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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### Explaining the Components of a Family-Friendly City: A Qualitative Study

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### Introduction

Currently, many cities are seeking to shift their approach to urban management by placing the family at the center of their policies, recognizing it not only as a decision-making unit but also as a key institution alongside other actors in urban governance. However, comprehensive studies covering all aspects of family-friendly cities remain scarce. The theoretical foundations of family-friendly cities draw on several frameworks, including the concept of the family as the most fundamental social institution, Sennett's (2018) Open City theory, the sustainable city approach, Carmona's (2019) public space framework, gender and development perspectives, and the Right to the City theory. This study aims to identify the core components of a family-friendly city in megacities such as Tehran and to provide a holistic framework for urban policymakers.

### Methodology

This basic-applied research employs an exploratory qualitative design using content analysis. Initially, a scoping review was conducted, and 24 articles were selected, reviewed, and analyzed to identify the components of a family-friendly city. Subsequently, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts and specialists to determine the indicators of a family-friendly city in Tehran. Participants were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation, including experts, managers, and specialists in urban management, sociology, social work, urban planning, and gerontology who were willing to participate. The mean interview duration was 65 minutes. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using conventional content analysis. To ensure data trustworthiness, the Elo et al. (2014) checklist was used. The study was carried out in three stages: (1) systematic search and review of international experiences regarding family-friendly city programs and policies; (2) semi-structured interviews with experts to extract the components of a family-friendly city in Tehran; and (3) formulation of family-friendly city policies. Ethical considerations based on the Declaration of Helsinki were observed throughout the study.

### Findings

The scoping review revealed that the dimensions emphasized in family-friendly city research were concentrated in eight main areas: accessibility and safety, urban services, family economy, housing, health services, transportation,

educational services, and childcare centers. The qualitative analysis of 18 expert interviews identified 4 main components and 14 sub-components:

1. Infrastructure and Urban Services – including transportation (metro, BRT, taxis), accessibility (sidewalk and park modifications, safe equipment, pedestrian bridges, slip-resistant surfaces), urban furniture (seating, drinking fountains, shaded areas, sanitation), waste management (organized collection, separation bins), air pollution control (restricting polluting vehicles, flexible working hours, early warnings), and facilities (ATMs, fresh produce markets).
2. Cultural-Social – including cultural services (cultural centers, religious programs, festive gatherings, recreational activities) and social interaction (charitable associations, social networks, community support, family participation in decision-making).
3. Social Welfare – including child services (kindergartens, preschools, infant care centers), education (parental training, neighborhood educational centers, virtual education, health education), health (accessible healthcare centers, first aid boxes), and safety (police presence, speed bumps, CCTV, street lighting).
4. Livelihood – including affordable housing (low-cost housing, low-interest loans) and subsidies (free utilities, tax exemptions, rental assistance, free transportation).

Among the 14 sub-components, "accessibility" had the highest frequency, followed by transportation, urban facilities, air pollution, cultural services, urban furniture, and health. Regarding infrastructure and urban services, participant (P11) stated: "The most important issue that all managers and urban planners in Tehran must consider as an infrastructure task is public transportation." Participant (P2) highlighted the need to pay attention to cultural-social programs and said: "Joyful and family-appropriate programs in which all family members can participate are essential." Participant (P6), referring to one of the examples of social welfare, stated: "Everyone must adhere to the principle that children are the center of development in any society. Therefore, childcare centers are essential for a family-friendly city." Participant (P14) emphasized the importance of livelihood and said: "Formal livelihood assistance to families with children can have a great impact on improving the family's livelihood situation."

The findings showed that while many international experiences share commonalities with domestic expert opinions, contextual differences require localized adaptation. International experiences emphasized free public transport for elderly and pregnant women, safe pedestrian paths, workplace childcare, free health services, and family participation in decision-making. Iranian experts specifically highlighted the need for metro and BRT stations, accessible ATMs, local fresh produce markets, neighborhood cleaning services, speed bumps, CCTV cameras, street lighting, affordable housing for multi-child families, free utilities, rental assistance, and free urban transportation.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the components of a family-friendly city, which is essential for effective urban policymaking in megacities like Tehran. Infrastructure and urban services emerged as the foundational component, highlighting the importance of accessible public transportation, safe pedestrian pathways, and well-maintained urban furniture. The cultural-social component emphasizes the need for community engagement, social interaction, and cultural programs that strengthen family bonds. Social welfare, including childcare services, education, health, and safety, addresses the direct needs of families. The livelihood component, focusing on affordable housing, subsidies, and financial support, is crucial for economic stability. Compared to previous studies, this research provides a more holistic perspective by integrating multiple dimensions that have often been addressed separately in international frameworks such as child-friendly cities or age-friendly cities. Creating a family-friendly city requires a multi-sectoral approach involving collaboration between government, the private sector, and civil society. Urban policymakers

should prioritize these components to enhance the quality of life for all residents. Recommendations include creating safe public spaces, developing affordable housing policies, expanding childcare and educational services, improving public transportation, reducing air pollution, fostering social participation, and establishing continuous monitoring systems for family-friendly city indicators.

#### **KEY WORDS**

Family-Friendly City, Urban Management, Children, Older Adults, Tehran.



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