Victims of Corruption Suffer Personal and Collective Loss: A Qualitative Study of Public Perceptions

Saeid Zandi, Masoumeh Esmaeili, and Kumars Farahbakhsh

Abstract
This study aimed to identify citizens’ perceptions of the effects of administrative corruption on their lives. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with 15 citizens living in Tehran, Iran, recruited through the convenience sampling method. Two main themes emerged from the data: Negative individual consequences (including “negative emotional consequences”, “negative motivational consequences”, “negative moral and behavioural consequences” and “negative economic consequences”) and Negative collective consequences (including “negative consequences related to family formation and stability” and “negative social consequences”). The study reveals that participants have experienced or perceived adverse effects in the personal, family and social spheres as a result of administrative corruption. The impacts of corruption on people’s lives can be taken into consideration when explaining the importance and necessity of designing and implementing preventive measures and policies aimed at reducing corrupt behaviours in public agents.

Keywords
citizens, consequences of corruption, effects of corruption, perception of official corruption, public service

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Introduction

Corruption is a global phenomenon that affects many aspects of human life, including political, economic, social, and environmental. Corruption can be defined as the abuse of entrusted power or position for private gain (Transparency International, 2021). However, corruption is an essentially contested concept; what is considered “corrupt” can vary greatly depending on cultural, historical, and societal norms (Johnston, 2005; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Wickberg, 2021). There are different interpretations of the concept of corruption in the literature, and this is a confirmation of the claim of many researchers about its complexity. Some researchers believe that the interpretation of corruption and corrupt practices can vary based on region, local beliefs, and values (e.g., Budiman et al., 2013). A general perception is that when studying corruption, these multiple meanings of corruption lead to complexity and dependence on the mind (Chandler & Graham, 2010). These consequences are due to the difference in culture and the tolerance of corrupt behaviour in countries, which subsequently creates different perceptions.

Principal-agent theory, in the context of corruption, assumes that agents (public officials) serve to protect the interests of the principal (the public) (Garen, 1994). However, the interests of the agents often diverge from the interests of the principal, leading to corruption. Corruption takes various forms, such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, fraud, extortion, and favoritism (Han, 2023). It can occur in different sectors, such as public, private, or nongovernmental. Corruption can also involve various actors, such as politicians, bureaucrats, businesspeople, civil society, or citizens.

One of the most prevalent and problematic forms of corruption is administrative corruption or public employees’ corruption, which refers to the misuse of public office or resources by public officials for personal benefit or for the benefit of a third party (Klitgaard, 1988). Public employees’ corruption can undermine the quality and efficiency of public services, including health, education, justice, security, and infrastructure. Additionally, administrative corruption can erode the trust and legitimacy of public institutions and public officials, weakening the accountability and transparency of public administration. It also has the potential to distort the allocation and distribution of public resources, creating or exacerbating social and economic inequalities and injustices (Manara et al., 2023).

Public employees’ corruption can have significant and lasting effects on the individuals and the citizens’ life. The literature on this topic can be divided into two main streams: one that focusses on the objective and measurable outcomes of public employees’ corruption and the other that focusses on the subjective and perceptual experiences. The following sections will review these two streams of literature and highlight the main findings and gaps.

Objective and Measurable Outcomes of Public Employees’ Corruption

The first stream of literature aims to quantify and assess the impacts and consequences of corruption on various indicators of individual and societal well-being, including
income, poverty, inequality, health, education, and social capital. This literature employs diverse methods and data sources, such as surveys, experiments, case studies, and secondary data analysis, to establish causal or correlational relationships between public employees’ corruption and these indicators.

One of the most common indicators used to measure the effects of administrative corruption is income. Several studies have found that corruption by public employees reduces individuals’ and countries’ income levels and growth rates by creating inefficiencies, distortions, and uncertainties in the market and the public sector (Gyimah-Brempong, 2002; Tanzi & Davoodi, 1997). Corruption also increases the income inequality and poverty by favoring the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised, and by depriving the vulnerable of access to basic public services and opportunities (Gupta et al., 2002; You & Khagram, 2005). In a study conducted by Qizilbash (2001), a significant relationship between corruption and some aspects of human development, including poverty, was found.

Health is another common indicator. Research shows that administrative corruption adversely affects the health status of individuals by reducing the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of health care services, and by increasing the exposure to health risks and hazards (Hanf et al., 2011; Olken & Pande, 2012). Public employees’ corruption also affects the health behaviours and choices of individuals and countries, influencing the demand and supply of healthcare services, and creating incentives and disincentives for health promotion and prevention (Hunt, 2010).

A third common indicator used to measure the consequences of public corruption is education. Several studies have found that administrative corruption negatively affects the level of education by reducing the quantity, quality and equity of education services, and by increasing the costs and barriers to access education (Reinikka & Svensson, 2004; Patrinos & Kagia, 2007; Hallak & Poisson, 2007). Public employees’ corruption also affects the education values and attitudes of people by undermining trust and confidence in the education system and by fostering a culture of cheating and dishonesty among students, teachers, and administrators (Heyneman et al., 2008; Björkman, 2007).

Other indicators used to measure the impacts of public employee corruption include social capital, democracy, human rights, the environment, and security. The general finding of these studies is that public employees’ corruption has a negative and significant effect on these indicators by increasing the instability and vulnerability of individuals (Uslaner, 2008; Montinola & Jackman, 2002; Kaufmann et al., 2011).

The literature on the objective and measurable outcomes of public employee corruption provides valuable insight and evidence on the magnitude and direction of the effects of corruption on individuals and citizens. However, this literature also faces a challenge: the variability and heterogeneity of the consequences of corruption, which can depend on the type, frequency, severity, and distribution of public employees’ corruption, and on the characteristics and responses of individuals and citizens (Svensson, 2005).
Subjective and Perceptual Experiences of Public Employees’ Corruption

The second stream of literature aims to explore and understand the impacts and consequences of administrative corruption on the subjective and perceptual experiences of individuals and citizens, such as their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, values, and norms.

One of the most common themes that emerges from this literature is the emotional effects of public employees’ corruption on individuals and citizens. Several studies have found that corruption evokes a range of negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, disappointment, resentment, fear, anxiety, and depression, among those who encounter or witness public employees’ corruption (Andersson & Heywood, 2009; Morris & Klesner, 2010). These negative emotions can affect the well-being, motivation, and behaviour of individuals and citizens, likely influencing their attitudes and expectations toward public institutions and public officials (Miller, 2006; Rothstein & Eek, 2009). Tay et al. (2014) investigated the impact of administrative corruption on subjective well-being (including positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction) using data from 150 countries and found that the perception of high administrative corruption reduces the level of subjective well-being of people, particularly in the dimension of life satisfaction.

Another common theme is the cognitive effects of administrative corruption on individuals. Research shows that public employees’ corruption affects the beliefs, values, and norms of people, such as their trust, legitimacy, fairness, justice, and morality, regarding public institutions and public officials (Mishler & Rose, 2001; Seligson, 2002; Sung, 2003). These cognitive effects can shape perceptions, judgments, and evaluations of individuals and citizens, potentially influencing their participation, cooperation, and compliance with public institutions and public officials (Persson et al., 2013). Villoria et al. (2013), in a survey of citizens in Spain, showed that the perception of the level of administrative corruption in the country has caused a decrease in satisfaction with the government and a decrease in institutional and social trust. The disclosure of new corruptions further confirms peoples’ hypothesis about the corruption of the economic and administrative system.

A third common theme is the behavioural impacts of public employees’ corruption on citizens. Some studies have demonstrated that administrative corruption affects the actions and reactions of individuals, such as their involvement, engagement, or disengagement, in public affairs and public services (Charron et al., 2013; Bauhr & Grimes, 2013). These behavioural effects can reflect the adaptation, resistance, or avoidance of citizens, and influence their willingness or unwillingness to engage in corruption themselves (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006; Serra, 2006). Villoria et al. (2013) showed that administrative corruption increases the tendency of citizens to break the law. The more people consider the administrative system to be corrupt, the more psychological readiness they have to accept engaging in corrupt acts, and corrupt practices spread further. The higher the frequency of corrupt practices, the fewer incentives there are for others to act honestly (Bardhan, 2005). This phenomenon aligns with what Ostrom (1998) calls the ‘collective action problem of the second order’. According to this theory,
rational actors heavily depend on shared expectations of how others will act. Therefore, if there is a belief that other key social actors, such as public administrators and politicians, are going to cheat, everyone has an incentive to act in a dishonest or corrupt way because honest behaviour will result in a loss. Administrative corruption leads to the creation of a selfish and profit-seeking moral atmosphere in the society (Hosseini-Hashemzadeh, 2020).

The literature on subjective and perceptual experiences of administrative corruption provides valuable information. However, this literature also faces a limitation: the difficulty of accessing and sampling the individuals and citizens who have experienced or perceived public employees’ corruption, which can be sensitive, stigmatised, or hidden, and which can vary across contexts, sectors, and levels (Johnston, 2014).

To the authors’ knowledge, the impacts of administrative corruption on the lives of Iranian people have not yet been studied from the perspective of citizens. This study aims to identify public perceptions about the ways their lives are affected by corrupt actions of civil servants. It is worth noting that while public employees’ corruption exists in many developing countries, it is a severe problem in Islamic Republic of Iran (Zandi et al., In Press). Iran is one of the countries with a high rate of corruption. According to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Iran has been ranked 149th among 180 countries (Transparency International, 2023).

**Materials and Methods**

The current study employed a qualitative approach, utilising qualitative interviews for data collection.

**Sample**

The participants included 15 citizens living in Tehran, who were selected using the convenience sampling method (volunteer sampling type) and through a call posted on social media. It should be mentioned that 25 individuals expressed their interest in participating in this research. Among them, 21 persons met the inclusion criteria, and were initially selected. The sampling process continued until the conceptual saturation of the categories was achieved (interview with 15 people). The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1. Age between 20 and 60 years old; 2. Living in Tehran for at least two years; 3. Experience of direct or indirect exposure to instances of administrative corruption in the past year. The demographic data of the participants are shown in Table 1.

According to Table 1, eight participants were women and seven were men. The average age of the participants was 39.40 years. In addition, five people had a bachelor’s degree, four people were at high school level, three had a master’s degree, one was at middle school level, one had an elementary education, and one held a PhD. In terms of marital status, there were eight married, five single and two divorced among the informants.
Procedure

We collected the data using semi-structured interviews. The main interview questions were based on an interview protocol (see Appendix A). We also used clarifying questions, such as ‘Could you tell me more?’ The main and additional questions of the interview guide were formulated based on the study objectives, as well as the research literature. Two experts in behavioural and social sciences provided comments and finally approved the interview protocol. Data collection occurred from November 2022 to March 2023. Interviews were conducted by a PhD Candidate in Counseling, at the participants’ convenience, either via video or audio calls. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 min. Due to the sensitivity of the subject and to establish trust, the interviews were not audio-recorded, but they were instantly transcribed verbatim on paper.

Data Analysis

We inductively analysed the data using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, we read the interview transcripts repeatedly, looking for concepts. Then, we coded the data and categorised conceptually associated concepts. The categories and subcategories were linked to related codes. Coding continued until high level of agreement was reached. Finally, we identified two main themes and described them. After all interviews were analysed, the main narratives for each category were translated into English.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Informants.

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<tr>
<th>#</th>
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<td>44</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>divorced</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>master’s</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>married</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>bachelor’s</td>
<td>single</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>high school</td>
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<td>single</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>30</td>
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Trustworthiness

The criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were followed to ensure trustworthiness. We considered the diversity in informants’ gender, age, education, and occupation. Detailed written notes were taken during the interviews. A peer examination was performed by three experts who verified the coding and categorisation process. All members of the research group reviewed interview drafts and verified all codes and categorisations.

Ethical Considerations

We took into account all the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were free to participate in this study and informed consent was obtained from them. Furthermore, participants were assured that their information would be kept confidential. The participants had the right to withdraw from research at any time and without consequence. The Research Ethics Committee of Allameh Tabataba’i University endorsed this study (protocol code: IR.ATU.REC.1399.077).

Results

Data analysis led to the identification of two main themes: Negative individual consequences and Negative collective consequences. This implies that the citizens participating in this research have experienced or perceived adverse effects in the personal, family, and social spheres from the administrative corruption. These main themes are described below. Figure 1 presents an overview of our findings.

Figure 1. Qualitative model of the consequences of corruption based on public perceptions.
Negative Individual Consequences of Administrative Corruption in the Life of Citizens

This theme refers to the individual areas of the citizen’s life affected by the occurrence of administrative corruption. Within this main theme, there are four categories: “Negative Emotional Consequences”, “Negative Motivational Consequences”, “Negative Moral and Behavioural Consequences,” and “Negative Economic Consequences”.

Negative emotional consequences, repeatedly mentioned by most interviewed citizens, encompass the negative feelings that the perception of administrative corruption creates in a person, either immediately or gradually. The feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, sadness, pervasive fear, isolation and hatred towards the public employees were among the sentiments expressed by the informants. In some narratives from the participants in this study, we encountered the following statements:

*When I see these things, I feel helpless... When it is said many times in the news that certain people are embezzling, but still not being prosecuted or easily fleeing to another country, one feels that there is no one to take our rights back from these thieves and embezzlers.* (participant #1)

*I feel isolated. I can’t communicate in government offices at all. A kind of fear and isolation because I think in my mind that they don’t intend for your business to move forward, but they are looking for a reason not to do anything for you [maybe sometimes pushing you to give bribes and under-the-table payments]. As much as I can, I don’t do the administrative work myself; mom and dad go after it, or if I go myself, they come with me for this work...* (participant #2)

*I feel scared when I hear a series of news like the safe deposit box of a certain bank being emptied easily... It’s very scary that we don’t know where our society and country is going... What is the future of this inflation, these embezzlements and rent-seeking... The top officials of the country should take a series of real actions and not slogans to reduce this fear of the future in the young generation...* (informant #7)

*In my opinion, the feeling of despair is the biggest consequence of administrative and economic corruption. The citizens of a country hope that the country’s officials and their associates are the people’s refuge. When I think about these issues, I lose all hope...* (informant #8)

*I am disappointed to see these problems. Everything is becoming inferior... Only justice, meritocracy, and transparency can bring back the feeling of hope...* (respondent #14)

*Why should I be depressed in my youth? I applied for an employment loan many times so that I could create a job for myself in this crisis of unemployment and inflation. But I did not succeed. I had no capital but I liked to work. Instead of making it easier to start a business, they do the opposite. I really feel sad and depressed...* (participant #9)
My tolerance threshold for all civil servants and government employees has gone down and I hate them. I think most of them are incompetent and they’ve taken the place of qualified people… (participant #11)

In the description of the negative motivational consequences, it can be asserted that, based on participants’ experiences, the perception of corruption causes individuals to lack motivation to stay in their homeland or to lead an ethical life. Consequently, the present research identified increased motivation to migrate and decreased motivation to earn healthy income as the motivational outcomes:

I believe that these immoralities and occupational irresponsibility will reduce the motivation to earn a healthy income. For example, you go and see that the person sitting behind the desk is not working, but gets paid, he is talking to his family on the organisational phone, he is doing little work, he is sitting idle and not doing his job, he says “go, and come again on Saturday” and... Well, one may say “why should I bother myself so much at work to earn the same amount of money?” One loses his real job motivation. Later on, the citizens will also become like them in their own jobs... (respondent #3)

You know, these corruptions take away the hope of staying in the motherland... When a person sees that law, order and justice do not prevail, he loses his attachment to his country... I myself decided to emigrate at this age, even though I don’t like... (informant #4)

The meaning of negative moral and behavioural consequences is the emergence of unethical actions and undesirable behaviours in citizens as a result of perception or experience of examples of corruption in the country’s administrative bodies. In the statements of some respondents, there were hints of signs such as aggression and unfair profit seeking in their profession:

From the day I was not hired for discrimination and injustice, I became angry and aggressive. The people who were hired really had a much lower level of expertise than me... (interviewee #11)

Years ago, I was bribed to get my work done... I was very angry at that time and decided to make up for it in my work. For example, I sold a product to a customer at a higher price than its actual price to compensate for the loss they caused me. This story has no end. With the irresponsibility and corruption of the officials and public employees, the people also become immoral... (interviewee #10)

The negative economic consequences clearly refer to the issue of poverty and financial problems, which the citizens believe to be one of the outcomes of
administrative and economic corruption in the country. For example, participant #12 mentioned:

Well, the corruption they do causes discrimination, and discrimination, in turn, causes poverty and financial problems. It means that some progress more easily and become rich, and some others become poor because jobs, loans, and relationships are not available to them...

**Negative Collective Consequences of Administrative Corruption in the Life of Citizens**

This main theme includes the perceived adverse consequences of administrative corruption in the familial and social spheres of citizens’ lives. “Negative consequences related to family formation and stability” and “negative social consequences” are the subthemes of this theme.

The negative consequences related to the formation and stability of the family are the adverse effects that public corruption can have on the establishment and stability of the family. According to the participants of the research, the difficulties faced by young people in getting married and the increasing probability of some divorces can be the direct or indirect result of certain administrative corruption. For instance, informant #12 stated:

Some young people can’t get a loan because they don’t have acquaintances, or their loan is delayed a lot, and they can’t buy or rent a house, and this might make them unable to get married and start a family until middle age...

In addition, respondent #5 stated:

You know, the reason for my separation from my wife was financial problems. One of the reasons for financial problems is the existence of corruption. When you want to get a good job, they don’t accept you because you don’t have acquaintances, or even for a low amount loan, they block you. That’s why after living for a long time, you’re still a tenant, or you can’t pay for the everyday expenditure, and many disputes with your wife come to appear...

Negative social consequences refer to the adverse effects that administrative corruption leaves at the societal level, with a particular emphasis on reducing public trust in the state and governance and fueling social unrest. For example, an interviewee raised this issue as follows:

The government has good goals, but these goals must be implemented by mid-level managers and low-level employees. But when they do not act properly and commit corruption, people are dissatisfied with the government and governance... In fact, due to the
immorality of managers and employees, we lose our trust in the entire governance system... (participant #6)

Another citizen (#3) mentioned:

*Corruption lowers our satisfaction with the public officials and reduces our sense of justice in the society. This can undermine our peace. Discrimination and corruption are one of the reasons why my family and I participated in almost all recent national protests...*

**Discussion**

Public corruption is the abuse of official duty by public officials, entailing a direct or indirect benefit derived from a public service position for an individual or a group by privileging private interests over the common good and encompassing the violation of rules regulating public service behaviour or the ethics of public service (Villoria, 2007). The study of corruption in government, its outcomes, and efforts to contain it lies at the very core of modern public administration. The purpose of this study was to identify public perceptions about the consequences of public service employees’ corruption. The results of data analysis led to the formation of two main themes: *Negative individual consequences* and *Negative collective consequences*. Some of the findings of our study are discussed and explained in detail below.

We found that the occurrence of petty or administrative corruption has caused some negative emotional consequences for the citizens participating in the study; emotions such as helplessness, despair, sadness, fear and isolation were among the prevalent negative sentiments. This finding is consistent with the results of Tay et al.’s results (2014), highlighting the substantial impact of the perception of administrative corruption on increasing frustration and negative affect while decreasing positive affect of people. The study identified feelings of helplessness, isolation, and hatred toward public employees as novel results in the field of consequences of corruption.

It should be noted that corruption perception involves the subjective assessment of the extent and nature of corruption in a country or institution, drawing from the opinions and experiences of citizens, experts, or business executives. Corruption perception can trigger adverse emotions in citizens, perhaps because it can affect their social capital and their sense of justice and fairness. According to the social capital theory, corruption perception can undermine the resources embedded in social networks and relationships, such as trust, norms, and reciprocity, which facilitate collective action and cooperation (Putnam, 2000). Corruption perception may elicit negative emotions like anger, frustration, fear, and shame among citizens, as they might feel outraged, helpless, threatened, or guilty due to the prevalence and persistence of corrupt practices in their society (Bauhr & Grimes, 2013). Furthermore, corruption perception may diminish satisfaction among citizens, as they may feel dissatisfied, unhappy, or hopeless by the lack of quality and fairness of public services and goods that impact their personal and family lives, such as education, health, security,
and justice (Gupta et al., 2002). Corruption can undermine the sense of distributive justice among citizens, as they may perceive that the outcomes and benefits of the society are unfairly allocated and concentrated among the corrupt elites and officials, while the costs and burdens are unfairly imposed and dispersed among the honest masses (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). It may erode the sense of procedural justice among citizens, as they might feel that the rules and procedures of the society are unfairly manipulated and violated by corrupt actors. Citizens could feel that their trust and cooperation are unfairly exploited and abused by public institutions. Corruption perception may also affect the meaning and purpose for citizens, as they might feel confused, disillusioned, or alienated by the violation and erosion of the values and principles guiding their personal and social life, such as honesty, justice, and morality (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006).

In addition, the results indicated that, from the perspective of the citizens participating in the research, administrative corruption has adverse effects on the motivation, ethics, and behaviour of citizens. Reduction in motivation for ethical earning and unfair profit seeking in one’s job are among these undesirable consequences. This finding aligns with the results of the study by Villoria et al. (2013). Corruption perception can weaken the norms of social solidarity and responsibility, as citizens may prioritise their personal interests over the common good of the society or adopt opportunistic attitudes towards social obligations and expectations (Mishler & Rose, 2001). The higher the frequency of corrupt practices, the fewer incentives there are for others to act honestly (Bardhan, 2005). Therefore, it seems that administrative corruption leads to the compromise of individual morality. This occurs probably because the belief in the social system, or the ‘collective conscience’ in Durkheim’s words (Ridenour-Jones, 1994), decreases among citizens, resulting in a reduction of people’s psychological control over their behaviour. Individuals sincerely seeking to earn money through legal means may experience despair and disappointment when witnessing those who have acquired a considerable wealth effortlessly and immediately, enjoying a lavish lifestyle. As a result, they may eventually come to believe that by working honestly, it is impossible for them to achieve wealth, and this can lead them to workplace deviance and economic crimes.

The findings also showed that, from the perspective of informants, administrative corruption exacerbates poverty and financial problems among citizens. One of the most important macro-level costs of corruption is the widening class gap between the rich and poor social classes, potentially fostering a sense of the absence of social justice in the attitudes and minds of people. This observation aligns with Qizilbash’s study (2001), which indicates that administrative corruption results in a decrease in the level of social services, especially for poor and low-income individuals, along with an increase in the cost of living and prices.

Moreover, our findings revealed that, as perceived by respondents, administrative corruption might potentially have negative effects on the family dimension of citizens’ lives. Although delays in marriage and the individual’s economic problems and unemployment can stem from various reasons and factors, individuals also consider the
potential and influential role of economic and bureaucratic health in the emergence of these issues. This is a novel finding from our data that was not shown in previous research. This interesting finding can have implications for understanding of the after-effects of corruption. Although experts underline poverty, income inequality, and wealth inequality as consequences of corruption, citizens participating in our study differentiate between negative economic consequences and subsequent consequences caused in turn by those negative economic consequences. That is, here we observe a pattern of domino effect or chain reaction. It is very important that we consider this chain of consequences (series of adverse outcomes that are interconnected) when we study the human consequences of corruption.

In addition, the results indicated that, from the perspective of citizens participating in the research, administrative corruption has adverse effects on citizens’ trust in the government. This finding is in line with Villoria et al. (2013), demonstrating that the perception of the level of administrative corruption leads to a decrease in satisfaction with the government and a decrease in public trust. Administrative corruption probably weakens people’s belief in the ability and will of the government to prevent corrupt practices and occupational frauds. Notably, the Gallup Poll (2020) recently reported that the Iranian people’s trust in the government is below 50% for the first time, likely attributed to the country’s economic crises. Distrust of the state, in turn, may generate instability at the moral level and instability may make people unethical because they cannot trust the future. One of the main criteria of a healthy society is the high level of public trust, which is damaged by corruption and fraud. Overall, corruption is of concern due to its broader social consequences, particularly to the extent to which it may lead citizens to distrust government institutions and to be less willing to follow rules and obey laws.

**The Limitations of the Study**

Given that the sampling was based on an announcement, the results of this research do not take into account the experience of people who did not see the call or did not want to volunteer. In addition, probably, some persons who could have been involved in volunteering had not expressed their interest because of the sensitive nature of the subject under study. It is clear that the qualitative nature of the inquiry makes it impossible for our findings to be generalised.

**Directions for Future Research**

- It is suggested that the perceived consequences of administrative corruption in people’s life be identified from the perspective of citizens of other cities in the country to provide a basis for environmental and intercultural comparisons.
- Conduct nation-wide cross-sectional surveys to find the extent to which these perceived consequences are prevalent. It would also be interesting and important to
explore whether the impacts and consequences of administrative corruption vary across different groups of citizens, such as gender, age, education, income, ethnicity, religion, etc. Quantitative studies could map these consequences through cross-tabulations.

- We need to know how the impacts and consequences of corruption change over time, both in the short-term and the long-term, for the individual and the society. Longitudinal studies may help in this regard.
- How the impacts of corruption interact with other factors, such as political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors, that affect the quality of life of citizens would be a subject of investigation.
- Researchers are also recommended to compare and contrast the impacts of administrative corruption with the consequences of other forms of corruption, such as political, judicial, or private sector corruption.
- Exploring the ways in which corruption perception influence the attitudes and behaviours of citizens towards public institutions, public employees, and public services can provide insightful contributions.

**Practical Implications and Policy Recommendations**

- Implement and enforce anticorruption laws and regulations that deter, detect, and punish administrative corruption, such as whistleblower protection, asset declaration, conflict of interest, transparency, and accountability.
- Strengthen and support the institutions and mechanisms that monitor and investigate administrative corruption, such as anti-corruption agencies, audit offices, ombudsmen, and civil society organisations.
- Educate and train public employees on the causes, consequences, and prevention of administrative corruption, such as through awareness campaigns, codes of conduct, ethics courses, and workshops. An inflationary economy can lead to moral blindness in people, and this, in turn, encourages ignoring the consequences of actions and indifference to the suffering of others. In addition, sometimes employees are not aware of the negative consequences of administrative corruption for themselves, the country, and citizens; therefore, it is necessary to add this topic to in-service training courses. Reflecting “the adverse effects of corruption on people” to the public sector employees may have a positive and effective role in their decision to avoid engaging in corrupt practices.
- Empower and involve citizens in the delivery and evaluation of public services, such as through participatory budgeting, citizen feedback, social audits, and e-government. Public participation can limit powerful interest groups and restrict the influence of elites, potentially corrupt officials and corrupted groups.
- Psychotherapists, family counselors, and social workers are recommended to recognize and validate the negative impacts of administrative corruption on the lives of citizens, such as emotional, motivational, moral, behavioural, economic, familial,
and social consequences. They should provide and refer citizens to the appropriate resources and services that can help them cope with and overcome the negative consequences of corruption, such as psychological, legal, financial, or social support. We must provide a safe haven for those who perceive themselves as victims of corruption.

- Inspire and motivate citizens to participate and contribute to the anti-corruption efforts and initiatives in their communities and societies, such as by reporting, denouncing, or exposing administrative corruption, or by joining or supporting anti-corruption movements and counter-corruption organisations.

- It is recommended that the results of this study be used in governance decision counseling so that the senior managers of the country become aware of the damage of administrative corruption in the lives of individuals and families in order that they can plan, make decisions, and take action more efficiently for this matter. In addition, it is better for the country’s legislative, executive and regulatory bodies to be open to requests for cooperation from cognitive and behavioural science experts.

- General Inspection Office, Transparency Think Tank for Iran, Ministry of Justice, Supreme Audit Court of Iran, Special Prosecutor’s Office for Money and Banking Crimes, Judicial System of Iran, Iranian National Tax Administration, Law Enforcement Command (police force of the Islamic Republic of Iran), and municipalities can use our findings. Additionally, administrative policy-making groups, governing officials, managers of private companies and government institutions, specially, HR and recruitment managers, anti-corruption practitioners, experts of administrative violation boards and in-service training units, and specialists in the fields of criminology, organisational behaviour, auditing, law, family counseling, career counseling, and industrial-organisational psychology can benefit from our research findings in theory and practice.

**Conclusions**

Corruption is a phenomenon that exists more or less in all countries of the world. In recent years, administrative corruption, including corrupt actions by public sector employees or bureaucrats, has posed significant challenges to Iranian society. Currently, Iran does not have a good position on administrative and organisational ethics, and this indicates the imperative need for comprehensive measures to bridge the gap between the current state and the desired situation.

This study revealed some perceived adverse consequences of public servant corruption in the lives of citizens. Among the interesting findings, we saw that family institution is negatively affected by the occurrence of administrative corruption, and this shows the important and potential role of the quality of the country’s administrative space in the ecology and dynamics of the family. This study was just a small attempt to clarify the dimensions of the consequences of administrative corruption in the lives of citizens from the perspective of the citizens themselves and it is likely to help enrich knowledge about this issue.
Acknowledgments
This work is the result of a doctoral dissertation completed by Saeid Zandi in fulfilment of PhD requirements at Allameh Tabataba’i University. We extend our sincere gratitude to the participants in the study for their invaluable responses to our interview questions.

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Conceptualisation, Saeid Zandi and Masoumeh Esmaeili; Data curation, Saeid Zandi; Formal analysis, Saeid Zandi, Masoumeh Esmaeili, and Kumars Farahbakhsh; Investigation, Saeid Zandi and Kumars Farahbakhsh; Methodology, Saeid Zandi, Masoumeh Esmaeili, and Kumars Farahbakhsh; Project administration, Saeid Zandi; Resources, Saeid Zandi and Kumars Farahbakhsh; Supervision, Masoumeh Esmaeili; Writing – original draught, Saeid Zandi; Writing – review & editing, Saeid Zandi, Masoumeh Esmaeili and Kumars Farahbakhsh.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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### Appendix A

Demographic variables

- Age:
- Sex:
- Education:
- Civil status:
Interview Questions

- How do you define administrative corruption? What are some examples of administrative corruption you have encountered or witnessed in your interactions with public employees?
- How did administrative corruption affect you or others? What were the short-term and long-term consequences of administrative corruption for you or others?
- How did you feel or react when you faced or observed administrative corruption? What emotions or thoughts did you experience? What do you experience if you are reminded of corruption?
- How did administrative corruption influence your attitude toward public institutions or employees?