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# Designing a Family-Centered Welfare System Model in Iran: Integrating Social Balance, State Solidarity, and Takaful

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## ABSTRACT

Iran's welfare system, despite its extensive institutional structure, has proven inefficient in utilizing the capacity of the family as an independent social institution due to its predominantly individual-centered and economy-centered approaches. This study was conducted with the aim of designing an innovative family-centered model to address the existing gap in welfare modeling and in pursuit of implementing the "General Policies on the Family" (2016). This research is applied in nature and qualitative in methodology, employing documentary analysis and meta-synthesis techniques. Data were collected from upstream policy documents and from the theoretical foundations articulated by Martyr Sadr concerning social justice. These data were extracted and conceptualized within three principal pillars: "social balance," "state solidarity," and "takaful," and subsequently modeled within the framework of Charles Jones' policy cycle. The findings indicate a structural disconnect between "legal ideals" and "individual-centered implementation" in the current welfare model. The proposed model, through the integration of the three pillars, redefines the role of the state (solidarity) from that of a distributive agent to a regulatory authority and ultimate guarantor, while simultaneously activating the capacity of civil society institutions (takaful) and the internal functional role of the family (balance). Institutionalization of this model through policy integration within the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare would resolve the challenges of structural inefficiency and policy parallelism. By shifting welfare support from the individual level to the family level, the model establishes the foundation for the realization of sustainable social justice.

**Keywords:** *Family-centered welfare, state solidarity, social takaful, social balance, welfare policymaking*

## Introduction

The welfare system, as one of the principal pillars of public policymaking, plays a central role in reducing social inequalities and enhancing quality of life. In Iran, the significance of this system is amplified due to the family-oriented social structure and the emphasis of Islamic teachings on social justice. However, evidence suggests that Iran's current welfare system faces profound structural challenges, including inefficiency in resource allocation, institutional parallelism, and the dominance of a "therapeutic-supportive" approach over an "empowerment-oriented" approach (1, 2). The fundamental problem is that existing welfare policies are predominantly "individual-



centered” and “employment-centered,” while the family as an independent unit of policymaking has been largely overlooked (3, 4).

This structural gap persists despite the explicit emphasis in the General Family Policies proclaimed in 2016 on “establishing a family-centered society” and positioning the family as the محور (axis) of laws, regulations, and executive systems (5). Nearly a decade after the issuance of this document, no operational model has been designed to translate these macro-level aspirations into concrete executive mechanisms. Previous research has either focused on critiquing the existing welfare structure (1, 6) or examined the jurisprudential and theoretical foundations of welfare in an abstract manner (7, 8). Yet, the absence of a comprehensive model capable of integrating governmental responsibilities (state solidarity), social capacities (takaful), and the internal functioning of the family (social balance) remains evident.

Accordingly, the central question of this research is: How can a model for Iran’s welfare system be designed—drawing upon indigenous theoretical foundations, particularly the ideas of Shahid Sadr, and upstream policy documents—that overcomes existing inefficiencies and transforms the family from a passive recipient of services into the core locus of welfare and development? This study seeks to address the modeling gap in Iranian welfare policymaking.

By proposing both a conceptual and operational model for family-centered welfare policymaking, this research aims to provide a framework capable of improving Iran’s welfare conditions and assisting decision-makers in adopting more effective and coherent policies.

## Research Background

The literature on social welfare policy over the past two decades demonstrates that welfare regimes are typically classified along a spectrum ranging from liberal to social-democratic and conservative-corporatist models, depending on the relative roles of the state, market, and family (9). Within this theoretical framework, one of the key axes of analysis concerns the degree of “familialism” versus “individualism” in welfare arrangements. Comparative studies on intergenerational policies and family-oriented welfare have employed the conceptual frameworks of familialism and defamilialization. For instance, Keck and Saraceno identified three approaches—“default familialism,” “supported familialism,” and “defamilialization”—as analytical tools for examining European intergenerational public policies (10). Saraceno further demonstrated that countries with seemingly similar welfare traditions, such as Italy, Spain, Japan, and South Korea, in fact apply distinct combinations of these approaches across different policy domains (11). International research indicates that in successful welfare models, the family is not merely a recipient of services but constitutes a fundamental pillar in the production of social welfare (10, 11). Nevertheless, in many developing countries, the family assumes a disproportionately extensive supportive role due to weaknesses in formal institutions.

In Iran, several studies have analyzed the structure of the existing welfare system. Amiri, drawing on Esping-Andersen’s typology, characterized Iran’s welfare regime as a hybrid of conservative and liberal elements and emphasized that a substantial share of welfare responsibilities rests upon the family (1, 9). Naeimaei and colleagues identified institutional inefficiencies, overlapping mandates, and weaknesses in welfare data systems as central factors undermining the welfare system (2). From a theoretical perspective, Hosseini elaborated on the capacities of an Islamic welfare model through the lenses of private provisioning, public takaful, and state solidarity (7).

However, the model proposed therein remains primarily conceptual and does not extend into systematic policy modeling.

With respect to family policy, domestic research demonstrates that although upstream documents in Iran emphasize the centrality of the family, executive policies remain predominantly economy-oriented, fragmented, and implicit (3, 4). Takfali shows that family policy in Iran has largely been subsumed under employment, economic, and medical-support frameworks, lacking a coherent and integrated operational model (4). Similarly, Khoshnami argues that family welfare policies in Iran are generally confined to meeting basic needs and do not adopt a social-educational or empowerment-oriented approach (3).

At the theoretical level, the thought of Shahid Sadr constitutes one of the most significant indigenous sources for articulating an Islamic model of welfare. Concepts such as social justice, takaful, social balance, and the responsibility of the state for ensuring an appropriate standard of living for citizens provide a coherent framework for reconsidering welfare policy (8, 12). Despite the importance of these foundations, previous scholarship has primarily interpreted these concepts at a theoretical level and has paid limited attention to their “policy translation” into a structured operational model of social welfare. Fathalian and colleagues argue that through reciprocal guarantee (kafalah) and the principle of social balance in its Islamic conception, just social values are realized and an Islamic model of social justice emerges; consequently, through the implementation of social takaful by the state accompanied by effective oversight and planning, social justice can be institutionalized and discrimination reduced (13).

In general, the scientific literature highlights several realities. First, Iran’s welfare system is predominantly individual-centered and does not formally recognize the family as a unit of policymaking (1, 4). Second, family policies in Iran are fragmented, implicit, and economy-oriented, and do not follow a coherent policy model (3). Third, Islamic theoretical foundations—particularly the ideas of Shahid Sadr—possess significant modeling potential but have not yet been integrated into a structured welfare policy framework (8, 12). Fourth, international studies on familism, the role of the family, and state-based support mechanisms remain largely absent from Iranian scholarship, distancing domestic literature from the broader global discourse on welfare studies (10, 11).

Previous studies have accurately identified structural inconsistencies and the predominance of an economy-centered approach in Iran’s welfare system (2, 6). They have also emphasized the potential of non-governmental institutions and the necessity of strengthening the internal functioning of the family as a dimension of social balance (7, 13).

Despite these valuable contributions, no study has yet comprehensively designed a family-centered welfare system model for Iran that purposefully integrates the tripartite mechanisms of state solidarity (systematic governmental support), takaful (capacity-building of civil and charitable institutions), and social balance (enhancement of the family’s internal functioning and well-being) in a simultaneous and structured manner. The present research seeks to design such an integrated model in order to address the modeling gap in this field.

## Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in documentary–conceptual analysis and was conducted with the aim of designing a conceptual model for a family-centered welfare system in Iran. In policymaking studies, when the objective is to integrate theoretical foundations, policy documents, and normative theories in order to

generate a proposed model, the use of thematic analysis, qualitative meta-analysis, and conceptual modeling is considered a common and methodologically appropriate approach (14, 15).

### Analysis of the Welfare System in Iran

Iran's welfare system is characterized by particular complexities; identifying the model of the welfare system in Iran is a multidimensional and highly intricate issue. Welfare programs originate from welfare policies, and welfare policies themselves derive from prevailing ideological frameworks (6, 16). Globally, welfare regimes are situated along a spectrum encompassing liberal, corporatist (conservative), and social-democratic models, and in practice, no country fully conforms to a single ideal type (9). Scholars of social policy typically employ three principal criteria in classifying welfare regimes: (1) the relative roles of the state, market, and family in social provision; (2) the degree of decommodification; and (3) the pattern of social stratification and solidarity (9, 10).

According to Amiri, based on Esping-Andersen's criteria, Iran's welfare system represents a hybrid of the conservative-corporatist model with tendencies toward a liberal welfare system. While a review of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the rights formally recognized therein brings the system conceptually closer to a social-democratic model, practical implementation reveals significant discrepancies between constitutional ideals and realized rights (1, 9).

An examination of pre-revolutionary development plans indicates that although the first and second development programs included chapters titled "Social Affairs" and "Social Reforms," they did not specifically address family welfare. In subsequent plans, particularly the fourth development plan, social welfare was addressed with greater attention to family and child welfare. Welfare programs during that period primarily encompassed educational, financial, and economic services, and policies tended to support the male breadwinner model, with comparatively less emphasis on women's employment. Structural deficiencies included overlapping institutional mandates.

Following the Islamic Revolution, numerous documents and programs related to family policy were adopted, such as national strategies concerning women's and children's security and child health. Post-revolutionary welfare policies generally adopted a disease-centered and damage-centered perspective, and development programs focused primarily on needy families. In Iran, family welfare policy has largely been confined to meeting basic needs of families experiencing hardship; it has not been comprehensive, governmental support has remained limited, and family policy has not been explicitly defined as a distinct policy domain (3). Governmental support has remained restricted, with continued emphasis on the traditional role of the family, while policymaking institutions and active civil society organizations in this domain have been relatively limited (3, 4).

After the Revolution, various institutions were established to promote structural transformation and improve living conditions, particularly for disadvantaged groups. These foundations played a significant role in redistributing wealth, providing social services, and reinforcing the Islamic governance framework. While they contributed to improvements in certain segments of society, criticisms have highlighted weaknesses such as insufficient financial transparency, concentration of authority in a limited number of institutions, and reduced governmental efficiency (6, 16).

In 2004, the Comprehensive Welfare and Social Security System Act was enacted pursuant to Article 29 and clauses 2 and 4 of Article 21 of the Constitution, marking a significant step in structuring welfare policymaking. The subsequent establishment of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security represented an important institutional development (6). However, later reforms, including the merger that resulted in the formation of the Ministry of

Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare, have been accompanied by critiques concerning legal ambiguity, lack of comprehensive statutory clarification of duties, and institutional incoherence (17).

The ideals of the Islamic Revolution, which influenced constitutional provisions defining the state as a welfare-oriented entity responsible for ensuring food, employment, housing, education, and health in order to preserve human dignity, have encountered practical limitations. Post-war economic and social policies demonstrated that the state has not been fully capable of realizing all these constitutional commitments in practice (16).

### **Core Pillars of the Family-Centered Welfare System**

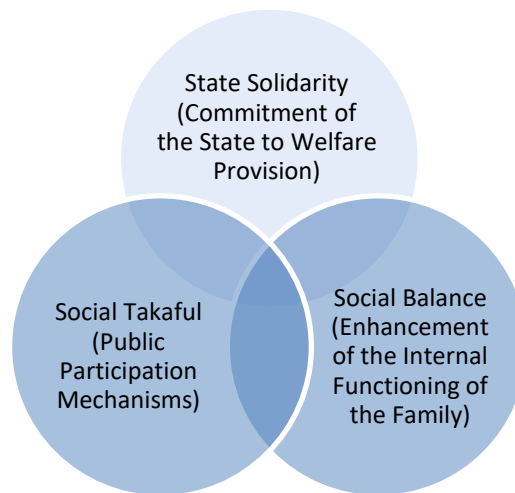
Meeting citizens' basic needs is regarded as a responsibility of Islamic governance, and the state is obliged to guarantee access to essential resources, eliminate discrimination, and ensure a healthy economic order. Within the framework of Islamic economic thought, social justice constitutes a central pillar, and the state is tasked with identifying conditions that threaten social justice and addressing them through appropriate policies (8, 12).

Shahid Sadr's conception of social welfare highlights three principal characteristics.

First, the pillar of social balance refers to equilibrium in levels of consumption and living standards, rather than equality in wealth or property. The aim is to ensure that members of society enjoy relatively comparable standards of living, thereby distinguishing this perspective from purely material egalitarianism (12). In the context of family-centered welfare, this pillar is directed toward the internal functioning of the family. Policymaking should preserve balance between work and family life and between income and expenditure. The objective is to empower the family to fulfill its educational and emotional roles, rather than merely to receive financial assistance.

Second, the pillar of state solidarity reflects the sovereign duty of the state. In this model, the state does not assume absolute direct control but functions as a regulator and ultimate guarantor. Contrary to strictly market-oriented theories, the state is obligated to ensure that the essential needs of all members of society are met through redistributive policies (7). The state bears primary responsibility for welfare provision and must guarantee the conditions necessary for empowerment. Where individuals are unable to meet their needs through empowerment mechanisms or through the supportive layers of social takaful, the state assumes responsibility for fulfilling those needs at a level consistent with Islamic legal sufficiency (7).

Third, the pillar of general takaful (reciprocal social support) emphasizes the capacity-building of civil and charitable institutions and the mutual responsibility of individuals toward one another. In Islamic thought, reciprocal guarantee among members of the community is regarded as an enforceable duty within the limits of ability and resources (12).



**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Pillars of the Family-Centered Welfare System**

These three characteristics—social balance, state solidarity, and general takaful—position the proposed welfare model within a social-democratic orientation, given its emphasis on decommodification of welfare and the central role of the state in reducing inequalities (9). At the same time, its emphasis on the role of social groups and the family introduces elements associated with conservative welfare traditions (10, 11).

In developing any policy, policymakers must pay close attention to the underlying sources and normative authorities from which policy derives, in order to determine the values and norms upon which it is constructed. Policies originate from doctrinal frameworks, and doctrines themselves are rooted in philosophical foundations. Thus, knowledge of a policy enables inference about its intellectual origins, and understanding a philosophy permits anticipation of the policies that may emerge from it (15, 18). Neglect of foundational principles leads to inconsistency and fragmentation in policymaking. Reconsideration of the normative values underlying welfare policymaking is therefore essential for enhancing coherence and effectiveness.

The concept of social welfare, particularly since the 1980s, has evolved from a focus on the provision of services to address social problems toward a broader conception encompassing human well-being and life satisfaction (14). The objective of social welfare is to render individuals self-sufficient, a responsibility attributed to Islamic governance. In this regard, the Islamic state bears two fundamental duties: social provision and social balance in standards of living (12). Through appropriate legal and supervisory instruments, these duties should contribute to the realization of social balance and increased social well-being. Shahid Sadr's conception of social justice—grounded in comprehensive reciprocal takaful and social balance—facilitates broad and equitable access to material resources and strengthens social solidarity (8, 12).

### **Theoretical Foundations of the Family-Centered Welfare System**

According to Esping-Andersen's welfare regime typology, Iran's welfare system may be described as a hybrid combining elements of the conservative-corporatist model with tendencies toward a liberal welfare system (1, 9). Liberalism conceptualizes the desirable state as one that merely safeguards the general framework of social life. The state should promote welfare while minimizing interference in citizens' affairs; grounded in individualism and the primacy of the individual, social regulations are to be limited and personal freedoms maximized. The state's

principal responsibility is to maintain order and security so that individuals may enjoy material welfare and personal benefit.

In contrast, within Islamic thought, the state is expected to be both welfare-promoting and virtue-promoting. It must protect life, property, and dignity, while simultaneously fostering morality and spiritual growth at both the individual and societal levels. In cases of conflict, collective rights take precedence over individual claims, and moral considerations are prioritized over purely material welfare (19).

One of the most fundamental foundations of a family-centered welfare system is articulated in Clause 1 of the General Family Policies proclaimed in 2016, which calls for the establishment of a family-centered society, the strengthening and consolidation of the family and its core functions based on the Islamic family model, and the positioning of the family as the محور (axis) of laws, regulations, executive policies, and all educational, cultural, social, and economic systems, particularly housing and urban planning (5).

Despite this normative emphasis, Iran's welfare system has largely been structured around individual-centered and employment-based insurance services, while the family as a supportive institution has been marginalized (1, 3). By contrast, the Islamic approach to welfare—unlike liberal models—underscores both the responsibility of the state and the foundational role of the family in realizing social justice (8, 12). Revising welfare policies to prioritize the family, expanding family-based insurance mechanisms, and utilizing Islamic financial instruments such as zakat and waqf could significantly enhance the efficiency and equity of the welfare system (7).

### Characteristics and Components of the Family-Centered Welfare System

The principal characteristics and components of a family-centered welfare system may be summarized as follows.

A holistic welfare system independent of employment status is essential. Iran's welfare system has exhibited inefficiencies in addressing structural poverty. Even where macroeconomic growth policies improve aggregate economic conditions, certain social groups—such as retirees or households lacking a working member—remain unable to benefit from economic growth. In such cases, only an effective social security system can address the poverty experienced by these households (20).

Many social insurance services, including pension, disability, and unemployment insurance, are contingent upon formal employment. If an individual is unemployed for any reason, they are often excluded from social security benefits. This employment-based structure prevents comprehensive coverage of family needs and reinforces individual-centered provision (1).

A second component is the intelligent alignment of support mechanisms with family structure. In this model, the family is not only the primary unit of welfare receipt but also an active producer and preserver of welfare. Unlike the prevailing individual-centered approach in Iran, which conditions support exclusively on employment status, this model operationalizes state solidarity at the family level, ensuring equitable distribution of resources within households (7). This perspective aligns with Shahid Sadr's emphasis that Islamic social justice is not confined to moral exhortation but must be realized through concrete institutional mechanisms (8).

A third component is the decommodification of welfare services. Social welfare is recognized in the Constitution as a right, and within Islamic theory, the ultimate objective of governance is to establish social balance in standards of living and to render all members of society self-sufficient (12). Yet in practice, welfare services in Iran often assume a commodified form. Benefits such as unemployment and pension insurance are limited to employed

contributors. While healthcare coverage exhibits a greater degree of decommodification—partly financed through taxation—a substantial portion of the population remains dependent on employment-based insurance contributions (21).

From the perspective of Islamic economics, social justice constitutes a fundamental right grounded in principles such as general *takaful* and social balance. These principles stand in tension with the commodification of welfare, which conflicts with both religious teachings and constitutional commitments (8, 12). In Shahid Sadr's framework, the ideal welfare model must be family-centered and based on two core principles: reciprocal social responsibility (*takaful*) and governmental responsibility (solidarity). In such a model, strengthening the family's position within the welfare architecture is essential.

### Functions of the Family in Society

The family performs multiple interrelated functions within Iranian society.

First, economic support is a primary function. When a family member experiences economic hardship or unemployment, the family often assumes responsibility for support. Children frequently remain economically dependent on parents into adulthood, and intergenerational assistance mitigates economic vulnerability (10).

Second, social and emotional support is central. During emotional or social crises, family members provide psychological and relational support. In old age—often associated with increased dependency and vulnerability—the family remains a crucial caregiving institution (11).

Third, educational support is significant. Families bear substantial costs of formal education and transmit cultural norms, values, and social capital through informal and formal mechanisms. This role contributes to social cohesion and intergenerational continuity (3).

Fourth, health and care provision is largely family-based. Families provide primary healthcare support, including caregiving during illness and assistance with medical expenses. In many cases, the family represents the first line of care within the broader health system (21).

Fifth, the family compensates for inefficiencies within the formal welfare system. In Iran, the family functions as a complementary and corrective institution in response to shortcomings in official welfare provision (4). Weakening the family structure would significantly increase pressure on the state, given that a considerable portion of social support has traditionally been borne by families. Supporting the family thus represents a cost-effective and culturally embedded strategy for reducing welfare burdens. However, modernization processes and top-down demographic policies have posed challenges to the continuity of these supportive functions (22).

Governments may assume diverse responsibilities in strengthening a family-centered system within the framework of policy objectives. Despite transformations in family structures, the family remains recognized as a محور (axis) of development, and policymakers continue to emphasize its role in social cohesion and structural integration (5).

In this context, family policy may be understood as a set of measures aimed at protecting, promoting, and empowering the family through attention to five explicit domains: family formation and structure (including birth, marriage, divorce, adoption, guardianship, and inheritance); spousal interaction (marriage policy, communication skills education, allowances, and tax incentives); economic support (income policy, housing, food, vocational training, and tax relief); child-rearing (minimum parenting standards and state intervention parameters); and care (state intervention as a complement or substitute in caring for elderly, ill, or disabled individuals) (4).

In practice, welfare policies within Iran's welfare system often refer to family welfare implicitly rather than explicitly, and thus fail to comprehensively address the needs of Iranian families. For example, in caregiving domains, the state's role is largely supplementary, and assistance to vulnerable groups frequently takes the form of limited subsidies or subsistence allowances that do not substantively alter structural conditions (4).

Although the Constitution and upstream laws emphasize the value of the family, the state's direct supportive role remains comparatively limited relative to successful welfare systems internationally. In social-democratic systems, the state assumes a prominent role in supporting families; however, support is frequently directed to individual family members as independent rights-holders, thereby compensating for gaps in parental presence and distributing caregiving responsibilities between family and state (3, 9).

In Iran, despite constitutional and doctrinal emphasis, comparable levels of structured support have not been institutionalized. For effective implementation of a family-centered welfare system, the state must recognize the family as an independent institution and the principal محور of social policy. By empowering the family in its social, economic, health, and emotional roles, this approach enhances productivity and accelerates development, as the family represents the smallest self-regulating social unit capable of allocating resources and shaping individual capacities within society (15, 18).

### Components of the Family-Centered Welfare System in Light of Islamic Teachings

In light of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's emphasis on social justice, general takaful, social balance, and the provision of basic needs by the state (state solidarity), clarifying the position of the family as a central institution within Iran's welfare structure acquires particular significance. This requires policies that both reinforce the supportive role of the state and place primary reliance on the family as the محور (axis) of welfare provision (8, 12). By examining welfare regimes and their evaluative criteria, it is possible to design a model aligned with Iran's religious and cultural foundations that situates the family at the core of welfare policymaking (9, 11).

The first component concerns the development of family-centered economic and supportive programs. Addressing inflation and social inequality requires targeted economic measures that strengthen family resilience. The state may contribute to equitable growth by safeguarding family rights, promoting employment, and improving health conditions. Housing facilities, direct financial assistance, and subsidies for meeting essential needs, together with equitable redistribution of public wealth, constitute central mechanisms of economic support (7, 20). Such policies should not merely alleviate poverty at the individual level but should instead stabilize family structures and enhance their productive capacity.

The second component involves the expansion of family-centered health and medical programs. The family physician plan, when embedded within a comprehensive family-centered welfare package, can function as an institutional mechanism that strengthens preventive care, ensures continuity of treatment, and enhances public health outcomes (21). Integrating healthcare services with social insurance frameworks centered on the family can further reduce inequalities in access and prevent the commodification of essential health services.

The third component is the development of social insurance schemes oriented toward the family unit. Insurance coverage should encompass healthcare, disability, pensions, retirement benefits, and unemployment protection, while recognizing the family—not merely the employed individual—as the principal unit of entitlement (1). Such restructuring aligns with the principle of state solidarity, under which the state assumes responsibility for guaranteeing minimum living standards when individuals or families are unable to secure them independently (7).

The fourth component consists of family empowerment programs. Through economic literacy training, social education, and improved resource management, families can assume a more active role within a development-oriented economic system. Empowerment policies strengthen internal family capacities and contribute to long-term social stability, consistent with the Islamic conception of social balance (12).

The fifth component includes supportive and caregiving policies for families. These encompass fertility support measures, childcare assistance for working parents, illness allowances, maternity and paternity leave, reduced working hours for parents, incentives for larger families, support for elderly persons and their caregivers, stress reduction initiatives, and the promotion of marriage (4). Such measures seek to reinforce the family as a self-regulating social institution capable of fulfilling its social, economic, and emotional functions.

Population decline in conjunction with developmental processes represents a serious challenge for Iran and cannot be addressed without a comprehensive family-centered welfare policy. Population policies designed to support families, improve living conditions, and increase fertility rates are essential for strengthening the family's social position and enhancing its economic security (22). Historical data demonstrate that following the abandonment of strict population control policies in the late 1970s, Iran experienced rapid population growth; subsequent post-war policies shifted toward limiting growth, ultimately making Iran one of the most successful countries in implementing family planning programs (22).

The emergence of demographic decline in the late 2000s generated significant concern among policymakers, leading to delayed revisions of population policies. Although incentives for mothers, housing facilities, and adjustments in subsidy schemes were introduced, these measures have had limited impact, particularly among the middle class. Effective implementation requires broader social participation, cultural adaptation, and the establishment of economic and psychological security for families (4).

In this context, the National Population Headquarters functions as a strategic coordinating body at the macro-policy level. Given the executive mandate of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare in the field of welfare policy, it is proposed that responsibility for designing and implementing policies related to family economic support, employment, insurance, and subsidy redistribution be consolidated within this ministry. Such consolidation would enhance coherence in social support mechanisms, optimize resource allocation, and promote social justice (6). Nevertheless, structured coordination between the macro-level policy authority and the implementing ministry remains essential to ensure policy coherence across economic, cultural, and social dimensions.

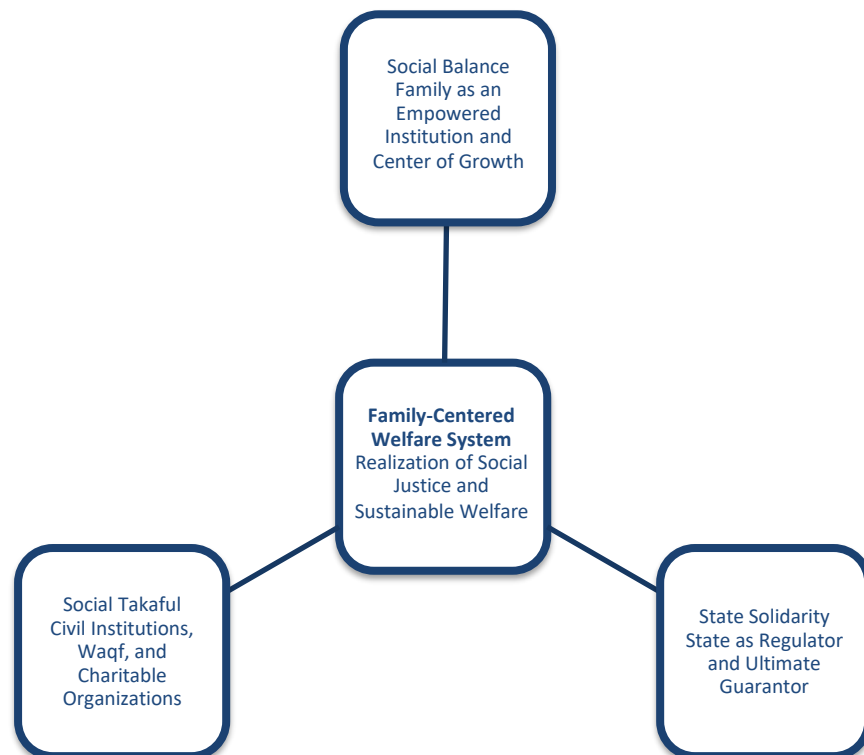
The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare was established in 2011 pursuant to Article 53 of the Fifth Development Plan through the merger of three ministries. However, more than a decade after its formation, a comprehensive statutory framework defining its duties has not been fully ratified, and legal ambiguities persist (17). Consequently, fragmentation and institutional inconsistency continue to affect employment, cooperative, and welfare functions.

There is therefore an urgent need to reconsider existing institutional structures and to concentrate welfare policymaking and implementation within a specialized and coherent ministry. Such an institution could more effectively support vulnerable groups and advance the decommodification of welfare services. The Iranian experience thus underscores the necessity of establishing a stable and integrated welfare governance structure capable of operationalizing a family-centered welfare model grounded in social balance, state solidarity, and general takaful (8, 12).

### Conceptual Model of the Family-Centered Welfare System

This research aims to design a family-centered welfare system model as a strategy for enhancing the efficiency of welfare policies in Iran. The theoretical framework of the model is based on three fundamental pillars and structured according to the policy cycle approach (executive process). Each pillar represents a distinct level of welfare production.

1. **Social Balance (Family Level):** The family is regarded as the محور (axis) of growth and the central institution of welfare, playing a primary role in strengthening solidarity, reducing social harm, and enhancing economic resilience.
2. **State Solidarity (Governance Level):** The state functions as regulator and ultimate guarantor, responsible for establishing enabling conditions, reducing dependence on individual-based assistance, and ensuring minimum welfare standards through equitable redistribution.
3. **Social Takaful (Societal Level):** The development of participatory support mechanisms based on charitable organizations, cooperatives, and Islamic financial instruments (such as zakat and waqf) to strengthen localized social support networks.



**Figure 2. Conceptual Model of the Family-Centered Welfare System**

Based on these three foundational pillars, the conceptual model consists of five key components. The relationships among these components are presented in Table 1 and illustrated in the conceptual framework. Within this model, the state acts as the “guarantor of welfare,” not merely as a distributor of resources; social institutions function as complements to the state, not substitutes; and the family serves as the “core producer of welfare,” rather than a passive recipient.

Table 1. Five Key Components of Family-Centered Welfare Policymaking

| Component                                                    | Description                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Family Economic Support (Balance + Solidarity)            | Provision of financial facilities, employment creation, insurance protection, and targeted subsidies centered on the family unit.                     |
| 2. Social Justice and Reduction of Inequality (Solidarity)   | Equitable redistribution of wealth, reduction of economic and social disparities, and provision of equal opportunities for families.                  |
| 3. Governmental Support Policies (Solidarity + Balance)      | Formulation of supportive policies such as social insurance schemes, unemployment benefits, and support for elderly persons and working mothers.      |
| 4. Complementary Social and Financial Institutions (Takaful) | Utilization of public takaful mechanisms, charitable organizations, waqf, interest-free lending, cooperatives, and community funds.                   |
| 5. Family Participation in Welfare Production (Balance)      | Empowerment of families through education and cultural development to strengthen their role in reducing social harms and enhancing economic security. |

Table 2. Comparison Between the Proposed Model and Current Welfare Policies in Iran

| Indicator                           | Current Welfare Policies in Iran                       | Proposed Model (Family-Centered)                                             |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary Focus of Support            | Individual-centered (direct support to individuals)    | Family-centered (strengthening the family's supportive role)                 |
| Insurance and Social Security       | Employment-based                                       | Family-based coverage with broader social protection                         |
| Participation of Civil Institutions | Limited and inefficient                                | Expanded role of charities and local institutions                            |
| Redistributive Policies             | Predominantly state-driven and insufficiently targeted | Combination of public and Islamic resources (waqf, zakat) for social support |
| Monitoring and Evaluation           | Fragmented and lacking integrated systems              | Continuous monitoring and data-based policy revision                         |

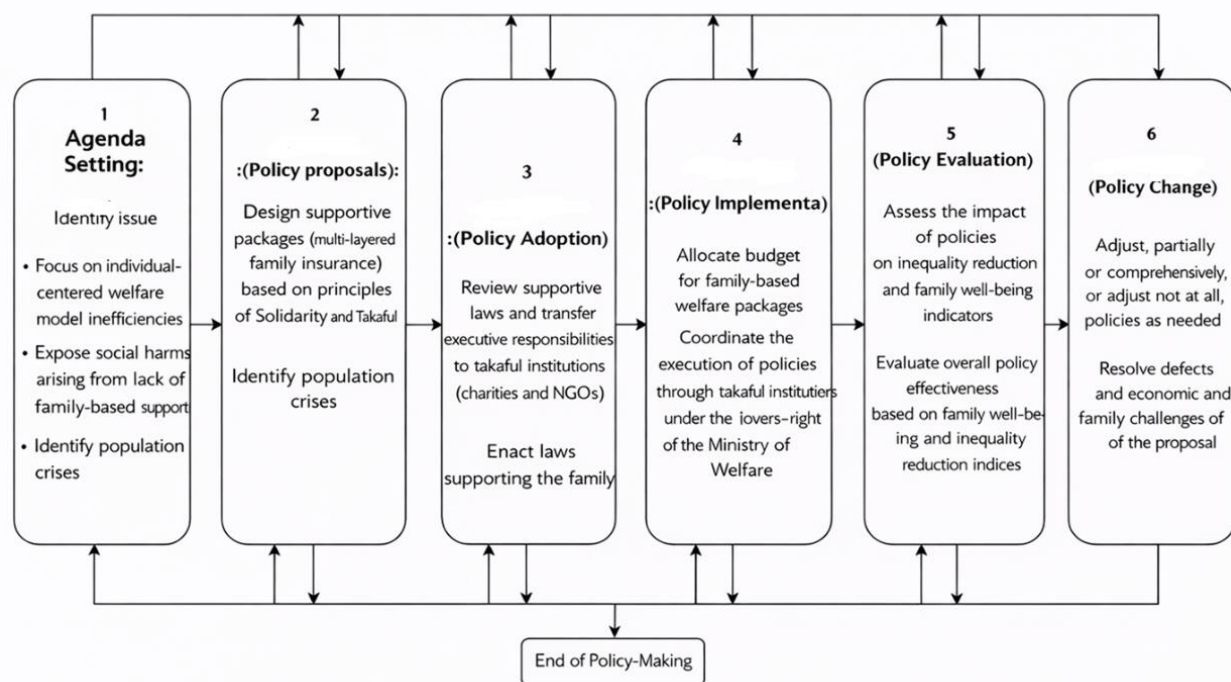
Family-Centered Policymaking Based on the Charles Jones Model

In public policy analysis and policy education, various models are employed, among which the cyclical model is one of the most widely used for explaining the policymaking process. The policy cycle approach conceptualizes policymaking as a series of interconnected stages forming a continuous cycle.

Given the flexibility of the Charles Jones model and its capacity to integrate theory and practice, the family-centered welfare model is structured in six sequential stages. This model enables continuous interaction between theory, practice, and implementation and allows adaptation to indigenous considerations.

1. **Agenda Setting:** Identification of demographic crises and inefficiencies of the individual-centered welfare model as primary policy problems.
2. **Policy Proposal:** Design of multi-layered family insurance packages based on solidarity and takaful principles.
- 3–4. **Adoption and Implementation:** Enactment of supportive legislation and delegation of executive responsibilities to takaful-based institutions (charities and NGOs) under the supervision of the Ministry of Welfare.
3. **Evaluation:** Assessment of policy effectiveness using indicators such as “family well-being” and “reduction of inequality.”
4. **Policy Change:** Application of necessary adjustments, whether partial or comprehensive, in response to identified deviations.

The theoretical framework of the proposed model is structured around the three foundational pillars described above.



**Figure 3. Family-Centered Welfare System in Iran Based on the Jones Model**

Designing and implementing family-centered welfare policies requires a systematic, comprehensive, and evidence-based approach. Experience from various welfare systems indicates that successful policies move beyond fragmented and damage-oriented interventions toward long-term, empowerment-based strategies.

Within this framework, family-centered policymaking in Iran necessitates redefining the family as the primary actor in welfare provision while simultaneously redefining the state as macro-regulator, supporter, and guarantor of social balance. This redefinition must be grounded in cultural values and philosophical foundations prevailing within Iranian society. Expanding social insurance capacity, strengthening supportive instruments, and creating incentive-based systems for active participation by families and non-governmental institutions are among the essential policy requirements.

The success of such policies depends on several key factors. First, the alignment and persuasion of policymakers and stakeholders regarding the strategic importance of the model for enhancing social resilience and distributive justice. Second, the clear delineation of institutional roles to prevent duplication, overlap, and resource waste. Third, assigning responsibility for coordination, policymaking, and monitoring to a specialized and authoritative body, with the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare positioned to play a central role.

Finally, establishing mechanisms for continuous evaluation, gradual refinement, and periodic policy revision constitutes a prerequisite for ensuring the dynamism and effectiveness of a family-centered welfare system.

## Conclusion

This article examined the concept of a family-centered welfare system and its impact on improving public welfare in Iran. The findings demonstrate that the family, as the principal pillar of economic, social, and emotional support, plays a foundational role within Iranian society. This reinforces the necessity of structurally redefining Iran's welfare

system to align with the policy imperative of positioning the family at the core of laws, regulations, and executive systems.

The conceptual model proposed in this study integrates three pillars—state solidarity, social takaful, and family balance—and operationalizes them through five policy components: family economic support, social justice, governmental support policies, complementary social institutions, and family participation in welfare production. This framework has the potential to reduce the gap between legal aspirations and the practical functioning of the welfare system.

The model demonstrates that welfare production operates at three complementary levels—state, society, and family—none of which can independently ensure sustainable welfare. Transitioning from the current system toward a family-centered welfare structure requires redefining the state's role from primary distributor to macro-regulator, activating takaful mechanisms, and strengthening the internal capacities of the family.

The study yields several policy implications. First, supportive policies should shift from the individual level to the household level to reinforce family-based support functions. Second, expanding participatory mechanisms—such as charitable institutions, waqf, cooperatives, and community funds—can reduce the financial and administrative burden on the state. Third, designing multi-layered, family-based social insurance schemes can promote social justice through broader coverage and reduced inequality.

In sum, this research offers an indigenous theoretical–conceptual framework that may serve as a foundation for structural reforms in Iranian welfare policymaking. Nevertheless, empirical validation and practical testing of the proposed model require further research, including field-based analyses and expert consultations. Strengthening this research trajectory may contribute to the establishment of a sustainable, justice-oriented, and family-centered welfare system in Iran.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to this study.

### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

### **Transparency of Data**

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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