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Violation of the Security Rights of Children and Adolescents in Iranian Law: An Approach Based on the Optional Protocols to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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ABSTRACT

The issue of violating the security rights of children and adolescents in Iranian law holds special importance given the sensitivity and vulnerability of this group. At the international level, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols have sought to provide a comprehensive framework for the protection of children; however, the realization of these rights within the domestic laws of states, including Iran, faces numerous challenges and deficiencies. The necessity of this study arises from the fact that despite the existence of international instruments and regulations, legal and executive gaps and shortcomings in Iran have led to repeated violations of the security rights of children and adolescents. The main concern of this research is to analyze the degree of compatibility between Iranian laws and the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to identify the existing weaknesses and deficiencies in legal protections. The central research question asks: to what extent are the security rights of children and adolescents in Iran consistent with international obligations, and what challenges exist in this regard? The research method is descriptive-analytical, and through the study of international documents and domestic laws, a comparative evaluation has been conducted. Findings indicate that although Iran has acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and certain Optional Protocols, there remain significant weaknesses in legislation, enforcement, and legal guarantees that lead to violations of children's rights. These issues include inadequate legal protection, lack of independent supervisory institutions, and insufficient public awareness and education. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the need to reform domestic laws, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and enhance alignment with international standards.

Keywords: security rights of children, violation of child rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Optional Protocols, Iranian law.

Introduction

At both the international and domestic levels, numerous measures have been established to safeguard the right to security of children and adolescents, owing to their psychological and physical vulnerability. In Iranian law, although various legal provisions address certain aspects of protection, these measures remain fragmented and lack comprehensiveness (1, 2). To address this gap, the *National Document on the Rights of the Child and*



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Adolescent was drafted and announced in 2018 by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution under the directive of the President, with the aim of providing comprehensive protection for this group (3). Nevertheless, its executive by-laws and implementation programs have not yet been prepared, and no significant action has been taken at the operational level (4).

One of the main pillars of this document is the *right to security* of children and adolescents, the realization of which requires a complete understanding of the dimensions of this right and the establishment of enforcement guarantees for its violation. Article 11 of the National Document enumerates various aspects of this right in six paragraphs, accompanied by preventive measures. At the international level, Articles 37–40 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the principles enshrined in the *Beijing Rules* (1985) emphasize the protection and security of children in legal and social contexts (5, 6). After World War II, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1959) was adopted, followed by three major Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child—two of which focus on the physical, psychological, and social security of children. These include the *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* and the *Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography*, which Iran acceded to in 2007 (7, 8). These protocols stress international cooperation to prevent economic exploitation, sexual abuse, and the forced involvement of children in hazardous labor and armed conflicts (9).

Within the National Document and related domestic laws, protections have been provided against sexual exploitation, the use of children in drug-related activities, and their participation in armed conflicts. However, the enforcement mechanisms within domestic legislation—such as the *Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents* and the *Labor Law*—suffer from serious deficiencies (10, 11). For instance, Article 79 of the Labor Law prohibits the employment of persons under the age of 15, yet in practice, the phenomenon of child labor continues to rise, demonstrating a structural weakness in enforcement (12). In the field of exploitation, existing legal sanctions remain scattered and insufficient. Begging, under Article 713 of the Islamic Penal Code, is criminalized, yet there is no explicit legal protection for children in this context. Moreover, while the *Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents* criminalizes sexual offenses against minors even with their consent, inconsistencies persist in the treatment of offenders and, in some cases, of the adolescents themselves (13).

Through the examination of international instruments such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Beijing Rules*, and the *Lanzarote Convention* of the Council of Europe, it is possible to establish a coherent model for the protection of children and adolescents. Otherwise, Iran's legislative policy, due to dispersed regulations and weak enforcement guarantees, will continue to face multiplicity of approaches, legal confusion, and lack of determination in confronting violators of children's security rights (14, 15).

In terms of prior research, relevant studies include *An Examination of Avicenna's Views on Women and Children and Their Comparison with the Provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Davar & Sadeghi, 2024), *Criminal Analysis of Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents from the Perspective of Substantive Criminal Law* (Goldouzian & Hedayati, 2024), and *Innovations and Challenges of the Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents in Preventing Child Abuse* (Sabouripour & Haqqbin, 2023).

This study seeks to answer the following questions: What types of rights related to security exist for children and adolescents under Iranian law? What is the status of Iran's accession to and utilization of the United Nations Optional Protocols on the Rights of the Child? What enforcement mechanisms exist regarding the violation of

security-related rights of children and adolescents? What are the instances of the violation of children's and adolescents' security rights within the framework of the National Document on the Rights of the Child with reference to the UN Protocols?

Essentially, the violation of children's security rights can manifest in various forms such as forced labor, early marriage, domestic violence, neglect, sexual abuse, and involvement in unlawful activities—each of which has irreparable consequences for their physical and psychological well-being. Among these, the Optional Protocols to the Convention—particularly the Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography—provide crucial complementary mechanisms to strengthen protective measures. A comparative analysis between the obligations of these instruments and Iranian legal regulations enables the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the domestic legal system in this field and outlines pathways for reform and the enhancement of protective standards. This issue is of significance not only from the standpoint of international obligations and human rights commitments but also from social, cultural, and national security perspectives, since the security of children forms the foundation of sustainable security and balanced development in every society, and neglecting it entails far-reaching individual and collective consequences.

Concepts and Foundations

The Importance and Status of Child and Adolescent Security in Legal Systems and International Instruments

In legal foundations, the period from birth until approximately 12 to 13 years of age is commonly referred to as childhood, divided into the pre-school and school-age stages, each characterized by distinct psychological and physical conditions. In another classification, childhood can be divided into two phases: the period before discernment (*tamyeez*) and the period after discernment. Islamic jurists have defined discernment as the stage during which a child gains a general understanding of contractual transactions and, after this phase, approaches puberty. At this stage, the individual becomes *muraḥiq* (approaching maturity), and once puberty is reached, legal responsibility begins (16).

From another perspective, the concept of childhood can also be examined through the lens of the Qur'an. Although the Qur'an does not explicitly specify the beginning of childhood, it employs the term *ṭifl* (child) in several verses (e.g., Surah Al-Hajj, verse 5), inviting reflection on the stages of human creation. Islamic scholars generally divide childhood into three stages: from birth to age seven (*non-discerning child*), from seven years to the onset of puberty (*discerning child*), and after puberty, when the individual attains full responsibility (16).

The term *bulugh* (puberty) originates from the root *balagh* and literally means “to reach the end of a destination,” whether that destination is spatial, temporal, or abstract. It can also mean “approaching a goal,” even if not yet attained. Derived terms such as *tabligh* and *iblagh* convey the sense of “delivery” or “communication.” Thus, puberty denotes reaching the age at which a person attains maturity and assumes legal responsibility (17).

The security of children and adolescents holds particular importance in legal systems and international instruments, as this group—due to its physical and psychological characteristics—is highly vulnerable and requires special protection to ensure healthy growth and well-being (2, 9). Consequently, various legal systems, as part of their human rights obligations, have paid special attention to guaranteeing the security of this group and have enacted numerous laws to protect them (1). At the international level, key instruments such as the *United Nations*

Convention on the Rights of the Child—widely ratified across nations—recognize the right to security as one of the fundamental rights of children and oblige states to adopt necessary measures to prevent violence, exploitation, abuse, and any threat to their health and security (5, 6). These instruments, with a comprehensive approach, not only emphasize the prohibition of violations of children's rights but also require governments to provide adequate educational, health, and social facilities to create a safe environment for children's growth and development.

The importance of children's security also lies in its direct impact on the future of society and the sustainable development of nations. Healthy and secure children constitute capable human resources and valuable social capital for the future. Therefore, the position of child and adolescent security in legal systems and international instruments represents not only a fundamental human right but also a crucial social, cultural, and economic necessity that obliges states to demonstrate strong commitment and effective action in this field.

The Concept of "Security Rights" and Its Distinction from Other Children's Rights

In 1959, a provisional draft of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child was submitted by the Commission on Human Rights to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and approved, thereby laying the groundwork for the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Because the 1959 Declaration did not create binding enforcement obligations for governments, lacked the legal force of United Nations General Assembly resolutions, and the world was plainly witnessing violations of children's rights—including shocking reports of increasing exploitation and abuse—Poland proposed in 1978 the establishment of special mechanisms to protect children. After ten years of intergovernmental deliberation, the draft was adopted on November 20, 1989, as a resolution comprising 54 articles by the General Assembly and entered into force in 1990 upon ratification by 20 states (18). Gradually, other states also accepted it, so that by 1997 nearly all countries of the world—either conditionally or unconditionally—had ratified it or requested accession from the United Nations; of 193 countries, 189 had accepted it (19).

The concept of "security rights" is among the rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In essence, children's security rights refer to the set of rights and guarantees whose primary aim is to protect children and adolescents against any physical, psychological, social, or legal threat or harm. These rights are designed to ensure the child's physical and psychological security and to prevent violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, neglect, and any threat to the health and life of children. Security rights include the right to a safe environment; protection against domestic and social violence; prevention of economic and sexual exploitation; and access to justice and legal protection (10).

The distinction between "security rights" and other children's rights lies in the security rights' focus on preserving the child's life and health, with a more pronounced preventive and protective dimension, whereas other rights may emphasize education, personality development, social participation, and civil or cultural rights. Put differently, security rights serve as the foundation for the realization of other children's rights, since without ensuring security and protection, the fulfillment of rights such as education, freedom of expression, and social participation is not feasible. For this reason, security rights play a vital role in guaranteeing healthy development, upbringing, and flourishing of children and constitute a primary priority in child-related protective policies and laws.

The Optional Protocols to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child complement the Convention by addressing specific and sensitive topics related to children's rights and by strengthening states parties' obligations in designated areas. Among the most important are the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict; the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography; and instruments addressing online sexual communications and other forms of exploitation and abuse—each playing a significant role in protecting children.

The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict was developed to prevent the use of children in armed hostilities. It explicitly requires states parties not to have persons under 18 years of age take direct part in military operations and to refrain from recruiting or enlisting children into the armed forces. It further emphasizes preventing attacks on children present in conflict zones, including in schools, hospitals, and civilian areas. These measures are not only human-rights based but are also designed, in light of the physical, psychological, and social harms inflicted on children, to ensure a safer and healthier future for them. States parties undertake to adapt their domestic laws to guarantee these prohibitions and to prevent any involvement of children in armed conflicts (8).

The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography focuses on combating severe forms of sexual and economic exploitation of children. It calls upon states parties to strengthen their criminal laws to define and punish the sale of children, sexual exploitation, and the production or distribution of child pornography. It also stresses international cooperation in combating these crimes, which are often transnational and require intergovernmental coordination. To protect children from economic and sexual exploitation, the Protocol mandates the creation of preventive mechanisms and the empowerment of institutions responsible for child protection.

Optional instruments addressing online sexual communications and other forms of exploitation have gained increasing importance in the era of new technologies. They concentrate on abuses facilitated through cyberspace and the internet, including the production, distribution, and access to online child sexual content. Owing to their scale and concealed nature, such abuses pose distinct legal and enforcement challenges that necessitate tailored national and international measures. These instruments obligate states parties to enact and enforce appropriate legislation, build the capacity of enforcement institutions, and expand international cooperation to prosecute offenders and support victims (5).

The Optional Protocols not only expand the scope of legal protections against grave violations of children's rights but also underscore the necessity of coordination and international cooperation, highlighting the importance of protecting children amid the complex and diverse conditions of the present era. They strengthen domestic legal systems of states parties and provide effective tools to confront threats and harms specific to children, thereby improving the preservation of children's dignity, security, and rights globally. Accession to and full implementation of these Protocols is thus a crucial requirement for achieving comprehensive and effective child protection in today's world.

Iran's Accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Status of Acceptance or Non-Acceptance of the Optional Protocols

Iran acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, undertaking to observe the Convention's principles and provisions within its domestic legal system. As one of the most comprehensive international instruments for the protection of children's rights, the Convention guarantees a range of rights—including the rights to education, health, security, and protection against violence and exploitation.

In addition to the core Convention, several Optional Protocols cover more specific issues, including the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography. Iran has also acceded to some of these Protocols. Specifically, in 2007 Iran acceded to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography and accepted its obligations (7).

These Protocols complement the core Convention and heighten states parties' obligations in responding to particular threats and violations of children's rights. Nonetheless, Iran's acceptance and full implementation of the Protocols face challenges, including the harmonization of domestic laws with Protocol provisions and the assurance of effective implementation within judicial and administrative systems. Cultural, social, and legal factors may also influence the processes of acceptance and implementation. Overall, Iran's accession to the Convention and certain Protocols represents a significant step toward enhancing child protection, but sustained efforts are required to improve implementation mechanisms and remove existing obstacles.

Manifestations of Violations of Children's Security Rights in Iran

Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

Violations of children's security rights in Iran take diverse forms, among the most significant of which are child abuse and domestic violence. Child abuse encompasses any physical, psychological, or sexual conduct that harms a child and endangers the child's physical and mental security. This phenomenon appears in various forms across families and social settings, ranging from beatings and inappropriate punishments to humiliation, neglect, and psychological exploitation. Domestic violence is likewise a principal threat to children's security and typically occurs within the family, including physical abuse, psychological abuse, neglect of basic needs, and even sexual abuse (3).

In Iran, despite the existence of laws and regulations that in various ways prohibit child abuse and domestic violence, these problems remain widespread and in some cases concealed. One major reason is the weakness of systems for identifying and reporting child abuse, leaving many children exposed to harm without adequate support. In addition, traditional culture and certain social beliefs often treat violence against children as a private matter or even a normal occurrence, impeding timely and effective intervention by protective and judicial bodies. Moreover, institutions charged with child protection face legal, operational, and resource constraints that weaken prevention and response to child abuse and domestic violence. The lack of broad-based parental education programs, the absence of comprehensive protective mechanisms, and weak interagency cooperation among judicial, health, and social institutions are further key challenges. Overall, child abuse and domestic violence, as two prominent manifestations of violations of children's security rights, not only threaten children's physical and psychological health but can also produce serious long-term social and cultural consequences. Addressing this problem requires

comprehensive measures, cross-sectoral cooperation, enhanced public awareness, and the reform of protective laws and policies to create a safe and appropriate environment for children's growth and development.

Forced Labor and Hazardous Occupations

Among the most salient manifestations of violations of children's security rights in Iran are forced labor and employment in hazardous occupations, which have profound and wide-ranging effects on the physical, psychological, and social health of children. Forced child labor refers to the use of their labor under conditions in which, due to their young age, inability to defend their rights, and weak access to legal protections, they are exposed to exploitation and abuse. Such labor is usually performed without the child's consent or under family pressure and difficult economic circumstances and may lead to various unlawful or dangerous activities (11).

Under ILO Convention No. 29, adopted in 1920, all forms of forced labor are prohibited. In Iran, although the Labor Law and regulations concerning the protection of children and adolescents prohibit the employment of persons under 15 and restrict the conditions of work for adolescents, in practice many children work in unsuitable conditions and in hazardous occupations. These are jobs that threaten the child's physical and mental health, such as work in industrial, agricultural, and high-risk service environments, or street work, which involves various dangers including physical injury, exposure to toxic substances, long working hours, and inadequate oversight of work processes.

Forced labor is condemned and prohibited under the Constitution and the Labor Law. In this regard, Article 6 of the Labor Law provides: "Based on paragraph 4 of Article 43 and paragraph 6 of Article 2 and Articles 19, 20, and 28 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, compelling individuals to perform specific work and exploiting others is prohibited, and the people of Iran, from any tribe and ethnicity, enjoy equal rights; color, race, language, and the like shall not constitute a privilege; and all persons, both women and men, are equally protected by the law; and everyone has the right to choose any occupation they wish that is not contrary to Islam, the public interest, or the rights of others."

The enforcement guarantee for Article 6 of the Labor Law in relation to forced labor is set out in Article 172 of the Labor Law. This article also reflects the legislature's serious approach to the necessity of combating forced labor in general. In line with the condemnation of forced labor in Article 6 of the Labor Law and in Article 43, paragraph 4; Article 2, paragraph 6; and Articles 19, 20, and 28 of the Constitution, it provides: "Forced labor, pursuant to Article 6 of this Law, is prohibited in all forms, and the offender, in addition to criminal liability, shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 91 days to one year and to a fine equal to 50 to 200 times the minimum daily wage. If several persons together or through an institution compel a person to forced labor, each offender shall be sentenced to the above punishments and shall be jointly liable for *ujrat al-mithl* (equitable remuneration), unless the instigator bears greater responsibility than the direct perpetrator, in which case the instigator shall be personally liable." If several persons are collectively compelled to forced labor, the offender or offenders, in addition to paying *ujrat al-mithl*, shall—considering the offender's circumstances and means—be sentenced to the maximum penalties set forth in the article.

Child labor has long been a focus of international organizations. According to International Labour Organization statistics, in 2002 approximately 350 million children aged 5–17 were economically active, of whom 179 million were employed in hard and hazardous labor. Convention No. 29 also prohibits forced and bonded labor for children. Among other international instruments is the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The

first Optional Protocol concerning the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography entered into force on January 18, 2002, and emphasized strengthening international cooperation through multilateral regional arrangements for children (12).

The principal problems in this field include the lack of rigorous oversight, weak law enforcement, and the poverty and economic deprivation of families, which force children to work under unsafe and inhumane conditions. In addition, the absence of robust support systems, inadequate education for families and society, and the lack of alternative programs to support working children have allowed this phenomenon to remain widespread and persistent.

Forced labor and employment in hazardous occupations not only deprive children of the right to education but also deny them their fundamental rights to development and health, exposing them to physical, psychological, and social harms. This situation runs counter to human rights principles and Iran's international commitments regarding the protection of children's rights and requires serious and comprehensive action by the government and relevant institutions for prevention, intervention, and support of affected children. Preventing forced child labor and creating suitable conditions for their healthy development are among the most important steps to ensure children's security rights and require cooperation among legal, social, and educational institutions so that children can grow in a safe and healthy environment and enjoy all their rights.

Child Pornography, Online Abuse, and Data Misuse

One significant manifestation of violations of children's security rights in Iran concerns child pornography, online abuse, and the misuse of children's personal data, which severely threaten children's mental health, physical security, and right to privacy. Child pornography—defined as the production, distribution, and use of sexual images and videos involving children—is recognized as one of the most severe forms of sexual exploitation and is strictly prohibited and criminalized under Iranian domestic law. With advances in communications technologies and the rapid spread of the internet, access to harmful content affecting children has become easier, giving this issue more complex dimensions.

Criminal activities involving pornography via the internet have now become acute problems (20). Some national laws do not cover, or lack clarity about, “pseudo-” or “virtual” child pornography, which typically depicts a child even if no child is physically present; these simulated images may be computer-generated, or a child's image may be partially combined with an adult body. While some countries, such as the United Kingdom, have amended their laws to include pseudo- or virtual child pornography, others, such as France and Belgium, still await comparable reforms. Today, parents must recognize that a child may conceal pornographic files from them (21). Just as children in the offline world require the help and supervision of a warm and balanced family to be safe from latent threats and dangers, such supervision is equally—if not more—important in cyberspace.

Online abuse of children—including threats, harassment, grooming, and sexual exploitation through digital environments—is an emerging harm that has rapidly expanded due to weak specialized legislation, inadequate education for children and families, and insufficient oversight of cyberspace. Many children encounter predators who, by forming online relationships, gain their trust and expose them to serious risks. Sexual exploitation in childhood has destructive effects on development and maturation and leads to guilt, depression, suicide, anxiety, negative self-image, reduced self-confidence, substance dependence, and alcoholism. According to credible global statistics, its prevalence varies by population and region from 12% to 40%. A large proportion of these children live

in deprived and developing countries, where children are compelled to work and live in difficult circumstances. They suffer not only from hunger and malnutrition but also repeated sexual exploitation, experiencing profoundly painful lives (13).

The misuse of children's personal data in digital environments is another manifestation of violations of security rights. Many children, due to lack of awareness and inadequate safeguards, share sensitive and private information online, which can be exploited by malicious actors for purposes including sexual exploitation, extortion, or psychological abuse. The absence of comprehensive, operational regulations on the protection of children's data exacerbates this problem.

Beyond causing psychological and social harm, these issues constitute clear violations of children's rights—including the rights to security, privacy, and healthy development. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive legislation, continuous education for children and parents, strengthened supervisory institutions, and cooperation among legal, educational, and information-technology bodies. Ultimately, protecting children from these threats must be a top priority in Iran's domestic and international policies to improve the security and legal conditions of children. (5)

Comparative Assessment of Iranian Regulations with the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Extent of Consistency Between Iranian Laws and the Provisions of the Protocols

In a comparative assessment of Iranian regulations with the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Iran has undertaken notable efforts in some areas to harmonize its domestic legislation with the provisions of these Protocols; however, shortcomings and deficiencies remain that prevent full alignment. Specifically, the Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography have received attention from the Iranian legislature, and a number of relevant provisions in the Islamic Penal Code and other protective statutes have been amended or added.

On the one hand, by enacting laws prohibiting the use of children in military activities and criminalizing trafficking, sale, and sexual exploitation of children, Iran has taken steps toward complying with its international obligations. In addition, Iran's formal accession to the Optional Protocols and notification thereof to the United Nations indicates an initial resolve to observe international standards for the protection of children. (1)

On the other hand, deficiencies persist in several important areas, including the effective enforcement of these laws; broad-based education and awareness-raising for judicial and law-enforcement officials and families; and comprehensive coverage of all facets of children's security rights. In particular, with respect to online abuse and exploitation, oversight of cyberspace, and the protection of children's rights in social and family environments, the applicable rules and regulations are either insufficient and ineffective or implemented only partially. Moreover, some provisions of the Protocols face harmonization challenges due to cultural and religious considerations or domestic legal structures. Overall, although Iran has made progress toward alignment with the Optional Protocols, achieving a desirable level of protection for children's security rights requires legislative review and reform, strengthened enforcement guarantees, and sustained inter-institutional cooperation. Public education and social awareness about children's rights and related sensitivities can also play a pivotal role in fully realizing the Protocols' provisions and narrowing the gap between international norms and domestic law.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Among Iran's strengths are legal and regulatory efforts to protect children. The enactment of multiple provisions in the Islamic Penal Code that criminalize offenses related to sexual abuse, trafficking, exploitation, and child abuse reflects a comparatively serious commitment to safeguarding children's rights. Iran's accession to the Optional Protocols—including the Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Protocol on combating the sale of children and sexual exploitation—also evidences a commitment to international standards. The existence of certain protective provisions in the Labor Law, the Law on the Protection of Orphaned Children, and other related statutes further constitutes a strength. (22)

Conversely, significant weaknesses remain in fully harmonizing domestic law with the Protocols. Chief among these are the lack of robust enforcement guarantees to address violations of children's rights; weaknesses in monitoring and follow-up of abuse cases; and incomplete conformity of some legal provisions with international standards. Additional weaknesses include the absence of comprehensive legislation on the protection of children in cyberspace and limited coverage of all dimensions of children's security rights. Cultural, social, and economic constraints also hinder full implementation, reducing the practical effectiveness of legal protections. Shortfalls in training and awareness among judicial and executive officials and families likewise constitute major challenges that affect the quality of implementation of children's rights. While Iran has taken steps toward alignment with the Optional Protocols, achieving the desired level of protection and assurance of children's security rights requires legal reforms, stronger supervisory institutions, enhanced specialized training, and the cultivation of a more robust legal culture in society. These measures can help narrow the gap between domestic law and international obligations and create better conditions for the protection of children.

Review of Non-Accession or Partial Implementation of the Protocols

A comparative review of Iranian regulations with the Optional Protocols reveals instances of non-accession or partial implementation that pose significant challenges to the full realization of children's rights.

First, despite Iran's formal accession to certain Protocols—such as the Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Protocol on combating the sale and sexual exploitation of children—there are still notable deficiencies in the full and practical implementation of their provisions. The absence of precise and effective enforcement mechanisms, a shortage of specialized institutions, and weak coordination among relevant bodies hinder the practical fulfillment of these commitments.

Second, some Protocols—or parts thereof—have not yet been accepted by Iran, or their accession process has been delayed. For example, Protocols addressing emerging issues such as online abuse and exploitation of children, data exploitation, and child pornography are not comprehensively and specifically covered in domestic law, leaving legal protections against cyber-threats and novel offenses involving children inadequate. (4)

Third, even where domestic laws conform to the Protocols, weak enforcement guarantees and ineffective oversight have resulted in partial implementation. For instance, although laws prohibit forced child labor and sexual exploitation, incomplete judicial follow-up or cultural and social obstacles sometimes prevent their full application.

Fourth, differences concerning the legal age and the definition of a “child” in certain domestic provisions diverge from the Protocols' international standards, creating ambiguity and gaps in child protection. In addition, aspects of criminal law and judicial protections lack the necessary comprehensiveness to fully cover violations of children's

security rights. The absence of implementing by-laws and insufficient training for personnel involved in child protection are further factors leading to partial implementation of Protocols and related laws. These structural and institutional problems mean that, despite appropriate rules in some areas, children's security rights are not adequately guaranteed in practice. To remedy these shortcomings, Iran must, beyond completing accession to outstanding Protocols, prioritize reforms to domestic legislation, strengthen supervisory and executive bodies, provide specialized training, and increase public awareness of children's rights so that full and effective implementation of the Protocols can be achieved.

Legal, Cultural, and Political Barriers

In a comparative evaluation of Iranian regulations with the Optional Protocols, multiple barriers in the legal, cultural, and political domains impede the complete and practical realization of international obligations. From a legal standpoint, key obstacles include internal inconsistencies and conflicts between domestic rules and the Protocols' provisions. For example, divergent definitions of the age of a child, statutory limits on individual freedoms and civil rights, and legal gaps concerning new offenses against children—such as cyber exploitation and pornography—undermine full implementation. The absence of precise implementing regulations and specialized bodies for monitoring and enforcement has likewise resulted in weak and inadequate guarantees for rights protection. (6)

Culturally, traditional and religious values prevailing in Iranian society challenge certain rights embedded in the Protocols. Issues concerning children's rights—such as aspects of sexual autonomy, participation in individual decision-making, and certain definitional elements—may not fully align with prevailing cultural and social attitudes. Moreover, taboos and social sensitivities surrounding topics such as sexual abuse and child labor reduce open discussion and attention, thereby complicating the enforcement of relevant regulations.

Politically, several factors affect implementation barriers, including insufficient political will and inter-institutional coordination; the lack of prioritization of children's rights in national policymaking; and international and regional constraints that may influence accession and implementation processes. Additionally, some power centers and security agencies harbor concerns about certain international commitments that could, in their view, reduce control or expand civic space, thereby slowing the acceptance and implementation of the relevant norms. (14)

Eliminating legal barriers requires statutory reform and the adoption of complementary regulations, bolstering supervisory and executive institutions, and specialized training. Culturally, raising awareness and reshaping social attitudes through education and public information campaigns are necessary. Politically, stronger coordination among institutions and greater political will to support children's rights are essential to achieve full compliance with international commitments.

Strategies and Recommendations

Reforming Domestic Laws to Address Gaps and Strengthen Enforcement

Reforming domestic laws to address existing gaps and strengthen enforcement is one of the most important strategies for improving the security rights of children and adolescents in Iran. At present, some existing statutes lack precise and comprehensive definitions of the manifestations of violations of children's rights, or contain weaknesses in the enforcement dimension that prevent serious and effective action against offenders. Therefore,

laws related to the protection of children must be reviewed and completed in a manner that, in addition to clarifying the various forms of violations, also provides practical measures and deterrent penalties to enable stronger judicial responses.

Strengthening enforcement means establishing specialized supervisory and executive institutions and mechanisms capable of coordinated and coherent oversight of implementation and of responding swiftly and effectively in the event of violations. These bodies should be vested with the necessary powers to pursue cases involving violations of children's rights and, in cooperation with judicial and law enforcement institutions, should also undertake preventive and educational measures.

Moreover, legal reforms should be undertaken in harmony with Iran's international obligations so as to prevent conflicts and overlaps between domestic laws and international protocols and conventions, thereby achieving convergence between domestic and international child-protection norms. These reforms should be designed with the participation of child-rights experts, civil society, and international organizations to ensure necessary comprehensiveness and effectiveness. Training judges, police, executive officials, and even the general public about children's rights and the necessity of protecting them is an essential component of strengthening enforcement. Such training increases awareness and sensitivity toward children's rights and lays the groundwork for effective implementation of the law. Therefore, reforming domestic laws and strengthening enforcement—alongside educational and cultural measures—constitute fundamental steps toward improving the security rights of children and adolescents and effectively addressing violations of those rights.

Enhancing Systems for Preventing Violence and Violations of Children's Security

Enhancing systems for preventing violence and violations of children's security is a key and necessary strategy for safeguarding and ensuring the security rights of this vulnerable group. Such systems should be designed and reinforced to identify and analyze risk factors and intervene in a timely manner through a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

At the outset, preventive mechanisms at the levels of family, school, community, and governmental and non-governmental institutions must be improved. This includes educating parents, teachers, and staff of support institutions about strategies for preventing violence, recognizing warning signs, and responding appropriately. Raising public awareness about children's rights and the consequences of violence on their physical and mental health can help reduce the incidence of violence.

The establishment and strengthening of specialized counseling centers for children and families, emergency hotlines, and simple and confidential reporting systems make rapid responses and timely support possible. These centers should be staffed with trained specialists capable of providing appropriate psychological, legal, and social services. (2)

The role of law enforcement and the judiciary is also vital in preventing violence; therefore, specialized training should be provided to these institutions on children's rights and on handling cases involving violence, so that their responses are not only deterrent but also sensitive and supportive of the child.

In addition, developing educational and cultural programs in the media and online spaces to change violent attitudes and behaviors toward children is of great importance. Enhancing cooperation among government agencies, civil society organizations, and the international community can also facilitate the exchange of experiences and the adoption of more effective policies. For prevention systems to succeed, national child-rights

policies must be coherently formulated and implemented, and adequate financial and human resources must be allocated to preventive programs. This multi-pronged, coordinated preventive approach can effectively reduce violence and violations of children's security and create a safe and healthy environment for their growth and flourishing.

Education and Social Awareness-Raising Among the Public, Parents, Teachers, and Police

Education and social awareness-raising among the public, parents, teachers, and police play a highly important and foundational role in preventing violations of the security rights of children and adolescents. This strategy aims to increase public awareness of children's rights, methods of protecting them, and the factors that threaten their security, and it can effectively prevent the occurrence of violence, abuse, and exploitation.

To begin with, parental education is crucial, as the family is the first and principal environment for a child's development. Parents must be fully informed about children's rights and the warning signs of abuse or violence so they can provide a safe, supportive, and affectionate environment for their children. Parental education programs may include positive parenting skills, behavior management, understanding the effects of psychological and physical violence, and preventive strategies.

Teachers—who are central to schooling and spend a large portion of time with children—should receive specialized training on children's rights, identifying instances of violence, supporting affected children, and proper reporting procedures. Such training enables teachers to play an effective role in early identification and support and helps create a safe and positive school environment.

Police and security forces, as judicial officers and guardians of public order, also require specialized training regarding the sensitivities and rights of children. Training on handling cases of child abuse, violence, and exploitation, and on appropriate conduct that respects the child's dignity during questioning and case handling, clarifies the importance of child-sensitive procedures. These trainings increase professionalism, care, and attentiveness when interacting with children and their families and help prevent secondary harm.

Furthermore, community-wide culture-building through media, television programs, public information campaigns, and cultural activities can change general attitudes and behaviors toward children. Heightened societal sensitivity to children's rights and a deeper understanding of the importance of their security and health create a receptive environment for adopting and enforcing protective laws. Comprehensive and targeted education and culture-building—coordinated among families, schools, security institutions, and the broader society—are key to preventing violations of children's security rights and to providing a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment for children and adolescents.

Expanding International Cooperation and Acceding to Remaining Protocols

Expanding international cooperation and acceding to the remaining Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child are among the most important strategies for strengthening the protection of the security rights of children and adolescents in Iran. These steps not only advance the fulfillment of Iran's international obligations but also enable the country to benefit from global experience, elevate legal and operational standards, and enhance institutional and technical capacities.

Accession to Optional Protocols—such as those concerning the involvement of children in armed conflict; the sale of children, sexual exploitation, and child pornography; and online sexual communications—can significantly

strengthen the legal and judicial framework for combating violations of children's rights. These Protocols provide clear frameworks for defining offenses, setting enforcement measures, and establishing international monitoring mechanisms. Their implementation will, in addition to enhancing Iran's international standing, improve the situation of children's rights domestically.

International cooperation through participation in training programs, information and experience exchange, and engagement with specialized international bodies—such as UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and other child-rights organizations—can enhance the capacities of domestic institutions to prevent and address violations. Such cooperation also provides access to international financial and technical resources and creates a basis for coordinating policies and actions at regional and global levels. Accession and cooperation require strong political will, convergence of domestic laws with international commitments, and sustained efforts to remove legal, cultural, and structural barriers. With this approach, Iran can play a more effective role in ensuring the rights and security of children and adolescents and move closer to achieving sustainable development goals in the field of children's rights.

Establishing Independent Oversight and Support Institutions

Establishing independent oversight and support institutions is one of the most important strategies for guaranteeing the security rights of children and adolescents, capable of effectively preventing violations and facilitating the handling of offenses. With structural, financial, and operational independence, such institutions can address issues related to children's and adolescents' rights professionally and impartially, free from political interference or other external pressures. (15)

Institutional independence increases public trust in protective mechanisms, encouraging children, families, and society to view these bodies as reliable authorities for reporting and pursuing violations. Independent institutions can also act as monitors to ensure the faithful implementation of laws and policies related to children's rights and to prevent potential violations. In addition to supervisory functions, they can provide support services—such as legal, psychological, and social counseling—to affected children and their families. Working with governmental, judicial, and law enforcement bodies, these institutions can accelerate the coordination of actions and the delivery of justice for children.

Creating such institutions requires the enactment of comprehensive and precise legislation that clearly defines their powers, duties, and structures. Adequate financial resources and specialized human capital must also be allocated so they can effectively discharge their responsibilities. By building an appropriate framework for prevention, case handling, and support, independent oversight and support institutions play a key role in enhancing the security and physical and mental well-being of children and adolescents and in fulfilling the country's domestic and international commitments in the field of children's rights.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that violations of the security rights of children and adolescents in Iran—despite the country's accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and certain of its Optional Protocols—remain widespread and systemic, with numerous obstacles hindering the full and comprehensive realization of these rights. On the one hand, Iran's domestic laws, particularly those concerning the protection of children's physical, psychological, and sexual security, contain gaps and ambiguities that enable abuse and violations of the rights of

this vulnerable group. In particular, the absence of effective mechanisms and sufficient enforcement guarantees has resulted in many cases of child abuse, forced labor, sexual exploitation, and online harassment remaining unaddressed by appropriate legal responses, leaving children exposed to serious threats.

On the other hand, weak alignment between domestic regulations and international commitments—especially the Optional Protocols—has prevented Iran from fully fulfilling its obligations regarding the protection of children's security rights. For instance, certain Protocols addressing sensitive and complex issues such as the involvement of children in armed conflicts, the sale and sexual exploitation of children, and digital abuses have either been partially adopted or have encountered extensive implementation challenges. This reflects the existence of legal, cultural, and political barriers in the process of adopting and fully implementing these instruments, which must be reconsidered and reformed.

Beyond the legal dimensions, insufficient cultural awareness and the absence of independent oversight and support institutions have contributed to the persistence of violations of children's and adolescents' security rights. Weaknesses in public education and in raising awareness among families, teachers, law enforcement, and judicial authorities have reduced societal sensitivity to children's rights, leading to judicial and protective responses that fail to match the gravity of the issue.

Therefore, this study underscores the necessity of drafting and revising domestic laws to provide full coverage of the security rights of children and adolescents. It also emphasizes the importance of strengthening enforcement guarantees—such as stricter penalties and preventive measures—alongside the establishment and empowerment of independent and efficient oversight institutions, including specialized child protection bodies. Purposeful education and cultural awareness initiatives across all levels of society, especially among parents, teachers, and judicial and law enforcement officials, should also be prioritized to prevent and reduce violations.

Moreover, it is recommended that the Islamic Republic of Iran adopt a more proactive international approach by acceding to the remaining Optional Protocols and establishing mechanisms to harmonize domestic legislation with international commitments. International cooperation in exchanging experiences, providing technical and financial support, and training professionals responsible for children's rights can significantly contribute to improving conditions.

Without a comprehensive, coordinated, and continuous approach that addresses the issue of children's and adolescents' security rights from both legal and cultural perspectives, it is unrealistic to expect meaningful improvement. Protecting this vulnerable population is not only a human and moral duty but also a legal and international obligation that must be pursued with determination and full commitment, so that the fundamental rights of children are genuinely realized and a better future for them is ensured.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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Transparency of Data

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