



Identifying Factors Influencing the Dignity and Honor of Veterans

Pourya Parvaneh: M.A. Student, Department of Public Policy , Faculty of Law and Political Science , University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

pouryaparvaneh@ut.ac.ir | 0009-0000-0603-7398

Mobina Mohammadi*: M.A. Student, Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Education, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

mohammadi.mobina@ut.ac.ir | 0009-0008-1991-8715

Zahra Zibapoo: Master's Student in Family Counseling Affiliation, Department of Family Counseling faculty of Islamic Education, Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch Tehran, Iran.

0024724580@iaiu.ir | 0009-0000-4414-1516

Abstract

Purpose: The dignity and honor of veterans in the Islamic Republic of Iran is more than a professional or welfare priority; it is a fundamental pillar of social capital and national authority. Recent developments, including the 12-Day War, the events of December 2025, and the Ramadan War, have transformed the parameters governing the “dignity system,” increasing the necessity of redesigning existing frameworks. This study aims to identify the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans and to provide a systemic framework for their enhancement.

Methodology: This research was conducted using a qualitative approach and the Grounded Theory method. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 families of veterans, retired combatants, and managers of the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs. The analysis process was performed in three stages: open, axial, and selective coding.

Findings: The study identified 15 key concepts and five strategic bottlenecks: dominance of the operational/executive approach, the gap between service and perception of service, structural rigidity, lack of a monitoring system for organizational behavior, and inter-institutional misalignment. Furthermore, three paradigmatic shifts in the new generation of veterans were identified: the transition from conventional (hard) warfare to cognitive-social warfare, the phenomenon of digital character assassination, and motivation under ambiguous conditions.

Originality/Value: The proposed framework emphasizes a transition from a purely supportive approach to a resilient systemic model based on smart services, media empowerment of families, and the redesign of the social narrative of dignity.

Keywords

Dignity and Honor of Veterans, Grounded Theory, Social Stigma, Systemic Resilience.

Introduction

The dignity and honor of veterans in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as one of the significant pillars of social capital and national authority, is considered a subject beyond a mere professional or cultural issue. Veterans and their families, as an influential group in the country's contemporary history, face challenges in various economic, social, cultural, and health dimensions that can affect their sense of social status and their perception of self-worth (Rajabi et al., 2020; Ahmadi & Yarmohammadian, 2019). At the international level, research has shown that the "meaning-making" of the war experience among veterans and combatants is a complex and dual process, such that this experience can simultaneously lead to a sense of loss, suffering, and vulnerability, while also providing a ground for emotional growth, deepening moral identity, and enhancing psychological resilience (Sendas et al., 2008; Valvano et al., 2013).

The importance of this issue becomes more prominent when considering that many veterans and combatants of long-term wars continue to face chronic problems such as poverty, livelihood limitations, social isolation, and inadequate access to medical services years after the end of conflicts (Ghamari-Tabrizi, n.d.). In Iran, despite the official discourse based on the veneration of veterans, field studies indicate a significant gap between supportive policies and the actual perception of veterans regarding the effectiveness of these policies (Shah-Nowrouzi et al., 2017; Safari, 2010; Yavand Abbasi, 2006). This gap can be analyzed within the framework of System Dynamics literature as a type of policy misalignment and the formation of negative reinforcing feedback loops, which can ultimately lead to the weakening of social trust and a decrease in the sense of status among veterans (Meadows & Wright, 2008).

The complexity of this issue has increased in recent years due to generational shifts and the transformation of war from a hardware-based arena to a cognitive and media-based one. The new generation of veterans (survivors of modern conflicts such as the 12-Day War¹, the security events of December 2025, and the Ramadan War), while being exposed to social polarizations and full-scale psychological warfare, possess different motivational patterns and expectations from supportive policies. However, it

1. The 12-Day War was an armed conflict between Iran and Israel that lasted from June 13 to June 24, 2025. The conflict began with a series of surprise attacks by Israel on Iran on June 12, 2025.

seems that most existing supportive laws are rooted in the traditional approaches of past decades and are not aligned with modern realities. Therefore, systematically identifying the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans and analyzing the relationships between them is a necessary step to move beyond the status quo and provide more effective policies.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer two fundamental questions:

What are the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans?

What are the relationships and prioritizations among these factors?

Furthermore, the goal of this research is to identify, analyze, and prioritize the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans through a systemic approach, and to provide a coherent picture of the relationships between these factors to assist in improving supportive policymaking in this field.

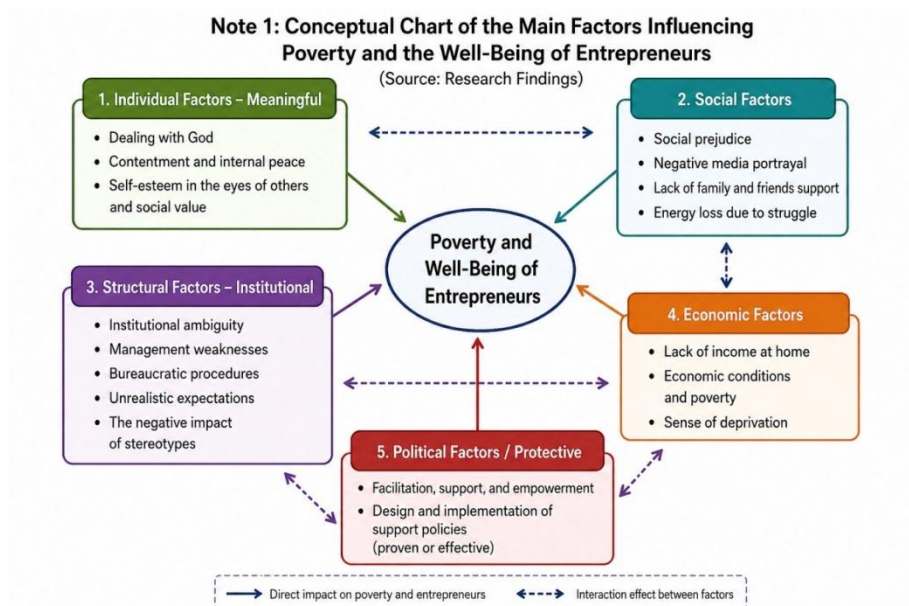
1. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

In Persian literature, honor (*'ezzat*) is defined as a sense of inviolability, dignity, and self-respect (Dekhoda, 1998). In psychological approaches, self-esteem is understood as an individual's evaluation of their own worth and plays a key role in mental health, resilience, and intrinsic motivation (Rosenberg, 1965; Orth & Robins, 2014). Studies have demonstrated that reduced self-esteem among veterans is associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and social shame (Valvano et al., 2013). Conversely, individuals with higher levels of self-esteem tend to exhibit greater adaptability when faced with psychological pressures and life challenges (Baumeister et al., 2003).

In contrast, dignity represents a broader concept than self-esteem, referring to the intrinsic value of human beings and the moral necessity of treating them with respect (Kant, 1785; Nussbaum, 2011). From a sociological viewpoint, dignity is not merely an individual attribute but is shaped and reproduced within the context of social relations and structures of power (Honneth, 1995; Sayer, 2011). Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, human dignity stems from the concept of humanity's divine vicegerency and the infusion of the divine spirit into human existence (Mesbah Yazdi, 2009). Accordingly, the dignity of veterans—beyond the inherent worth accorded to all human beings—derives from their role, sacrifice, and selflessness in defending societal values (Shah-Nowrouzi et al., 2017).

Under the legal framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the term veteran (*Isargar*) refers to individuals who, during the Iran–Iraq War, within the

Resistance Front, or in security and law-enforcement arenas, have risked their lives and property in defense of state values (Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, 2020). This definition includes combatants, disabled



veterans, former prisoners of war, and families of martyrs—each having borne significant burdens of sacrifice (Ahmadi & Yarmohammadian, 2019).

Figure 27. Initial Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing the Dignity and Honor of Veterans

Explanation of Figure 1: The research framework proposes that the dignity and honor of veterans are influenced by five interrelated categories of factors—individual-spiritual, social, structural, economic, and policy-related—which dynamically interact and exert mutual influence on one another.

1-1. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined diverse aspects of the lives of veterans and their families. At the international level, it has been established that low self-esteem constitutes a major risk factor for the persistence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among veterans, underscoring the need to address dignity and self-worth alongside pharmacological interventions (Drapalski et al., 2008). Another study on

veterans with spinal cord injuries found that the process of meaning-making in relation to war experiences plays a decisive role in psychological adjustment: veterans who were able to derive positive meaning from their suffering reported fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety (Valvano et al., 2013). Furthermore, a qualitative study of Iranian veterans after the Iran–Iraq War revealed that, despite their symbolic status in official discourse, they continue to face practical challenges such as poverty, marginalization, and inadequate healthcare (Ghamari-Tabrizi, n.d.).

In Iran, several studies have also explored these issues. Research on the effectiveness of resilience training for veterans' spouses demonstrated significant improvements in both mental health and quality of life following such interventions (Ahmadi & Yarmohammadian, 2019). Another qualitative study investigated the challenges faced by the families of martyrs and veterans, identifying economic pressure, communication difficulties, and inadequate support services as principal obstacles (Rajabi et al., 2020). Likewise, studies analyzing the factors influencing the promotion of the culture of sacrifice and martyrdom emphasized the vital roles played by mass media, the educational system, and the family (Shah-Nowrouzi et al., 2017).

Despite these scholarly contributions, a comprehensive review of the existing literature reveals that most research has centered primarily on clinical dimensions—such as mental health and resilience—or on social welfare issues, including economic hardship and livelihood concerns. Significantly fewer studies have systematically identified the factors affecting the dignity and honor of veterans from their own perspectives. In other words, the major gap lies in the absence of systematic identification and prioritization of such factors based directly on the viewpoints of the target community, as well as the lack of clarity regarding the interrelationships among them.

The present study seeks to bridge this gap by employing the Grounded Theory approach and emphasizing veterans' self-perceptions as the central source of conceptual insight.

2. Materials & Methods

2-1. Research Approach and Strategy

The present study was conducted with the aim of identifying the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans using a qualitative research approach. Given the exploratory nature of the research problem and the need to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation from the veterans' own perspectives, the Grounded Theory strategy was selected

as the primary research method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method enables researchers to develop an original theory or conceptual framework directly from field data without imposing prior assumptions (Danaeefard & Emami, 2007).

Among the various approaches to grounded theory, the systematic approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin—based on three stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—was adopted as the methodological foundation of this study (Mehrabi et al., 2011). The application of grounded theory in research related to veterans and war-injured populations also has precedent. For example, a grounded theory approach was employed in designing a decision-making model based on Islamic principles (Razini & Azizi, 2015). Moreover, a qualitative study on the condition of Iranian veterans adopted an approach closely aligned with grounded theory (Ghamari-Tabrizi, n.d.).

2-2. Study Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of veterans (combatants, disabled veterans, and former prisoners of war), families of martyrs, as well as senior managers and experts from the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs. Considering the qualitative nature of the study and the grounded theory approach, purposeful (theoretical) sampling was employed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this method, participants are selected not randomly but based on theoretical criteria and their capacity to enrich the data and contribute to the emerging theory (Mehrabi et al., 2011).

The inclusion criteria for veterans and their families included direct experience of veteran status (combatant, disabled veteran, or former prisoner of war) or having lived for at least ten years within a veteran's family (spouse or child of a martyr or disabled veteran), as well as willingness to participate actively in the interview process and in validating the findings. For managers at the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, the inclusion criteria consisted of at least ten years of managerial or executive experience in the Foundation and consent to audio recording and transcription of the interview.

The average age of participants was 50 years, and all possessed university-level education (at least a master's degree) along with significant managerial or executive experience. Snowball sampling was also used to complete the participant pool and to facilitate access to individuals who were not readily reachable (Danaeefard & Emami, 2007). The interviews were conducted across diverse geographic areas and varying socioeconomic conditions in order to ensure adequate heterogeneity in the data. In total, 10

in-depth interviews were conducted with families of veterans and senior combatants. The sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved—the point at which additional interviews no longer produced new insights or altered the relationships among the emerging categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Danaeefard & Emami, 2007). In addition to individual interviews, a series of expert panel meetings was also held with mid-level and senior managers of the Foundation.

2-3. Data Collection Instruments and Interview Procedure

The primary data collection instrument in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol developed under the title “Elite Interview Guidebook.” This protocol comprised 12 strategic inquiry axes designed to move beyond surface-level responses and explore deeper causal layers in order to extract the key variables shaping the dignity and honor of veterans (Razini & Azizi, 2015). Before initiating the interviews, a series of internal training sessions was conducted for members of the research team. These sessions introduced techniques of exploratory interviewing and methods for accessing latent cognitive layers, ensuring procedural consistency within the team and enhancing the convergence of interview outputs.

To facilitate access to the target population and to build trust with participants, official letters of introduction were issued by Imam Sadiq University for each core team member. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format while adhering to ethical research principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Each participant took part in at least three separate sessions: the first session involved a preliminary discussion on the concepts of sacrifice and dignity as well as clarification of the research objectives; the second session constituted the main interview, which served as the foundation of the inquiry and lasted on average approximately 100 minutes; and the third session was a feedback meeting during which the outputs of the previous sessions were shared with the participant and corrective suggestions were incorporated.

All interviews were recorded with the participants’ consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcribed texts were then reviewed and confirmed by the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

2-4. Data Analysis Method

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the Grounded Theory method based on the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and inspired by the study of Razini and Azizi

(Razini & Azizi, 2015). The analytical process involved three successive stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, meaningful and significant statements from the participants were examined line by line and transformed into conceptual codes, resulting in the extraction of 15 key concepts from the 10 in-depth interviews. In the axial coding stage, the extracted concepts were organized and categorized into broader semantic groupings and analytical categories to identify relationships among them (Danaeefard & Emami, 2007). In the selective coding stage, the core categories were integrated around a central concept, leading to the formation of the four main dimensions of the research: influencing factors, contextual variables, inhibiting factors, and consequences (Razini & Azizi, 2015).

To ensure the validity of the research, the findings were shared with participants and their corrective feedback was incorporated into the analysis. In addition, focus group sessions were conducted with the authors and several interviewees to further develop the components derived from the extracted concepts. To enhance reliability, the coding process was conducted by two independent coders, and the level of agreement between them was assessed and found to be within an acceptable range (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3. Research Findings

This section presents the results of the Grounded Theory analysis, structured to illustrate the factors and mechanisms influencing the dignity of veterans. The findings begin with the identification of key concepts, followed by their categorization into a systemic paradigm model. Furthermore, this section highlights critical strategic bottlenecks identified by experts and explores the evolving paradigmatic shifts within the new generation of veterans.

3-1. Key Concepts Extracted from the Interviews

Analysis of the interview data using the Grounded Theory approach—through the stages of open, axial, and selective coding—led to the identification of fifteen key concepts that shape the dignity and honor of veterans. These concepts represent the most recurrent themes in participants' narratives and reflect the complex interaction between individual beliefs, institutional structures, and broader socio-cultural conditions.

Among the most prominent concepts identified in the interviews were covenant with God, which participants described as a central spiritual source of resilience in coping with economic and social pressures, and contentment and avoidance of egoism, which moderates expectations regarding material benefits provided by institutional systems. Participants also referred to the

reverse effect of quotas, suggesting that quota-based policies—such as university admission quotas—may at times diminish perceived social self-esteem rather than enhance dignity.

Other concepts emerging from the interviews include social labeling, referring to negative public perceptions toward veterans due to the benefits they receive, and structural discrimination, which participants described as perceived inequalities in the distribution of services among combatants. Respondents also emphasized weak media representation, noting that veterans are often portrayed in films and television as dependent or suffering individuals rather than as active contributors to society. Closely related to this issue is historical amnesia, a concern regarding the gradual fading of the culture and philosophy of sacrifice among younger generations.

In addition, several concepts reflected pressures emerging from the immediate social environment of veterans. These included family and social pressure, referring to unrealistic expectations from relatives and social networks that undermine psychological well-being, and the managerial gap, which participants described as a lack of familiarity among officials of the Veterans Foundation with veterans' lived realities and everyday challenges. Administrative issues also appeared prominently, particularly exhausting bureaucracy, referring to the lengthy procedures involved in verifying veteran status and accessing medical services.

Economic conditions also influenced perceptions of dignity. Participants highlighted the priority of livelihood over dignity, indicating that during periods of economic hardship, basic financial needs often overshadow symbolic or value-based concerns. Another related concept was divine versus worldly valuation, reflecting the tension between expectations of spiritual reward and the practical demands of everyday life.

Finally, several concepts pointed to institutional and post-war challenges. These included empowering facilities, referring to veterans' preference for empowerment-oriented services rather than charity-based assistance; post-war isolation, which captures the sense of marginalization experienced during peacetime; and implementation oversight, indicating that the main challenge lies not in the design of policies but in the lack of effective supervision over their implementation.

Together, these fifteen concepts form the empirical basis for the analytical model presented in the following sections.

3-2. Categorization of Concepts within the Four Dimensions

To better understand the relationships among the extracted concepts, they were categorized into four analytical dimensions derived from the grounded theory paradigm model: influencing factors, contextual variables, inhibiting factors, and consequences. Tables 1 to 4 present the classification of the initial codes into subthemes and broader thematic categories.

Table 16. Initial Codes, Subthemes, and Main Theme (Influencing Factors)

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Main Theme
Covenant with God; Contentment and avoidance of egoism; Divine versus worldly valuation	Spiritual beliefs and resilience	Spiritual–Individual Factors
Empowering facilities; Implementation oversight	Quality of support services	Structural–Executive Support Factors

As shown in Table 1, the primary drivers influencing veterans’ dignity consist of two interrelated domains: spiritual–individual factors rooted in religious beliefs and personal values, and structural–executive factors related to the quality and effectiveness of institutional support systems.

Table 17. Initial Codes, Subthemes, and Main Theme (Contextual Variables)

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Main Theme
Historical amnesia	Generational and temporal transformations	Generational–Historical Context
Weak media representation; Social labeling	Media environment and public opinion	Media–Social Context
Priority of livelihood over dignity; Structural discrimination	Economic conditions and resource distribution	Economic–Structural Context

These contextual conditions highlight the broader socio-economic and cultural environment influencing veterans’ social status. Media narratives, generational changes, and economic pressures collectively shape public perceptions and the lived experiences of veterans.

Table 18. Initial Codes, Subthemes, and Main Theme (Inhibiting Factors)

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Main Theme
Reverse effect of quotas; Social labeling	Inadequate design of support policies	Policy Barriers
Managerial gap;	Weakness in executive and	Executive–

Exhausting bureaucracy	managerial structures	Structural Barriers
Family and social pressure	Unrealistic expectations from veterans	Social–Familial Barriers

These barriers demonstrate that policy design flaws, administrative inefficiencies, and social expectations can undermine the positive effects of existing support systems.

Finally, Table 4 presents the consequences emerging from the interaction of these factors.

Table 19. Initial Codes, Subthemes, and Main Theme (Consequences)

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Main Theme
Covenant with God; Contentment and avoidance of egoism	Individual resilience under pressure	Individual Consequences
Post-war isolation	Social exclusion and decline in social dignity	Social Consequences
Reverse effect of quotas; Priority of livelihood over dignity	Erosion of dignity due to flawed policies	Policy Consequences

The consequences of these factors manifest across multiple levels, ranging from individual psychological resilience to broader social and policy outcomes that affect the collective status of veterans. To synthesize these dimensions into a unified structure, Figure 2 presents the resulting paradigm model, which illustrates the dynamic interaction between influencing factors, contextual variables, and inhibiting factors.

Within this systemic framework, influencing factors serve as the primary drivers of the model, while contextual variables define the overarching environment in which dignity is experienced. Inhibiting factors act as barriers that restrict the realization of honor, leading to consequences that emerge at the individual, social, and policy levels. These elements interact in a mutually reinforcing manner to constitute the overall structure of the grounded theory model, reflecting the complex reality of veterans’ status in the contemporary era (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

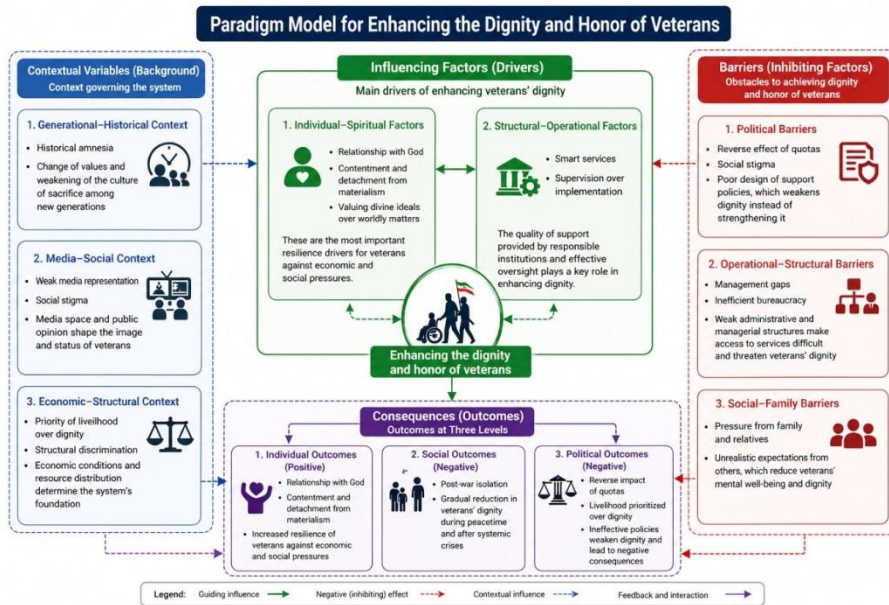


Figure 28. Paradigm Model of Factors Influencing the Dignity and Honor of Veterans

3-3. Five Strategic Bottlenecks

In addition to the conceptual model derived from the interviews, expert panel discussions with middle- and senior-level managers of the Veterans Foundation revealed five strategic bottlenecks that hinder the effective realization of veterans' dignity.

The first bottleneck is the dominance of a custodial approach over a strategic approach. According to experts, the Foundation has gradually become absorbed in routine livelihood issues and payment bureaucracy, which diverts attention from its broader cultural mission of promoting dignity. As a result, veterans are often treated primarily as administrative beneficiaries rather than as national symbols of sacrifice.

The second bottleneck concerns the gap between service delivery and service perception. Although various services are provided to veterans, weak media engagement and insufficient cultural communication have led segments of the public to interpret these services as forms of discrimination. Policymaking has therefore insufficiently accounted for feedback from the broader social environment.

The third barrier is structural rigidity and outdated regulations. Many existing rules were designed decades ago and are poorly aligned with the needs of the new generation of veterans or with current economic conditions.

The fourth bottleneck is the absence of systematic monitoring of organizational behavior. Even well-designed financial benefits may lose their positive impact when veterans encounter disrespectful treatment or bureaucratic indifference within administrative offices.

The fifth bottleneck relates to inter-agency misalignment. The relative isolation of the Veterans Foundation from other governmental and social institutions limits opportunities for effective collaboration and synergy and sometimes results in parallel policies that inadvertently harm the social image of veterans.

Taken together, these five bottlenecks represent the underlying structural roots of many inefficiencies in the current system. Addressing them is therefore essential for any meaningful policy intervention aimed at strengthening veterans' dignity and social status (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3-4. Paradigmatic Shifts in the New Generation

The findings also reveal important generational changes in the experience of dignity among veterans. Specialized interviews with veterans and the families of martyrs from the 12-Day War and the events of December 2025 suggest the emergence of three paradigmatic shifts affecting the formation of dignity in the new generation.

The first shift involves a transition from hard warfare to cognitive–social warfare. Unlike veterans of the Sacred Defense, who operated within a relatively unified social environment, the new generation faces conditions characterized by social polarization and intense virtual debate. Consequently, their perceived self-esteem depends less on formal governmental recognition and more on societal attitudes and environmental pressures.

The second shift concerns the phenomenon of digital character assassination. Participants described the growing impact of organized criticism and labeling on social media platforms, which has introduced a new variable referred to as psychological and status security in cyberspace. In this context, families of recent martyrs often experience distress not primarily due to economic hardship but because of negative campaigns and stigmatization in digital environments.

The third transformation relates to changes in motivation patterns under ambiguous conditions. Whereas the first generation of veterans largely acted based on collective duty and ideological commitment, the new generation

often enters the field through individual awareness and conscious personal choice. As a result, traditional motivational mechanisms are less effective, and policies must increasingly focus on identity-building incentives tailored to the experiences and expectations of this generation.

Taken together, these shifts indicate that traditional frameworks for promoting veterans' dignity may no longer adequately address the realities faced by the new generation. A transition toward a revised strategic framework for managing and enhancing their social status, therefore, appears necessary.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to identify the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans within contemporary society. The findings demonstrate that veterans' dignity is neither a purely individual phenomenon nor solely the result of institutional support; rather, it emerges from the dynamic interaction of individual–spiritual, social, and structural–managerial factors. These dimensions jointly contribute to both the preservation and erosion of veterans' self-esteem and perceived social worth.

At the individual and attitudinal level, concepts such as bargaining with God, contentment and avoidance of ego, divine versus worldly valuation, and the preference for smart and empowering facilities—as opposed to charity-based services—were identified as key internal sources of dignity and resilience. These findings suggest that dignity is deeply rooted in meaning-making processes through which veterans interpret their sacrifices and life conditions. In particular, bargaining with God functions as a psychological and spiritual mechanism that enables veterans to endure economic hardship and social pressure without experiencing a collapse of self-esteem.

This interpretation is consistent with the Qur'anic perspective, which conceptualizes dignity as fundamentally linked to divine approval rather than material status. The verse “All dignity belongs to God” emphasizes that human honor derives from faith, righteous action, and moral integrity, while material resources merely function as secondary instruments (Mohammadalinezhad Omran & Kamalvand, 2016). Within this framework, contentment operates as a moderating variable that recalibrates expectations toward institutional support and prevents self-worth from becoming exclusively dependent on economic indicators. This finding aligns with Valvano et al. (2013), who demonstrated that meaning-making processes play a decisive role in the psychological adjustment of veterans. When

suffering and loss are integrated into a coherent horizon of meaning, dignity and resilience are more likely to be sustained.

The tension between divine valuation and worldly valuation further reinforces this interpretation. William James (2006) argued that religious faith generates an extraordinary inner force that enhances individuals' capacity to cope with life's hardships. Empirical studies have similarly shown that religiosity—through meaning, hope, belonging, and spiritual support—reduces vulnerability to stress and enhances self-esteem (Habibvand, 2008; Javanbakht et al., 2010; Rahimi, 2001). From this perspective, veterans' preference for empowering rather than charity-based facilities reflects a desire for recognition and respect consistent with the self-image of a morally valued and dignified individual. Charity-oriented support, by contrast, risks reinforcing dependency and undermining dignity.

At the social level, the findings highlight social labeling and weak media portrayal as major sources of diminished social dignity. Negative societal perceptions regarding veterans' access to benefits, combined with media narratives that depict them primarily as passive victims or objects of pity, conflict with veterans' lived identities as capable and socially engaged individuals. These findings strongly resonate with Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition, which conceptualizes dignity as dependent on social acknowledgment at emotional, legal, and social levels. When veterans are denied recognition as competent and morally worthy subjects, dignity is undermined both normatively and emotionally.

Family and social networks further shape this process in ambivalent ways. While supportive family relationships can foster psychological security and self-expression (Mohammadi, 2004), unrealistic expectations or instrumental views of quotas and privileges may generate pressure and erode self-esteem. Additionally, post-war isolation reflects broader dynamics of social exclusion that are well explained by Sociometer Theory. According to Leary and Baumeister (2000), self-esteem functions as an internal gauge of social acceptance, and experiences of rejection—whether through neglect, exclusion, or ostracism—lead to a decline in self-worth (Leary et al., 1995; Williams, 2007). The veterans' narratives in this study provide empirical support for this theoretical linkage.

At the structural and managerial level, the findings identify counterproductive quota effects, management gaps, and exhausting bureaucracy as the most significant institutional barriers to dignity. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, quota-based mechanisms intended to compensate veterans may paradoxically reinforce stigmatizing labels that

signal incapacity rather than merit. Instead of enhancing self-esteem, such policies may therefore contribute to social devaluation.

The management gap reflects a disconnect between policymakers and veterans' lived realities. When decision-makers lack experiential understanding of veterans' everyday struggles, policies are more likely to be misaligned with actual needs. Furthermore, exhausting bureaucratic procedures for verifying veteran status or accessing medical services, combined with economic pressures that prioritize livelihood over dignity, reinforce a perception of institutional indifference. These findings are consistent with Ghamari-Tabrizi's (n.d.) analysis, which highlights poverty, marginalization, and inadequate care as persistent post-war challenges for Iranian veterans.

A central insight of this study is the discrepancy between official discourse and lived experience. Although veterans are frequently portrayed in official rhetoric as possessing the highest levels of dignity and moral status, everyday encounters with bureaucracy, social labeling, and economic hardship convey a contradictory message. Drawing on Honneth's (1995) framework, this gap can be interpreted as a form of institutional disrespect, whereby normative promises remain unfulfilled in practice, gradually eroding veterans' sense of honor and recognition.

Based on these findings, several policy implications emerge. First, quota- and support-based mechanisms should be redesigned. Rather than relying solely on traditional numerical quota systems, future initiatives may benefit from more flexible approaches—such as invisible supportive credits—that better align support with veterans' individualized needs while avoiding stigmatizing labels. Second, governments and relevant media stakeholders should develop media empowerment initiatives for veterans' families. Through media literacy training and the creation of virtual activism networks, families may strengthen their social positioning and create structured spaces for mutual support. Third, the administrative processes of the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs require reengineering. Greater decentralization, process smartification, and stronger oversight of organizational behavior may help ensure that veterans' dignity is respected across all levels of service delivery.

Future research should also expand upon the present findings. One important direction is the design and validation of a comprehensive measurement scale for veterans' dignity, incorporating the fifteen dignity-related concepts identified in this study. Additionally, intergenerational comparative research could examine how motivational

patterns and dignity-related expectations vary across different cohorts of veterans. Another promising line of inquiry concerns the psychosocial consequences of the visibility trap, particularly by comparing the effects of visibility-based policies with invisible or traditional support mechanisms in shaping veterans' perceptions of dignity.

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. The research was conducted primarily in Tehran, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future studies employing mixed methods across multiple provinces could strengthen the external validity of the model. Moreover, greater attention should be given to veterans living in deprived or remote areas, whose experiences may differ significantly from those represented in this study. Developing targeted strategies for identifying and supporting these groups—particularly among martyrs' families, liberated prisoners, and disabled veterans—could improve the effectiveness of dignity-enhancement policies.

Using a grounded theory approach, this study ultimately demonstrates that veterans' dignity and honor emerge from complex interactions among individual spiritual resources, social recognition processes, and structural–organizational conditions. Fifteen core concepts were identified and organized into four principal dimensions: influencing factors, contextual variables, inhibiting factors, and consequences. The analysis further revealed five strategic bottlenecks in the current system, including the dominance of a custodianship approach rather than empowerment, a perceptual gap between service provision and veterans' perceptions of those services, the structural rigidity of administrative processes, insufficient supervision of organizational behavior, and interinstitutional inconsistencies. Moreover, three paradigm shifts among the new generation of veterans indicate that traditional dignity-enhancement frameworks may no longer adequately respond to evolving expectations.

Overall, the results highlight the need to move beyond a purely supportive model toward a systemic resilient model that integrates empowerment, recognition, and institutional responsiveness. Achieving this transformation requires a comprehensive reorientation in policymaking, management practices, and future research agendas so that the symbolic recognition of veterans is meaningfully translated into lived dignity within society.

References

1. Ahmadi, K., & Yarmohammadian, A. (2019). The effectiveness of resilience training on quality of life and mental health of veterans' spouses. *Military Psychology Quarterly*, 10(38), 145–162. (in Persian)
2. Bakhshayesh, A. (2011). Forgiveness and its relationship with reliance on God, self-esteem, and academic achievement in students. *Journal of Psychology and Religion*, 4(2), 79–98.
3. Baumeister, R. F., Campbell, J. D., Krueger, J. I., & Vohs, K. D. (2003). Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles? *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4(1), 1–44.
4. Bonyad Shahid va Omur-e Isargaran [Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs]. (2020). *Comprehensive law for services to veterans*. Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Department. (in Persian)
5. Carnegie, D. (2006). *Ritual life: How to reduce anxiety and start peaceful living* (S. Ardekani, Trans., 2nd ed., p. 31). Badreghe Javidan. (Original work published not specified)
6. Danaeefard, H., & Emami, S. M. (2007). Strategies of qualitative research: A reflection on grounded theory. *Strategic Management Thought*, 1(2), 69–98. (in Persian)
7. Dehkhoda, A. A. (1998). *Dehkhoda dictionary*. University of Tehran. (in Persian)
8. DeVellis, R. F. (2017). *Scale development: Theory and applications* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
9. Drapalski, A. L., ... et al. (2008). Self-esteem and posttraumatic stress disorder in veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 21(6), 537–540.
10. Fakouri, A., Pilevarzadeh, M., Shamsi, A., & Ghaderi, M. (2015). Relationship between religious beliefs and self-esteem in students. *Zanco Journal of Medical Sciences*, Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences. (in Persian)
11. Farkhondeh Fal, M., & Nejat, P. (2022). Effect of social rejection on explicit and implicit state self-esteem and moderating role of trait self-esteem. *Social Cognition*, 11(1). (in Persian)
12. Ghamari-Tabrizi, B. (n.d.). *From tickets to paradise to coupons for social security: The sacred and the mundane in the tales of Iranian veterans of the Iraq War*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
13. Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine.

14. Habibvand, A. M. (2008). The relationship between religious orientation, mental disorders, and academic achievement. *Journal of Psychology and Religion*, 3, 79–93.
15. Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Polity Press.
16. Javanbakht, M., Ziaee, A., Homam, M., & Rahnama, A. (2010). Effect of Ramadan fasting on self-esteem and mental health of students. *Journal of Fundamental Mental Health*, 11(4), 266–273.
17. Kant, I. (1785). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*.
18. Leary, M. R. (2012). Sociometer theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 151–159). Sage Publications.
19. Leary, M. R., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). The nature and function of self-esteem: Sociometer theory. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 32, pp. 1–62). Academic Press.
20. Leary, M. R., Tambor, E. S., Terdal, S. K., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68(3), 518–530.
21. Mann, M., Hosman, C. M. H., Schaalma, H. P., & de Vries, N. K. (2004). Self-esteem in a broad-spectrum approach for mental health promotion. *Health Education Research*, 19(4), 357–372.
22. Meadows, D. H., & Wright, D. (2008). *Thinking in systems: A primer*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
23. Mehrabi, A., Khaneifar, H., Amiri, A. N., Zarei Matin, H., & Jandaghi, G. (2011). Introducing grounded theory methodology for Islamic research. *Organizational Culture Management Journal*, 9(23), 5–30. (in Persian)
24. Mesbah Yazdi, M. T. (2009). *Society and history from the Quran's perspective*. Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute. (in Persian)
25. Mohammadi, H. (2004). Self-esteem and the role of family in it. *Basirat*, Islamic Azad University, 11(32–33). (in Persian)
26. Mohammadi Nejad Emran, R., & Kamalvand, P. (2016). Comparative conceptualization of self-esteem in Quran and humanistic psychology. *Culture of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 7(27). (in Persian)
27. Norouzi, K., Bagheri Kani, M. A., Azadi Ahmadabadi, J., & Norouzi, M. (2012). Enhancing dynamic capabilities in management faculties of the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Management Journal at Islamic University*, 1(3), 423–446. (in Persian)

28. Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Harvard University Press.
29. Orth, U., & Robins, R. W. (2014). The development of self-esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(5), 381–387.
30. Pedlar, D. J. (2019). *Veterans' transition to civilian life*. Veterans Affairs Canada.
31. Rajabi, G., Moazen, S., & Sharifi, K. (2020). Investigating challenges faced by martyr and veteran families: A qualitative study. *Journal of Social Health*, 7(4), 431–442. (in Persian)
32. Razini, R., & Azizi, M. (2015). Designing a decision-making model with an Islamic approach. *Islamic Management Scientific-Research Quarterly*, 23(4), 73–100. (in Persian)
33. Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton University Press.
34. Safari, J. (2010). Effect of the role of culture of self-sacrifice and martyrdom on spiritual improvement of Basij members. *Hesoon Journal*, (27). (in Persian)
35. Sayer, A. (2011). *Why things matter to people: Social science, values and ethical life*. Cambridge University Press.
36. Sendas, S., Maia, Â., & Fernandes, E. (2008). Between horror, mission and epic: Modalities of meaning-making of participation in the Portuguese Colonial War. *Análise Psicológica*, 26(4), 601–613.
37. Shahnourozi, M., Esmaeili, R., Parastgari, S., & Emamjamézadeh, S. (2017). Effective factors on enhancing promotion of culture of self-sacrifice and martyrdom. *Cultural Management*, 11(35–36), 53–70. (in Persian)
38. Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage.
39. Valvano, A. K., deRoon-Cassini, T. A., St. Aubin, E., Brasel, K. J., & Hastings, J. E. (2013). Meaning-making appraisals relevant to adjustment for veterans with spinal cord injury. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(5), 483–496.
40. Williams, K. D. (2007). Ostracism. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 425–452.
41. Yavand Abbasi, G. (2006). Re-recognition of promoting culture of self-sacrifice and martyrdom. *Narrative of Sacrifice Quarterly*, ISNA News Agency. (in Persian)