> <li>- Avoiding the negative stereotyping of a certain social class or bolding the positive points of another class</li> <li>- Gender segregation and respecting the distinctions of man and woman with a family-oriented approach</li> </ul>
1. Weakening of gender distinctions in the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empowerment of women to preserve their gender identity versus men</li> <li>- Offering various socioeconomic participation models to women with a focus on their gender identity in the context of family</li> </ul>
2. Showing dual behaviors regarding the gender distinctions in the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposing a theory of norms for the gender issue in the media with a native-Islamic approach</li> <li>- Emphasis on the place of women as the agents of love and care and on that of men as</li> </ul>

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	the agents of household sustenance and running
Increase of one-child families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prohibition of showing gender superiority in movies and TV series</li> <li>- Displaying complete natural families with the presence of the parents and children</li> <li>- Emphasis on the place of woman as the agent of love and education and on that of man as the agent of household sustenance and running as well as the dependence of family members especially children</li> <li>- Honoring men for their economic and paternal roles</li> </ul>
Helping to make the power structure matriarchal in the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explaining the dependency of men and women's roles on their gender nature</li> <li>- Enhancing the specific features of each gender</li> </ul>
1. Giving men's roles to women	- Elaboration on religious teachings about the role and position of mothers
2. Exchange of man and wife's roles	- Reinforcement of the central role of woman in the family
1. Dominance of women's passive, inefficient and aggressive behavioral patterns in the family	- Providing a single definition of the maternal role and a healthy family
2. Projecting some of the emotional and affective traits of women as their weakness or illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoidance of showing an aggressive and illogical image of women</li> <li>- Encouraging women to contemplate about their roles as a mother and a wife</li> <li>- Highlighting the directive role of mothers in childrearing</li> <li>- Considering the family as an institution and trying to solve problems within the family</li> <li>- Displaying the family as a shelter for the members and a haven where to solve problems</li> </ul>
Changing or weakening of family functions (sexual, educational, reproductive, childbearing, affective and economic functions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Displaying the family as a center for the love and peace of the members</li> <li>- Emphasizing the participation of both spouses in rearing the children and their consensus on how to do it</li> <li>- Recalling attentions to the positive results of raising children based on religious teachings</li> <li>- Displaying the warm and affective relation of children to parents especially the father</li> </ul>

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Change of the economic functions of the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoidance of showing a family as an insecure environment</li> <li>- Reinforcing the basic role of the family in the socialization of the children</li> <li>- Displaying the central role of men in earning a living and that of women in managing the consumption</li> <li>- Avoidance of downgrading the task of childrearing</li> </ul>
Spread of childless and one-child family patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encouraging young couples to bear children and avoid having only one</li> <li>- Displaying joy and liveliness in families with the presence of children</li> </ul>
1. Separation of religion from the daily life of the family	
2. Incompatibility of the offered models with religious teachings and the native requirements of the society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presenting and promoting an effective model of religious life in ordinary and everyday life</li> </ul>
3. Ignoring the display of how religious teachings affect the decisions of the family and the solution of the problems there	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasizing and strengthening the role of parents in the religious upbringing of children</li> <li>- Emphasizing the guiding role of mothers in raising children</li> </ul>
4. Showing the parents' lack of care to train the children ideologically and behaviorally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Showing how to use religious teachings to solve family problems</li> </ul>
5. Contradictory reactions of the family to the practice of norms Showing the parents as those unable to breed their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demonstrating no passive or ineffective parenting model in the family</li> <li>- Reinforcing the solidarity in the kinship network</li> <li>- Emphasizing the principle of dialogue and negotiation in family interactions</li> <li>- Displaying face-to-face intimate communication in the family and its positive effects on the foundations of the family</li> </ul>
1. The change of interpersonal relations to virtual communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Showing the ways that family members can express love and affection for one another</li> </ul>
2. Lack of enhanced family solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Correcting one's attitudes towards the family-in-law (mother-in-law, father-in-law, etc.)</li> <li>- Teaching the skills of how to communicate with the family-in-law</li> </ul>

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1. Showing right-related conflicts, confrontations and insults between men and women in the national media	- Prohibition of imparting any feministic ideas, prejudiced thoughts against men, and matriarchal or patriarchal bias
2. Verbal aggression of women against men and vice versa	- Promoting moralities rather than pursuit of rights in family relationships
Normalization of the couples' insulting each other (ridicule and humiliation)	- Showing no scenes of family conflicts
Ignoring ethical and religious norms in family relations	- Avoidance of showing women as aggressive and nervous individuals
Making fun of each other's gender by children in the roles of brother and sister	- Emphasis on family members' mutual respect
	- Strengthening men's religious passion without going to extremes in family relationships
1. Women's suspicion of men	- Increasing the couple's trust in each other
2. Displaying men's cheating	- Showing honesty and sincerity in family members' relationships
3. Normalization of children's cheating their parents	- Emphasizing the loyalty and commitment of Iranian men to their wife and family
	- Emphasizing the commitment and loyalty of family members to one another
	- Raising children's spirit of appreciation for their parents
Children's feeling that their parents always owe them (filiarchy)	- Avoidance of raising the expectations of family members from each other
	- Developing the desire to take responsibilities and participate in important family decisions
	- Emphasizing the respect for the rights and dignity of parents by children, and vice versa
	- Inclusion of emotionally positive statements in parents' talks to children in media dramatic productions
Showing parents incapable of relating to their children	- Promoting different ways of communication between parents and children
	- Showing correct and practical methods of raising children in dramatic productions
Impoliteness of children with their parents and the family elders	- Enhancing the culture of respecting parents and elders
	- Advertising the practice of modesty in the relationships among family members

Violence, aggression, and family conflicts between parents and children (displaying the physical punishment of or violence with children and adolescents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encouraging children to obey their parents in a reasonable way</li> <li>- Teaching discourse skills, tolerance and flexibility by experts in education</li> <li>- Teaching non-violent corrective punishment methods and using incentives instead of punitive methods</li> </ul>
1. Showing illogical and merely emotion-based marriages (love at the spot)	
2. Paying attention to appearances and the material standards of marriage in TV series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting the cultural criteria of marriage</li> </ul>
3. Ignoring the cultural criteria of marriage in movies and TV series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presenting a marriage model with congruent couples</li> <li>- Emphasis on cultural compatibilities in marriage</li> </ul>
4. Displaying the marriages of people who are not of the same status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advertising the culture of simplicity</li> </ul>
5. Advertising merely economic standards for marriage	
Downplaying the role of parents and family elders in the marriage process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening the determining, constructive, guiding, and supportive role of parents in the marriage process</li> </ul>
Showing males and females mixed in marriage ceremonies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Showing wedding ceremonies as held in Iranian families</li> </ul>
Displaying premarital love instead of lasting love after marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Showing lasting love after marriage instead of love before marriage</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highlighting the harms of unhealthy and unconventional friendships between men and women</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Condemning the culture of celibacy</li> <li>- Avoidance of advertising single life for boys and girls</li> </ul>
Inducing fear of getting married and discouraging the marriage of young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encouraging young people to get married</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasizing peace of mind between couples as a positive effect of marriage</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Showing easy marriages that are free from luxuries</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Producing programs in line with raising families, strengthening them, and making them functional</li> </ul>
1. Showing traditional marriage to be inefficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting traditional marriage practices</li> </ul>



2. Failure to rebuild the culture of mediation in marriage in line with the needs of the day

Parents' silence or negative reaction to their children's unusual marriage

Promoting the culture of polygamy

- Strengthening the determining role of parents in guiding and supporting the marriage process
- Prohibition of displaying polygamy instances and marriages concealed from the first wife

1. Normalizing the issue of divorce

2. Eliminating the mediating role of family elders in solving couples' problems and preventing divorce

3. Vague reasons for divorce in TV series

4. Discussing no ethics for divorce in accordance with religious and Quranic teachings

Seeking triangular love

- Providing information on the adverse consequences of divorce
- Showing the effects of divorce on children
- Ensuring that the marriage and divorce instances shown on the media are in complete agreement with research findings, especially the domestic findings, and expert opinions

Prohibition of showing love conflicts between young people

After the upstream documents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and those of the IRIB Organization were examined on the purpose of finding ways of introducing a balanced family model in the national media, structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven senior experts and executives of the national media. The following tables present the demographic data of the interviewees and the information they provided.

**Table 3. Demographic data of the senior experts and executives of the national media**

No.	Interviewee	Field of study	Position
1	Dr. Ali Tolou'i	Research in social sciences	Head of the research center of the IRIB Organization
2	Dr. Hassan Khojasteh	Strategic management	Former head of the IRIB radio and a faculty member at the University of Radio and Television

			of Iran
3	Masoumeh Ashtianizad	MA in media management	Director of the family group in Channel 2 of Sima
4	Dr. Mohammad Alviri	History and civilization of Muslim nations	Associate professor at Bagher al-Oloum University and a media expert
5	Dr. Hassan Bonyanian	Public administration	Head of the social and cultural commission of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution
6	Dr. Ali Darabi	Political sciences	Director general of the IRIB provincial affairs and the former head of the IRIB Sima
7	Dr. Roghayeh Mohammadzadeh	Cultural sociology	Director of the social institutions group in Channel 2 of Sima

**Table 4. The findings from the interviewed senior experts and executives of the national media**

No	Category
1	Casting an independent non-environmental look at religious teachings and their meta-identity nature to practice the extracted model of a balanced family in the context of Iranian culture
2	Using lived experiences to justify the Iranian nature of the extracted model of the balanced family
3	Adjusting some of the extracted categories of the balanced family model in order to implement it in the current Iranian society
4	Implementing the balanced family model within the framework of the general and strategic policies of the national media
5	Preparing questionnaires based on the programs produced in the national media and the audience and validating them to apply the balanced family model in the national media
6	Using cluster and cascade approaches to the data-driven balanced family model
7	Devising policies based on the research findings (regarding the balanced family)
8	Keeping the statements short to define the policies derived from the balanced family model





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- 9        Ensuring the flexibility of the model and emphasizing its ethical dimensions in the media
  - 10      Policymaking in the national media based on the balanced family model
  - 11      Unification and integration of national media programs based on the balanced family model
  - 12      Preparation of documents for an ideal family based on the balanced family model
  - 13      Laying the grounds to depict the parameters of the balanced family in the national media
  - 14      Updating the documents resulting from the balanced family model in the national media
  - 15      Bridging the gap between the managers and policymakers of the national media and the writers and producers of programs there
  - 16      Family experts' supervision on the contents of the programs produced by the national media
  - 17      Critical discussion of family-oriented programs on the national media by family experts in order to eliminate the problems existing in the content and structure of national media programs
  - 18      Emphasis on the national media managers' awareness of the indicators of a balanced family and the solutions to the conflict between the realities of the society and the characteristics of a balanced family
  - 19      The need to consult female experts and managers so as to formulate family policies based on the balanced family model and adjust the view of the family in the national media
  - 20      The need to depict a balanced family model considering the realities and social requirements of the current Iranian society
  - 21      Developing national media policies in the field of family based on the balanced family model
  - 22      Using the balanced family model in the three stages of message determination, message production, and message broadcasting
  - 23      The need to update the Islamic balanced family indicators so as to make them efficient
  - 24      Practicing the policies developed based on the Islamic balanced family model up to the message determination stage in order to prevent the lack of creativity of program-making agents in the national media
  - 25      Designing an Islamic balanced family model as an introduction to designing a desirable family model appropriate for the existing realities of the Iranian society
  - 26      The need for the practical definition of some propositions such as caring for the elderly
  - 27      The need to design the balanced family model based on social determinism
  - 28      The need for the pathology of the current state of the Iranian family after designing a balanced family model
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- 29     The necessity of teaching the balanced family issues in the national  
media through entertainment programs
  - 30     Introducing the relative advantages of an Islamic family separately  
based on the current challenges in the Iranian family and responding to  
these challenges with  
those advantages
  - 31     Paying attention to the relationship between the family and the Islamic  
government (politics) when developing the balanced family model
  - 32     The need to develop a balanced family model based on paradigms  
The need to design a questionnaire with indirect questions about  
balanced family indicators in order to evaluate the audience and
  - 33     program makers' acceptance of the developed balanced family model  
and to make appropriate changes in the model according to the needs  
of the society
  - 34     Emphasis on the model flexibility in terms of respect for privacy and  
limitations
  - 35     The need for a family-centered outlook of social phenomena
  - 36     The necessity of paying attention to the psychological differences  
between men and women in a balanced family
  - 37     Avoidance of relying on the traditional supportive functions of the  
family in favor of new supportive functions to be designed for the  
family
  - 38     The need to consider the positions of mother and father in a balanced  
family
  - 39     Considering the woman as an emotional shelter in the family
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### **Expert opinions on the challenges involved in the application of the balanced family model in the national media**

The interviews showed differences among the senior experts and executives of the national media in terms of their approach of dealing with a balanced family model and how to apply it in IRIB programs. The expressed opinions are presented in the following classification:

#### **Agreeing approaches**

Some experts and senior managers of the national media believe that the extracted indicators of a balanced family can be used in various ways in the national media. One way is to implement the corresponding model in accordance with the macro and strategic policies of the national media. In this approach, the macro policies are localized based on the findings of the present study and then formulated in the form of short sentences. For example, in a discourse-oriented program about family, a guest would briefly identify herself as a chaste wife and mother.



The questionnaires are designed according to the genre of the programs produced in the national media, the agents involved in the production (i.e., head of the group, producer, editor, writer, director, actor, and host or hostess), the audience, and the balanced family indicators. These questionnaires are then answered by the program-making agents. Finally, their validity and reliability are measured using reliable methods. After this process, macro and micro policies are formulated. The lived experience of those who are involved in the production of programs in the national media plays a very important role in the formulation of these policies.

Some other experts also believe that, to prevent the lack of creativity of program makers, the policies developed based on the Islamic balanced family model should be adopted up to the message determination stage, which was mentioned earlier. This means that program producers should prepare various programs with a mastery of the macro content policies and family-oriented topics and by utilizing their creativity and initiatives.

**Opposing approaches:** In the interviews, some experts also opposed the application of a balanced family model in the national media. They mentioned a few reasons as follows:

- a) A balanced family model has to be developed according to the realities and requirements of the current Iranian society.
- b) Some phrases such as caring for the elderly need to be defined operationally.

The phrase above is of biological and social functions in the family and is known as a subcategory of (.....). The recommendations of Islam regarding this issue are quite clear, and practicing it or not determines its effect on the strengthening of the family and the stability of its values or the instability of the family and the weakening of its functions. And the fact that some families do not practice the statement does not indicate its ineffectiveness. On the other hand, many families act on it, and, as a result, their bio-social functions and emotional support are better. Meanwhile, the national media currently address some of the statements related to the balanced family in unintegrated and inconsistent manners in many programs, which are produced with different structures. In other words, without having a coherent model of the family, program makers sometimes address such issues just due to religious concerns. This occurs only when program makers feel committed to the religion, though the cases are rare. Thus, a substantial set of guidelines, such as the one extracted in the present study, should be provided to program makers, and they should also be obligated to follow it.

## Discussion and conclusion

According to Grabner's theory of cultivation, Chomsky's media control, and Neumann's spiral of silence, the media can gradually influence the formation of the audience's mental image and create cognitive changes. Therefore, messages produced based on a balanced family model can preserve and promote the Iranian-Islamic identity of Iranian families, and the Islamic Republic of Iran can also use the media as a tool to transmit Iranian and Islamic cultural values and components to reinforce the foundation of the family. Considering the impact of the media on the attitudes of the audience, the necessity of presenting a balanced family model in the national media, and the documents and laws of the national media in the field of family, it can be claimed that the national media system suffers from the lack of a coherent and unified family model which the Islamic Republic of Iran deserves. Although the macro policies of the national media in the field of family have been formulated over the past years based on the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, the micro-strategies and guidelines have been associated with certain flaws, and the requirements of the society have distracted the media from paying attention to a balanced model that includes all the details of a family raising from background to structure and function. When designing a dynamic model, inclusion of the requirements of the time accelerates the transformation of the existing family form into the desired form. However, that desired form must be created with all the corresponding indicators and even the slightest actions in the family taken into account. Then, its indicators must be formulated with regard to the conditions of the society and the harms involved. The balanced family model, the features of which have been outlined in the present study, can serve as a basis for media programs in all the three stages of preparation, production, and broadcasting. It can also be used both to develop macro policies and to present content instances as well as approaches for programming. The outlined policies should not be devoted to a specific radio or television network; rather, they should be applied to all the programs produced in accordance with the structure and goals of the network.

In addition, with regard to the family-related policies announced by the supreme leader, the national media documents should be studied so as to make all the planning policies of IRIB family-oriented; currently, just some channels have family-oriented content guidelines.

### **The necessity of designing a balanced family model based on social needs**

Some senior media executives and experts believe that certain categories extracted for a balanced family model should be adjusted according to social needs; otherwise, the model will not be applicable in the media. In response,



it is to be noted that the requirements of the society were considered in the present study, a number of categories were revised when designing the model, and the indicators that seemed to be in conflict with the current Iranian family were elucidated.

### **Taking the relationship between the family and the Islamic government (politics) into account when developing the balanced family model**

The indicators of a balanced family model were extracted accurately from the interviews and with reference to original Islamic sources. Some of those indicators are related to the duties of the government in the field of family. For example, at the time of the holy prophet of Islam (pbuh), if a girl had multiple suitors and her family was helpless in choosing one of them, they would go to the prophet, as a lawmaker, and sought his verdict. The prophet would consider the girl's social status and get her married to a man who was reasonably rich and motivated enough to run her life. Also, in cases the prophet intended to break down racial discrimination, he would get a beautiful and wealthy girl married to a poor and black boy. These examples indicate the relationship of the family with the the state and the legislative system.

### **Emphasis on the flexibility of the model with respect to red lines and limitations**

An interviewee pointed to the flexibility of the model regarding the interaction between a man and a woman who are not related. To reject this objection, it is to be noted that flexibility should be reflected in the interpretations of the issue, but it should not be equated with the approval of the status quo. If the red lines are not respected, they should not be ignored under the pretext of flexibility. Religious norms should be introduced exactly as they are in the form of indicators.

### **The need to develop a model with questionnaires in which the audience's views on the model are evaluated**

This view is also rejected because the immediate audience of this model is the media agents who should enhance the public acceptance of the model by using the tools of art diversely in various programs made on the basis of the indicators of the balanced family model. Therefore, the acceptance of the public audience should not be taken as a prerequisite.

Some of the solutions suggested by the experts and the author of the research, based on her 17 years of experience in the national media, can be used to implement the balanced family model in IRIB. They are as follows:

a) Integrating and unifying national media programs based on the balanced family model: The producers of family-related programs should discuss the balanced family model with the national media executives every six months and avoid contradictory statements about the family in different programs. For example, given the macro policies of IRIB about childbearing and the population crisis in the country, which encourage the audience to have children, this indicator should be considered in all programs, rather than scaring women from giving birth under the age of 25 or over the age of 35 in a medical program. Thus, negotiation of issues brings the perspectives of program makers and managers closer together.

b) Establishing content councils in the national media through family councils can lead to a balanced family document. The purpose of such content councils is to form groups of different experts who come together, have consultation and deliberation, and finally prepare a balanced family document.

c) Using the balanced family model as a basis for criticizing family-oriented programs and monitoring the content of IRIB family programs by experts

d) Providing the required context to show the parameters of the balanced family in the national media

e) Updating the document resulting from the balanced family model in the national media in order to make it more efficient

f) Bridging the gap between the executives and policymakers of the national media and the writers and program producers there

g) Emphasizing the fact that the national media authorities need to be aware of the parameters of a balanced family and the solutions to the conflict between the realities of the society and the characteristics of that type of family.

h) The need to consult female experts and managers to formulate family policies based on the balanced family model, thus adjusting the attitudes about family in the national media

i) Emphasis on the pathology of the current situation of the Iranian family after designing a balanced family model

j) The tenets of a balanced family need to be taught in the national media only in entertainment programs. This is because some national media executives believe that the balanced family model should only be used in programs that are made to entertain the audience. As they argue, the number of viewers of these programs is larger than that of the other national media programs, and the conveyance of the message is implicit.





k) The relative advantages of the Islamic family should be presented separately based on the current challenges in the Iranian family, and these challenges should be responded to by referring to those advantages. This means that only some of the extracted indicators of the Islamic family should be used in national media programs, considering the current problems of the Iranian family.

l) The family functions presented in national media programs need to be viewed systemically.

### **Strategies**

a) Establishing a supreme family council with the aim of policy-making, modeling, preparing an index, and reproducing the Iranian-Islamic family in the national media

b) Monitoring the implementation of the supreme family policies to coordinate and synergize the family concepts in all the channels

c) Supporting the launching of a virtual family counseling network through the TV with the aim of reinforcing the family foundations

d) Establishing a special council for planning, programming and supervision in order to review and evaluate all the program production plans from the viewpoints of women and families

e) Establishing a media clothing design council in order to provide appropriate and diverse clothing models in programs and to set a role model for the younger generation

f) Requiring the media channels to allocate at least one series per year with family as its core subject

### **Challenges and limitations of the media in the field of women and family**

- Conflict of raising awareness about social harms with moral and religious teachings: some might feel that the media try to normalize the harms.

- Interpreting the reflection of harms and weaknesses as hostile pessimism

- Shortage of specialized and committed personnel in the fields of drama, acting, and especially screenwriting

- Limitations in giving informing about family health issues: there are differences in the criteria for auditing television and film productions.

- Lack of a comprehensive model and the capacity for criticism and the acceptance of criticism in the society

- Obscurity in the ways of depicting emotions, feelings, love, affection, and feminine beauty within the family in drama series
- Existence of ambiguous conflicts between Iranian-Islamic fashions and the world of variety, show-off and self-projection
- Limitations in showing women's championship sports in long shots
- Limitations in depicting the inappropriate cultural situations and women's clothing in different periods of history
- Uncertainty about the real position of women in decision-making and media policy-making, considering the different and conflicting interpretations of women's ability to manage significant affairs

As part of a research project, the bureau of women and family affairs in the national media (2009) has prepared a set of guidelines for depicting the presence of women and the implementation of a desired family model based on the lofty teachings of Islam, the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the women's charter approved by the supreme council of the Cultural Revolution, the approach proposed by Imam Khomeini (pbuh) and the supreme leader, and the criteria for producing and broadcasting IRIB programs. The documented guidelines were made available to the media planning and design center after several workshops and specialized meetings with elites and thinkers in the fields of religion, sociology, media, art, culture, etc.

In 2012, the book *Executive Regulations for IRIB Production, Supply, and Broadcasting* was published after slight changes in the previous book in the field of programming policies. In addition to the general program production criteria that all programs produced in the organization must comply with, the book refers to the criteria for program-making groups and agents. Some criteria also address the procedures for implementing family-centered program.

The research center of IRIB has also published a book titled *The Ideal Islamic Family from the Perspective of Experts* with an emphasis on the relationships among family members and considerations regarding the performance of the IRIB Organization. After examining the relationships between husband and wife as well as between parents and children from the perspective of Islam and the pathology of the current situation, the book devotes a chapter to the subject of media and family and discusses the pathological aspects of television programs in terms of how Islamic values are transmitted in family relationships from the perspective of experts.

Moreover, the supreme family council of IRIB has conducted a research project to examine the problems of the national media in the area of family-



related programs. It has identified some problems with the media policy-making and planning, family structure and management, family function and efficiency, family communications, and family raising and consolidation. Then, the project provides solutions for stepping away from the current situation toward a desirable situation. The present study has examined practical methods of creating a desirable and efficient family model in the national media of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In line with this study, it is recommended for future research to examine how much a balanced family model is presented in various national media programs and to compare it with the media in other countries.

### **Ethical Considerations**

**Ethical considerations of the research:** Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. The study was done with the informed consent of the participants.

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