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**Young middle class Iranians' perspectives upon the lifted sanctions and its effects upon their private economies**

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- A qualitative research of their perceptions and experiences from Tehran and Karaj.

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to investigate existing perceptions upon the sanctions relief amongst middle class Iranian youths between the ages of 25 to 30, living in Karaj and Tehran. The thesis also examines how the economic sanctions have affected their private economies in the post-sanctions era to fill the research gap within the development research field. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to acquire data from ten youths to fulfil the research aim.

The primary data were analysed through a conventional content analysis and afterwards discussed in relation to previously published literature, including the life course perspective, which predominantly justified the key finding.

The primary data showed that six of ten youths had positive viewpoints on the sanctions relief and embraced the implemented deal. Two of ten youths were more critical and additional two youths had ambivalent perceptions on the sanction relief. Iranian youths' perceptions can thereby be concluded as diverse where a majority viewed the sanction relief as a positive change and a small minority that either had negative or ambivalent outlooks. The primary data also demonstrated that nine of the ten youths were financially unaffected and only one youth had experienced a financial gain by the sanctions relief in the post-sanctions era.

**Keywords:** Experiences, Economic Sanctions, Iran, Private economy, Youth, Perceptions

**Wordcount:** 16300 words.

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## **Country profile: The Islamic Republic of Iran**

The Islamic Republic of Iran, also referred to as Iran, was historically noted as Persia prior to the Islamic revolution in 1979. The country is located in the Middle East region and has an estimated population of 75 million people (2016).

The country's capital city is named Tehran and the official language is Farsi, also known as Persian. Iran's official religion is Shia Islam and has been ruled by President Hassan Rouhani since June 2013 (BBC, 2016).

Iran has a predicted Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 406.3 USD billion and is thereby ranked as the second strongest economy in the MENA region behind Saudi Arabia. The country's economic assets are based on natural gas and oil reserves, agriculture and service sector in addition to an enormous hydrocarbon sector. The governments have, despite their strong economic position in the MENA region, suffered from economic isolation during several years due to international imposed sanctions. It has restricted their access to business opportunities and from establishing a strong economic position within the international arena. The sanctions were however lifted in the beginning of 2016 and allowed the Iranian government to re-enter the international economic arena. This provided gave them access to the economic market after nearly four decades of economic isolation (Worldbank, 2016)

## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

**EU** The European Union

**IAEA** The International Atomic Energy Agency

**JCPOA** Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

**The MENA** region Middle East and North Africa

**UK** United Kingdom

**UN** United Nations

**UNSC** United Nation Security Council

**U.S.** United States of America

# Map of the Islamic Republic of Iran



(United Nations, 2004).

## 1 Introduction

Iran's involvement in nuclear and uranium enrichment programs, including terror activities, in the past decades were considered as threatening by various actors within the international arena. This resulted in a common decision to punish Iran through imposed economic sanctions. The U.S. imposed the first round of sanctions in 1979, followed by numerous additional rounds of sanctions by other nations, EU and UN in the approached years (Samore, 2015 p.3-6). U.S. current Present Barack Obama once commented about the imposed sanctions and said: *"this resolution will put in place the toughest sanctions ever faced by the Iranian government ... It sends an unmistakable message about the international community's commitment to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons."* (Reuters, 2010). Faced with the effects of the economic sanctions, which appear to have had different negative impacts on the country over for quite some time, the Iranian government joined on July 14 2015 the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The action plan offered sanctions relief in return for reducing nuclear and uranium enrichment programs. This entailed a chance for Iran to become a part of the international economic arena through access to various opportunities that previously has been prohibited due to the imposed sanctions. In the beginning of January 2016 Iran finalized the last steps of the agreement and the sanctions were relieved on 16 January 2016 as a completion of their commitment (Worldbank, 2016). Present Barack Obama said: *"we've achieved this historic progress through diplomacy, without resorting to another war in the Middle East."* The reached agreement was also considered a major milestone for the Iranian government that once again could access various economic and political benefits. Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani claimed: *"the agreement is a tool for the progress, growth and development of the country, as well as the security and stability of the region."* (Melvin, Martinez and Hume, 2016). The sanctions relief means a new chapter for Iran that for a long time, have experienced various negative impacts of the imposed sanctions.

### **1.1 Historical background of Iranian sanctions**

For many nations or leading international institutions, economic sanctions have from a historical aspect been applied as a tool to exert economic pressure on a targeted country to change a specific principle of action or a particular behaviour. There are numerous forms of sanctions, however economic sanctions aim to limit a targeted country from accessing financial exchanges, including trade opportunities, whose effect is to lessen economic productivity within a country. This results in economic deprivation, which consequently affects ordinary people negatively. Imposed sanctions can also restrict a government's political opportunities through isolation and can furthermore create negative perception of the targeted country within the international arena. It can additionally lead to dissatisfaction amongst the citizens towards the ruling government, which in the long-term can cause instability within the country. This scenario can especially occur in countries where the population has been seriously affected by the economic pressure emerged from the imposed sanctions (Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2015, p. 118, 126, 132).

Economics and politics have been deeply connected in Iran. Shifts in the politics have led to various changes in the economic sphere. The United States (U.S.) imposed the first economic sanctions on Iran in 1979 due to the occupation of U.S. Embassy in Tehran where several Iranian students held a number of American diplomats hostage in November 1979. The U.S. froze an estimation of between US\$10 to US\$15 billion that belonged to Iran and restricted their oil exports as a result of this incident. Other Western countries followed United State's steps under the pressure of them and decreased and eventually stopped their investment in Iran. They furthermore stopped exports and imports of various natural resources at the same time.

During that time, Iran was already under political instability due to the Islamic revolution that took place within the same year, including economic instability that were caused by access to limited import and export recourses, a collapsed banking system, and a large gap of financial assets that were transferred abroad. The War between Iraq and Iran that begun in September 1980 and continued to 1988, created more economic instability, which worsened the economic situation as well as resulted in social issues for the population. Additional economic pressure occurred between the years 1980 and 1982 when the country faced a debt crisis as a consequence of the domestic and internal banks' decision to reduced amount of credit to the public and various businesses (Curtis and Hooglund, 2008, p. 149-150).

U.S. imposed additional economic sanctions on Iran in January 1984 as a result of Iran's involvement in the bombing of an American Marine base in Lebanon where they also were labelled as a state in support of terrorism activities. U.S. restricted their foreign aid, banned transfers of weapons and placed further limitations on exports of various products to Iran. The war with Iraq entailed also suspicions on involvement of nuclear weapons and made other nations concerned, which as an effects lead to more economic sanctions by the U.S. in 1995. This round of sanctions prohibited foreign business from trading with Iran in order to create extra pressure on them and restrict any further evolvement of business opportunities (Laub, 2015).

In 1996 “The *Iran and Libya Sanctions Act*” were U.S. signed and consisted of a law that allowed U.S. to give financial penalties to international companies, which invested in Iran's or Libya energy sectors (over certain percentage) in the approaching years. The adopted law aimed to establish a stronger collaboration between the international countries and furthermore pressure Iran from developing nuclear weapons (Samore, 2015, p. 4).

Several nations were also concerned by the progress of uranium enrichment in Iran, which resulted in additional sanctions by the European Union (EU), United Nation (UN) and U.S. in the beginning of 2000s. At this point, Iran was banned from accessing nuclear-related resources and further economic restrictions were placed on them as an attempt to end their involvement with nuclear weapons and uranium-enrichment programs (Laub, 2015).

In 2003, France, Germany and United Kingdom (UK) began the first round of negotiations with Iran after it was revealed that they have been producing a facility for uranium enrichment. The negotiations attempted to reach some form of agreement but failed to undergo any changes after that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected as Iran's president in 2005. The following year (in 2006) Iran terminated their involvement in the uranium conversion and was called for negotiations with the UN Security Council (UNSC) where they were found to be guilty for not following their obligations commitments. This was once again an unsuccessful attempt to reach an agreement.

The UNSC placed as a result, more sanctions on Iran, which carried on until 2010 due to their engagement in the ballistic missile and nuclear programs. EU followed UNSC's step and placed in the same round, a ban on Iranian oil and gas sector. In 2012, the ban transformed into a full ban on the whole oil sector. The EU froze also all of Iran's central bank financial assets and prevented them from accessing the international financial system. EU and UN efforts proceeded to enforce more sanctions on additional energy and financial sectors as well as placed sanctions on international companies that engaged in business with Iran until June 2013 (Samore, 2015, p.6, 7-8, 10-11).

In November 2013, Iran gathered with some of the UNSC' member countries China, France, Germany, Russia, UK, and U.S. to negotiate for an agreement. This resulted in Joint Plan of Action (JPA) that would give Iran sanctions relief, including access to their frozen assets in return for reducing uranium enrichment with full transparency in particular areas where uranium enrichment were produced in Iran. The IAEA were in charge of monitoring each step of the

process. Iran concluded the last step of the agreement and IAEA approved their commitment to the agreement, which resulted in sanction relief by the various previously involved institutions and U.S. (Laub, 2015).

The sanctions relief means that Iranian government has regained the frozen assets and furthermore can access the financial banking system, the oil market, and various sectors that previously have been excluded from the international arena. The government can furthermore access global economic market through import, export and trade with various nations and corporates, which have previously been prohibited. This leads into more financial circulation within the country, and moreover allows them to become an integrated part of the International economic arena (Wroughton and Torbati, 2016).

When it comes to impacts of sanctions on the population, evidence-based information has shown that ordinary Iranians has suffered severely from the effects derived from the imposed sanctions in various ways through the years. Youth, women, seniors, including individuals from lower class backgrounds were worst hit (Moret 2015, p.121). For example, the effects of the sanctions resulted in inflation that drive the price up for housing, education, nutrition, including medicine, which made it hard for Iranians to keep up with the raised prices and consequently pressured their economies.

The prices for public services, such as medical treatments, school fees, gas and electricity increased also during the era of imposed sanctions, which lead to additional economic pressure for them (UNHCR, 2013, p.1) The various rounds of bans in Iran has also a negative impact upon the population, e.g. limited import of medicines and medical equipment for treating sick patients from various illnesses. This negatively affected the wellbeing of individuals that dealt with diabetes, cancer, HIV/Aids and a number of other diseases (Moret 2015, p.126). The sanctions have also affected the labor market through creation of fewer within various sectors, which consequently increased unemployment rate, which placed additional economic pressure on ordinary Iranians' private economies (Nichols and Charbonneau 2012).

**Table form 1. Overview of historical events related to the sanctions**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Historical events</b>  |
|-------------|---|
| 1979        | Islamic Revolution, including the first round of sanctions on Iran by the U.S., followed by other nations within the international arena.   |
| 1980-1988   | Iraq-Iran War   |
| 1980        | Debt crisis in Iran   |
| 1984        | Second wave of imposed sanctions, also imposed by U.S.  |
| 1995        | Third round of imposed sanctions due to suspicions of nuclear weapons   |
| 1996        | The Iran and Libya Sanctions Act is signed and enforced as a law to put additional pressure on Iran.  |
| Early 2000s | Additional sanctions on Iran by UN, EU, including the U.S. because of uranium enrichment program  |
| 2003        | First round of negotiation with France, Germany and the UK and Iran   |
| 2005        | Mahmoud Ahmadinejad becomes elected as Iran's president and the negotiations fails to evolve.   |
| 2006        | Iran stops their participations of the uranium conversion and is consequently found guilty for not following their commitments.   |
| 2006-2010   | Additional sanctions are imposed on Iran by UNSC and EU due to their involvement in the ballistic missile and nuclear programs  |
| 2012-213    | A full oil ban placed on Iran and Iran's central bank financial assets were frozen, which banned them from the international financial system. EU and UN places more bans on Iran's energy and financial sectors, including on companies that trade with Iran |
| 2013        | Some of UNSC' member countries initiate negotiation with Iran for an agreement, which result in Joint Plan of Action (JPA)  |
| 2016        | Iran finalised their commitment under the verification of IAEA and the sanc are relived as a result.  |

Note: For details see text.

## **1.2 Research problem**

Most found previous research has dealt with the impacts of the imposed sanctions on the Iranian government, the population and the economy from a historical perspective. The information was also from a one-sided lens that briefly discussed how the population were affected from a distanced position, rather than from their own perspectives in order to demonstrate a deeper insight into their realities. The previous research highlighted furthermore some predications of future changes in relation to the Iranian economy, but did not go deep into the incorporate youths' roles.

Few studies within the scientific research identified what the sanctions relief means for Iranian youths or gave a deeper insight into how the sanctions relief has affected their private economies during the post-sanctions era. This type of knowledge is important because it intends to contribute with relevant and recent in-depth knowledge on a number of Iranian youths' viewpoints as well as experiences, based up own their own words. This knowledge contribution can fulfil a research gap and potentially be used to build on further research with significance to the same research topic.

## **1.3 Aim and Research Questions**

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how young Iranians perceive the sanctions relief and if it has had any effects upon their private economies during the post-sanctions era. Specifically, the thesis will focus on middle class Iranians between the ages of 25 to 30 living in the cities Karaj and Tehran. To fulfill the aim of the thesis, the following research questions will be addressed:

- What perceptions exist on the lifted sanctions amongst young Iranians from middle class backgrounds in the Iranian cities of Karaj and Tehran?
- In what ways (if any) have the lifted economic sanctions affected young, middle class Iranians' private economies in Karaj and Tehran?

#### **1.4 Delimitation of the research**

This research concentrates upon ten youths' perceptions of the sanctions relief, including their experiences of how the sanctions relief has affected their private economies during the post-sanctions era. The key concept of this research is therefore restricted to the viewpoints and experiences of a particular ethnic group (Iranians) and not to any other ethnic minority group or religious group.

The research focus furthermore on youths from middle class backgrounds and does not deal with youths from lower and upper class backgrounds. It would have been interesting to have a more diverse class background that could represent youths from different societal classes but were in this case hard to find, which can be considered as another limitation. I chose therefore to emphasize youths from middle class backgrounds since they represented a larger group of the Iranian society and were easier to find compared to youths from other socioeconomic backgrounds.

#### **1.5 Disposition**

The approaching chapter (section two) includes a literature analysis that is based upon a review of several authors' literary contribution with relevance to this research topic. It covers furthermore the limits and strengths of their literature and presents afterwards the selected theoretical framework (life course perspective) in the third chapter. Chapter four provide an insight into the data collection process, adopted qualitative methodology, method choice and the selected data analysis technique. The chapter also addresses the sample group, including some ethical considerations that were acknowledged during the research process.

The fifth chapter present the gathered primary research that is based upon ten interview questions, which was responded by the selected respondents during the interview process. Chapter six includes a discussion of the previous research, including the life course perspective in relation to the key findings from the primary data. The final chapter (section seven) ends with a conclusion and recommendations for further research. The reference list together with an appendix will be found at the end of this research.

## **2 Literary Analysis**

This chapter discusses three perspectives from a economic brief, policy brief, report, and a book, which address: the effects of the imposed sanctions on Iranian citizens, impact of sanctions relief on Iranian citizens, and economic opportunities for Iran's youth in the post-sanctions era. This analysis will also explore some of the strengths and limitations observed in this literature.

### **2.1 Literature Review**

There is a limited amount of published literature that address the perspective of young middle class Iranians on the lifted sanctions, including its effect on their private economies in the post-sanctions era. This can be explained by the recent removal of the imposed sanctions, which has limited researchers abilities to publish any advanced studies over a short period of time. The political implications in the research also make it difficult for foreign researchers to gain access to commoner households due to the limited freedom of expression and speech in Iran that limit the collection of qualitative data. The found literature has however provided some valuable arguments that will be discussed next.

### **2.2 Impacts of imposed sanctions on Iranian citizens**

The impact of the imposed economic sanctions on the population of Iran has been acknowledged by all of the authors. According to Biersteker (2015) the purpose and function of the UN economic sanctions are to govern various actors such as countries, companies or particular individuals to prevent them from being deviant of social norms or committing illegal acts. Examples of deviating against social norms and illegal acts would be to access specific resources, financial capital or weapons, which can harm other actors. Often time's actors have economic sanctions imposed on them, which are referred to as "power signals".

These sanctions aim to isolate and ostracise targeted actors through economic penalties and restrictions of economic activities. As a result, there are negative economic and social impacts on the population. Social shaming occurs when other actors within the international arena associate the targeted actor with negative labels that destroy their public image.

Economic penalties along with social stigmas cause the targeted actor to experience psychological effects and economic challenges that eliminate their ability to develop (Biersteker, 2015, p. 165-166, 169-170). Salehi-Isfahani was in agreement to Biersteker about the negative effects that comes with the imposed sanctions and meant in the case of Iran that it has negatively affected the regime, government-linked corporates as well as prevented their economy from developing.

Salehi explains that the imposed sanctions have resulted in a worsened economic recession, which as a consequence has negatively affected the entire population. He continues that many Iranian youths between the ages of 15 to 29 were expected to face negative consequences through lack of employment opportunities, which placed them in a “Waithood” process, where they have to wait for better opportunities not knowing when they would come. Salehi-Isfahani referred mainly to job opportunities but also emphasized on marriage opportunities, including the opportunity for youths to move from their parents’ home and into their own living arrangements (Salehi-Isfahani, 2010, p. 1-2).

Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba gave less importance to the consequences of the economic sanctions on Iranian youths during the sanctions era. They concentrated on the economic analysis of Iran’s economic development in the sanctions era, followed by an economic analytical prognosis of post-sanctions effects upon the Iranian economy. The Iranian citizens and their economic situation were briefly acknowledged as negative in consonance with Salehi-Isfahani (Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, 2015 p. 2-5).

Devarajan and Mottaghi confirmed similarly to Salehi-Isfahani that the economic recession had negatively impacted the labor market, which in turn affected the population through fewer job opportunities. They meant that certain sectors have been more affected than others and explained that the most important sectors for job creations in Iran (the auto industry, construction sector, service sector, and oil sector) have been most negatively impacted during the era of imposed sanctions.

As a result of this impact, approximately 600,000-700,000 jobs were lost annually, which affected ordinary Iranians. Devarajan and Mottaghi expected the recession to reduce enormously in the post-sanctions era due to the incoming oil revenues, which were expected to benefit different work sectors and create more work opportunities in Iran (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015, p. 1-2, 10, 13).

Finally, most of the authors, except from Salehi-Isfahani highlighted other aspects with relevance to the imposed sanctions and attributed less importance to how Iranian youths have been affected by the sanctions in the sanctions era.

The citizens were mentioned on a few occasions but were not addressed as a significant part of the literature. This aspect would have been relevant to include in order to, provide a deeper understanding of how the imposed sanctions affected Iranian youths. However, Salehi-Isfahani gave more importance to this aspect and explained Iranians youths' role in the sanctions era in detail.

### **2.3 The impact of sanctions relief on Iranian citizens**

Whilst little appears to have been written about the sanctions relief impact on Iranian citizens in Biersteker and Salehi-Isfahani's literature, Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba argued that Iranian citizens could be positively affected by the regained financial assets that had been frozen overseas during the period of imposed sanctions due to the imposed sanctions.

Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba explain that the Iranian government would use the assets to create reforms through implementation of new economic policies as well as create more business opportunities to develop businesses and attract significant foreign investment into the economy. As an affect, this would lead to improved economic status for Iran and positively influence the citizens. They add: "*failing to take any of these steps would temper the benefit of a deal to Iran's economy and population.*" (Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, 2015, p. 1-4, 15). However, they did not go into great details to explain in what other ways it would benefit the population.

Devarajan and Mottaghi shared a similar view to Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba and mentioned that further reforms pertaining to economic policies would be needed in order to establish economic progress and business opportunities. With this, the Iranian economy and its citizens would find more benefit. They argued that the country's trade market would expand and lead to large volumes of exporting and importing, which potentially could attract more foreign investment to Iran due to the open trade market, as well as benefit other dimensions of the economy. It was also expected to have a positive effect upon the labor market through creation of more jobs, which potentially could result in higher salaries and more work opportunities for ordinary Iranians (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015, p. 1-2, 14, 16).

#### **2.4 Economic opportunities for youths in the post-sanctions era**

Biersteker and Salehi-Isfahani do not indicate a direct correlation between sanction relief and economic opportunities for Iranian youth in the post-sanctions era. Although, Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, Devarajan and Mottaghi demonstrate some correlation between economic opportunities and citizens through access to more work opportunities. Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, briefly incorporate citizens' perspective in relation to the economic growth that was expected to occur in the post-sanctions era.

They explained that the Iranian government would use the assets to create reforms that would develop the businesses context, implement new economic policies, invest within their own economy and establish more business opportunities to improve the economic status of the country. This can in turn improve the economic situation of ordinary Iranians. Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, added: *“failing to take any of these steps would temper the benefit of a deal to Iran's economy and population.”* However, youths' economic opportunities were not specified further any further (Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, 2015, p. 1-5, 15).

Devarajan and Mottaghi gave a more detailed overview on the citizens' economic opportunities in contrast to Dubowitz and Fixler, but did not precisely refer to "youths". Instead, they mentioned that the incoming oil revenues in the approaching years is expected to be invested in the domestic economy and create growth in the automobile sector, pharmaceuticals, construction, tourism, banking and communications, which create more jobs for Iranians (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015, p. 13).

Devarajan and Mottaghi also predicted an increased female participation in the labour market, including a wage increase as a part of the economic progress in the post-sanctions era and said: "*the economic windfall could likely cause real exchange rate appreciation, which could put pressure on agriculture and industry and encourage the service sector. This could be disruptive for men who have greater dependency on tradable sectors, while women have been finding better job matches in the service sector. This could likely lead to a surge in female labor force participation (LFP) as their job opportunities expand. This could also help raise incomes of many women with positive effects on household incomes across the board. It is also probable that the kinds of rewarding jobs being created by the economy's reconnection with global markets will require greater skills (e.g., proficiency in a foreign language and familiarity with recent technologies and professional and business practices). In this case, incomes of those in the upper deciles of the expenditure distribution will rise fast.*" (Devarajan and Mottaghi 2015, p. 14).

## **2.5 Reflections on the literature**

Biersteker' literary contribution has given a well-explained insight into the historical background of the UN sanctions and its affect upon various actors to contribute to a broader understanding of how they function. These aspects are important to be aware of in order to understand the implementation process for UN sanctions. On the other hand, Biersteker discussed the sanctions in more general terms and focused less upon the case of Iran, which can be considered as less contributing in relation to this research. Furthermore, the human aspect in relation to sanctions are mentioned briefly but there is generally limited information that goes deep into explaining the aspects in detail, which could also be considered as a disadvantage.

Salehi-Isfahani provided knowledge on the challenges that come with the sanctions, and how they affect Iranian youths, which has been hard to find but is relevant in order to understand the deeper challenges for them (Salehi-Isfahani, 2010, p. 1). The limitations are a lack of testimonies from Iranian youths, including other relevant details on the youths, backgrounds, geographical locations as well as the number of individuals that Salehi-Isfahani referred to. This would have given a more concrete understanding of their viewpoints and potentially could have been used for comparison purposes in relation to this research. Salehi-Isfahani was furthermore unclear about some applied terms; this resulted in some confusion during the reading and thereby can be considered as an additional limitation of his report. Finally, it was six years ago since the report was published (in 2010) which makes the information dated in regard to the political and economic changes that have occurred in recent years. It is therefore important to keep in mind that some information might be irrelevant to this research.

Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba's report was published recently in 2015 and provides a relevant and up to date perspective on the selected topic.

Their literary contribution provided a detailed overview of the lifted sanctions' effects upon Iran's economy, together with some concrete examples of activities that could be reformed by the government in order to obtain economic development. They have furthermore provided estimated future economic trends including an analysis of the expected economic effects on Iran's economy during the post-sanctions era (Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, 2015, p.10-11).

This is highly relevant to this research for it provides a glimpse of the future that can be discussed in relation to the selected respondents' private economies in the post-sanctions era. It has also has created a good understanding of what the changes could potentially lead to, which can be considered as a strength of the research due to the limited information that exists on these aspects

Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba on the other hand, did not explain the economic impacts on Iranian citizens in detail to provide a deeper insight into the "human" aspect in relation to the economic discussion. This aspect is important because the citizens are a significant part of the economy through consumption, investment and by serving the labor market for example. Another weakness is that it mainly includes analysis based upon speculation rather than evidence-based research.

Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba did not remain transparent during some parts of the report, which indicated they were presenting biased information, despite their claim to strive towards transparency. The following statement is one example of several in their research where they did not include evidence-based research:

*"the Iranian government might choose to spend more on supporting Iran's overseas military and terrorist activities, which would change the composition of growth domestically and could leave less for domestic projects."* (Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, 2015, p. 12, 15).

Devarajan and Mottaghi highlighted the situation of several aspects prior to the lifted sanctions, which gave a historical understanding of the context and showed that the authors held expertise in the selected area. They also explained the sanctions relief's economic effects upon a number of aspects in the post-sanctions era and incorporated the citizens' future economic opportunities. This is relevant to this research since it provides information that can potentially interplay the experiences of the selected respondents in this research. The information can also be used to discuss whether some of the economic assumptions and changes that were expected to take place in the post-sanctions era have affected the respondents.

One advantage of their research is that it was published in 2015, providing updated information, relevant to the relation of this research. Another strength of this research was that the information was thoroughly explained and was based on accurate data that furthermore included a clear academic language. At times, their research provided a brief explanation of the historical background of the imposed sanctions and did not explain the background factors of the imposed sanctions in detail. More in-depth information on the background would have contributed to a full overview of the context. A reader that for example, is unfamiliar or has poor knowledge on the topic might have difficulties grasping the topic due to the limited background information (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015, p. 2).

Devarajan and Mottaghi did not elaborate further on some of their arguments to help with the reader understanding their viewpoints. For example, they claimed that Iran's trade market would expand, but did not explain further on how this would occur (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015, p.1). The citizens' roles were not explained in detail and only mentioned briefly. To mention more detail such as the economic effects upon the citizens during the post-sanctions era, to identifying what importance they have for economic development in the post-sanctions era would and have been relevant in order to understand the authors' viewpoints.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This chapter introduces the selected theoretical framework and present a number of aspects that incorporate various examples in regard to the research questions posed in this study. The life course perspective is human development-oriented approach that emerged in the 1960s. It has resulted from a number of combined features that have their origins in social and psychological sciences together with influences from behavioural science, and biological science. The perspective is used in various disciplines and research purposes due to its ability to explain a life circle and development processes from a number of different lenses. Most of the lenses within the approach are based upon element that influences an individual's life from external factors. An individual can however control his/her own life (to a certain extent) through the choices that are made during the life-circle. The life circle can therefore be considered combined components of various influences that has derived from the environments, social interactions/connections, choices, and historical events that an individual has encountered during various time periods (Elder, 1995, p. 103-104). The perspective is adopted in this research to explain the youths' perception of the sanctions relief, including their experiences of how the sanctions relief has affected their private economies in the post-sanctions era, based upon the four lenses.

#### **3.1 Historical time and geographical location**

The first lens of the life course perspective explains individuals' life-circles through various influences that have derived from interactions with historical time periods and geographical locations as factors that have shaped their lives. "Historical time" refers to the events or conditions during historical time periods that have exposed them to various environments that provide them with different limitations and opportunities in their life. Geographical location refers to birthplaces, home environment or contexts that individuals have interacted as well as been influenced by in various ways. An individual's life-circle can therefore be perceived as a composition of influences from their interaction with historical time periods and various geographical locations (Elder, 1995, p. 107-108).

The perceptions on the sanctions relief amongst Iranian youths can for example, be explained by different events that have occurred during the era of imposed sanctions. It has affected their lives and in turn influenced their mind-sets. The youths' birthplaces or the environment they grow up in within Iran takes also significant roles in shaping their viewpoints. An individual who experienced financial stress by the impacts of the imposed sanctions in Iran can for example be influenced by this experience and thereby have a optimistic outlook on the sanctions relief since it potentially could improve his/her financial situation. He/she could also perceive the sanctions relief as a non-effective change due to various reasons and therefore be more pessimistic towards the implemented deal. The sanctions relief's impacts upon the youths' private economies can be explained in relation to various settings (refers to environments) that they have been exposed to in Iran together with influences from the period of imposed sanctions (refers to time period) (Elder, 1995, p. 107). These factors could either affect their current private economies, positively or negatively depending on the previous experiences that have been influenced by the two elements.

### **3.2 Timing of life**

The second aspect concentrates on how the timing of various combined aspects such as development process, environments, events, historical time periods together with social interactions/connections take part in shaping an individual's life in various ways. Hence, the life-circle can be analysed through this multidisciplinary lens that includes influences from various dimensions (Elder, 1995, p. 114). Similarly, the Iranian youths' perceptions on sanctions relief can be explained from the effects of various elements that they have experienced and encountered through the entire life-course. Their outlooks on the sanctions relief are linked to their own experience, which results in diverse perceptions on the sanctions relief. Positive or negative events, environments, historical times, social interaction, and transition process can therefore be used to explain the rationale behind their viewpoints.

The sanctions relief's impacts upon youths can be explained through social interaction with connections that either has affected or unaffected them by the sanctions relief. This in turn affects, their economic situation. It can also be explained through various events, experiences from historical time periods and transitions that have exposed them to different positions, including environments in Iran. This positively/negatively affect their private economies through influences that arise with the sanctions relief.

### **3.3 Linked lives and social ties to others**

This lens explains an individual's life-circle, based upon the influences from social interactions and social ties that occur with other individuals in the social world. The social interactions and connections with other individuals are important elements, since it can expose an individual to a particular incident that negatively or positively changes his/her life (Elder, 1995, p. 107, 112-113).

The principle of linked lives can in relation to this case, explain youths' perceptions of the sanctions relief, based upon influences from the social interactions with other individuals in their social spheres. This can change their viewpoints through the influences of other people's opinions. The social interactions between individuals can also expose an individual to an incident that entails better life opportunities. For example, an individual could through a meeting with another individual receive a job offer that entails a high salary, which leads to a change in the individual's private economy.

When it comes to the impacts of sanctions reliefs on Iranian youth's private economies, both social interaction/connection also plays important roles in influencing youths' economic status. An individual might for instance, work for a company, which has been positively affected by the sanction relief and as a result receive a salary raise or becomes promoted, which consequently can result in boosting their private economies. The youths' families or friends might also have experienced positive effects from the sanctions relief and as a result, affects the youths through financial support or access to more/better work opportunities that benefit their own economic situations.

Negative impacts from the sanctions relief can also affect their social connection in disadvantageous ways, which as a result affects their private economy negatively.

### **3.4 Human agency and personal control**

The aforementioned lenses have included various elements that have affected an individual from external factors. The lens of “human agency and personal control” focuses instead on explaining life-circle, based upon an individual’s own capabilities to make choices in life. The choices that have been taken in an early stage of an individual’s life are therefore considered as important factors that shape the life-circle. The choices that an individual is exposed to can however be affected by certain situations, incidents and dispositions (e.g. economic position or environments) that either tend to limit or expand their capabilities to make decisions (Elder, 1995, p.110-111).

The Iranian youths might during the sanctions era have taken various decisions that either has placed them in disadvantaged positions or lead them to better life options. This has as an effect influenced their perceptions of the sanctions relief and could for example, be positive or negative depending on their experiences that were affected by their life choices. This can also explain their current economic situation, based upon the choices they have made in the past. The sanctions relief can therefore not be the determining factor that improves their private economies but rather an influence that can affect them.

## **4. Methodology, methods and material**

This chapter begins by an introduction of the data collection process, followed by some reflection upon selected research methodology and method.

The chapter proceed with explaining the data analytical process, the selected sample group, including some ethical considerations that have been taken into account during the research process. Issues of reliability and validity together with the limitations of the research will also be incorporated in this chapter.

### **4.1 Data Collection process**

Primary and secondary qualitative data are two different types of evidence-based material that are gathered differently and include content of contrasting characteristics to serve research of various purposes. Qualitative primary data can be gathered directly by a researcher through face-to face interviews, telephone interviews, Skype interviews or by a collection of surveys, where respondents answers a set number of questions in questionnaire forms to provide first-hand in-depth information. Qualitative primary data can also be accumulated through fieldwork where a researcher, for example observes a particular group in a specific context during a specific time period to provide in-depth information about them (Yin, 2010, p. 129-131).

The qualitative secondary data is based upon data that already has been gathered by previous researchers and is available for use. Secondary data can for instance, include government-based information, political manifest, reports or other forms of pre-collected evidence that are applied to serve various research purposes (Ragin and Amoroso, 2010, p. 16, 28). This research includes primary data that has been gathered through semi-structured interviews and secondary data that is based on information from reference books, reports and previous research. Information that has derived from analytical prognoses, theoretical-based knowledge, including historical-based information has also been used in addition to other secondary data.

The validity and reliability are two important aspects that were taken into account during the research processes. Validity is an indication that demonstrates the level of valid information within in research. The level of validity can be controlled by another research that repeats the same research to archive the same results.

This can for example show measurements of the truthfulness and objectivity that has been adopted in research process. The possibility for a research to contain 100% valid information is difficult due to numerous impacts that can affect a research. A researcher should however aim to show a high level of valid inform in his/her research to contribute with data of high quality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, p. 105).

This can be hard in the case of interviews since the researcher's interpretation of the gathered primary data can be different to another researcher's data. These different results are difficult to measure due to differences in the interpretation process and can thereby be considered as a limitation of this research (Yin, 2010, p. 78-79). To increase the validity, I consciously tried to take an objective standpoint as far as possible to avoid subjective attachments that would manipulate the research or the respondents in any way (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, p.16).

Reliability refers to measurement that demonstrates consistent results that can be repeated a later time. Data of high reliability can be controlled by comparison with other validated measurements that include the same data type.

This was difficult to measure in this research case due to the limited information on the selected topic. It is also hard to control the primary data of this research since the respondents can change their viewpoints at a later stage and thereby responds differently. This lowers the level of reliability of this research as a result (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, p. 19, 21, 121).

As previously stated in this section, primary data collection can only be obtained when a researcher provides unique first-hand information through the use of various qualitative methods. This was advantageous in this research since it provided me with an opportunity to exclude insignificant content that came with interviews and selectively chose relevant information to contribute with valuable knowledge. Another advantage of the qualitative primary data collection is the flexibility to gather data in various ways through the use of different methods. This gave me in this case, a free choice to select the most suitable technique in relation to this research (Yin, 2010, p. 131, 152). The primary data collection process is on the other hand, time consuming and required in this case an enormous amount of effort since the data had to be gathered through intensive interviews, which took two weeks to accumulate (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 539)

The collection of the secondary data was retrieved from different government and institutions websites combined with use of published research and some suggested literature from their bibliographies. I used various search engines such as Lund University's own search engine, LUBsearch, Libris and Google scholar to find relevant material. Different sentences and key words such as "sanctions in Iran", "sanctions relief" and "impacts of sanctions relief" were used to access data that potentially could be used this research. The secondary data collection was overall less time consuming and to a certain extent easier to access since some of the data were already available. This was convenient and did not require the same work effort as when carrying out the primary data collection. A large amount of the available data concentrated however upon other aspects in relation to the sanctions and required therefore accumulation of primary data. Some of the secondary data were also subjective and provided with one-sided perspectives. I therefore ensured that the chosen material contained authentic, objective, reliable and updated information to increase the reliability of this research. This was quite time consuming and required some effort, which can be considered as two challenges that I experienced during secondary data collection.

## **4.2 Research Methodology**

The qualitative methodology offers a number of methods, which can be used to gather in-depth data to obtain this research aim. The approach also provides with an opportunity to acquire unique data, which can demonstrate an in-depth understanding for various viewpoints and experiences. The use of another research methodology (e.g. quantitative methodology) would fail to achieve the aim of this research due to its concentration upon number-based statistical data. It would also lack to contribute with detailed information about youths' viewpoints and experiences to show a deeper understanding of their realities (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 538).

When it comes to the strengths of the methodology, several elements of its applicability have been advantageous during this research process, which are worth mentioning. To begin with, the qualitative methodology is based upon data that is characterised by humans' personal experiences and standpoints. This has given an opportunity to capture a number of individuals' experiences and viewpoints on a deeper level, which has contributed to meaningful knowledge that can fulfil this research aim. In-depth knowledge can also provide with a detailed understanding of youths' viewpoints, including experiences and thereby can be considered as advantageous in relation to this research (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 538).

The qualitative methodology serves furthermore different research purposes, which is advantageous since it offers various alternatives to produce research that can cover broad academic fields. The methodology can for instance, be adopted to explain human's lives within various contexts, demonstrate human's outlooks and aspects, or to analyse the most important aspects of individuals' situational environment. The methodology could also be used to provide an understanding of a particular reality or to explain the development process of a certain concept (Yin, 2010, p. 6-8). The methodology was in this research applied to show in-depth correlation between different variables in relation to a particular concept.

The methodology seeks furthermore to produce meanings through interpretation of humans' communicative contributions, which made it possible to understand a number of youths' viewpoints and experiences through extraction of their own words (Yin, 2010, p. 93). This has resulted in useful information that can be applied to achieve the research aim.

On the other hand, qualitative research is more restrictive when it comes to generalizations due to its aim to contribute with in-depth data, rather than quantities (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 540). The sample group were not representative for all Iranian youths but shows instead a deeper insight into the selected group's realities. It would have been relevant to include a larger amount of youths to show a broader representation, but were undoable due to the limited time schedule, which thereby can be considered as a limitation of this research.

Another disadvantage is the enormous responsibility that comes with the qualitative research process and entails some challenges. For example, a respondent could give a vague or inconsistent response during the interview, which as a result leads to misunderstandings or wrong interpretations of the data (Stake, 2010, p.15). There were a few incidents during the interview process where the respondents spoke in abstract terms, which made it difficult to understand their motives. The respondents were therefore asked to be more specific in order avoid unclarities that could led to interpretation mistakes (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 539).

The close connection that occurs between the researcher and the respondents during the interview process could potentially affect the researcher's objective position, which can be viewed as an additional disadvantage. The respondents might share sensitive or illegal information that affects the researcher to a point where it is unavoidable for him/her to maintain an objective position.

This can consequently influence the research through subjectivity, biases or by emotional normativity. The researcher have also tendencies to influence the respondents through his/her viewpoints without being aware of it and as a result negatively affect the respondents, including the research (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 538-540). During the interviews I have been aware of these potential problems and tried to avoid them by being open-minded and taking distance from any opinions that create bias and influence the research to increase the validity.

Finally, the qualitative research process required in this case, collection, transcription and interpretation of large volumes of data, which was time-consuming. It needed also travel preparation, search for suitable participants, including coordination with the respondents and the field assistant. This took additional time from the research schedule and can thereby be considered as disadvantageous. The data was furthermore unavailable and needed therefore to be collected from another geographical location, which is cost-ineffective and thereby regarded as final disadvantage of the qualitative research processes (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 539-540).

### **4.3 Method**

The primary data of this research has been gathered through conduction of ten interviews. There are multiple ways in which an interview can be carried out, these include: structured, semi-structured or unstructured. An interview can also be carried out on one occasion or on multiple times as well as include open-ended or close-ended questions (Stake, 2010, p. 20, 95). Semi-structured interview with ten open-ended questions were performed in this case due to the given opportunity to freely structure and prepare the interview questions prior to the interview sessions. This was advantageous since it allowed me to carefully formulate relevant interview questions that could be asked during the interview to gain valuable information. The interview questions were part of an interview guide that were used to create a clear structure through the interviews and prevent the occurrence of research mistakes, which can be viewed as another advantage (Fink, 2000, p. 5).

Another reason behind the selection of semi-structured interviews was to give the respondents an opportunity to express themselves freely without being limited in their responses. I came in contact with the selected respondents through a family member, who volunteered as a field assistant to find suitable respondents for the interviews. Through her network of friends and acquaintances ten respondents were recruited via a purposive sampling to ensure that they could contribute with relevant information. The purposive sampling is used by a researcher to selectively choose respondents, based upon various set characteristics requirements that are expected to serve a particular research aim (Yin, 2010, p. 88, 133, 135).

The field assistant helped me with occasional translation during the interviews and shared some valuable advices. One of the given advices was to avoid public places such as cafes, libraries, parks or restaurants that potentially could be monitored by government authorities. I therefore chose to conduct all of the interviews in private settings due to the country's limited freedom of speech and expression.

The interviews with the five Karaj-based respondents were performed at the field assistant's private home in Karaj, while the remaining five Tehran-based participants were interviewed in my relative's home in Tehran. All of the interviews were conducted separately and took place on different occasions during two weeks. The majority of the respondents did not know each other, except from three respondents that were studying in the same university together. Each interview took approximately one and half-hour and the same interview questions were asked to all of the respondents. The interviews were performed in English but some of the respondents used phrases and words in Farsi during certain occasions, which later was translated into English.

The conduction of the interviews was overall fulfilling experience knowledge wise. However, there were some challenges during the interview process that are worth mentioning. It was for example, quite hard and time-consuming to find respondents that were suitable and willing to participate in this research. Another example was when one of the respondents became ill and gave notice on the same day, which was stressful due to the limited time schedule. This left me with two options, either to wait until the respondent felt better again or to find a new respondent that could replace the other participant. I decided to wait a couple of days and conducted interviews with the other respondents in the meantime, instead of spending time to find new potential candidates (Yin, 2010, p. 133).

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

The primary data of this research has been analysed through a conventional content analysis, which is a data analysis method that is used to analyse different forms of communication-based data into interpreted elements. These are used to extract valuable meanings to serve various research purposes (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Communicative-based data includes various forms of data sources that have derived from some form of communication. It can for example, refer to oral interaction in form of interviews, meetings, stories, or consist of written forms that includes books, newspapers, including journals. It can also refer to data that are based upon visual or auditory sources such as movies, podcasts and video-casts (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 404.) Conventional content analysis is to explain a phenomenon when previous literature or a theoretical framework is limited to fulfil a aim, as in this case where the previous literature generally missed to give a full understanding of the context (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1279).

When it comes to the analytical process of the analysis, the gathered data must first be transcribed prior to the analysis process. The transcription process gives the researcher an opportunity to filter out irrelevant information that derived from the qualitative data and focus upon data that provides valuable information, which is advantageous since it offers the researcher freedom to decide what to include and exclude from the gathered data. The transcription process was however time-consuming and required rigorous effort, which can be considered as a disadvantage with the use of the analysis (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, p. 282).

In this research, the transcription process began with some reflection upon the gathered data that were taped through an audio recorder. The interviews were transcribed within the same day as they were conducted in order to process the recent gathered information and not miss any important content that could be importance. I listened to each interview carefully a number of times and made several pauses to transcript the data into written form.

Relevant information from the respondents' replies was marked and irrelevant expressions such as formalities, laughter, pauses, repeats and unclear statements were excluded. The data was integrated with some notes that were taken under the interview sessions and included remarks about significance and irrelevant aspects that were expressed during the interview to speed up the transcript process. Once the transcription process was finalized, I proceeded with the conventional content analysis. The data was first observed a number of times to give an overall understanding of the material and later integrated with relevant concepts/ sentences/ words that were perceived to be significant for the research.

Some of the statements and words that were expressed in Farsi were translated into English and accompanied with the remaining data. The marked data was converted into units together with the notes and furthermore placed under various categories to create a more structured order of the content. This helped me to observe patterns and be able to draw correlations between the various categories, which can be considered as an advantage when using conventional content analysis. The categories were later structured into larger sub-themes and lastly, labelled to relevant names (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1279).

#### **4.5 The Sample group**

The selected respondents were informed in advance that a foreign researcher would carry out the interviews and that questions would touch upon topic that could be perceived as sensitive due to its correlation to a political decision. All respondents herein have agreed to the stated terms. In order to strengthen the respondents' and the field assistant's anonymity, I chose to replace all names with aliases that have been made up for the purpose of this research. Furthermore, the researcher has also refrained from providing any detailed information, which could give away respondents workplace or universities in order to further strengthen their anonymity.

The selected sample group included a group of men and women from the capital city of Iran, Tehran and a nearby located city named Karaj. Their ages range from 25 to 30. They were as previously mentioned selected by a purposive sampling that is based upon the criterions of age, geographical location, and class background. The two geographical locations were chosen to show a representation of various realities from different cities in Iran.

The idea behind the selected age group was to include respondents that could provide with useful information for the final findings. I believed this age group had the potential to provide with such contribution since it is common for individuals in that particular age to be in a transition period of obtaining an academic education or experiencing a career change. Both female and men were selected in order to acquire gender diversity within the sample group. There is a strong belief that gender diversity can contribute to a variety of experiences, based upon the female and man identity (Sytsma, 2006, p. 62). Both sexes was therefore chosen to have some sort of variation within the sample group

The reason behind the selection of the chosen class background was to show a representation of social class that represents a large portion of the Iranian population. All of the respondents came from middle-class backgrounds and were predominantly living in middle-class neighbourhoods, except from two who lived in upper-scale communities in Tehran. When it comes to the respondents' educational background, including current occupation, the majority of them had finished a post-secondary education, except from three students that were in a process of completing their academic studies. The other remaining respondents were full-time professionals at various businesses, companies or institutions, besides from one respondent who was unemployed.

The Tehran-based respondents included three men and two women. Three of them were three full-time law students and studied together in the same university but intended to graduate at different time period. One of the students was completing her final semester, while another two respondents were attending their third year of law school and intended to graduate in spring 2017.

The other two respondents had already finalized their post-secondary education and were full-time professionals. One of them hold a Bachelor' degree and a Master's degree in economics and was working as an accountant for a bank, while the other respondent graduated from dentistry school and worked as a dentist in a medical clinic.

The Karaj-based respondents consisted of three women and two men. All of them had already graduated and were working full-time. One of respondents holds a bachelor degree in business and marketing and owned a boutique that specialized in a variety of beauty/health products. Another respondent was working as an accountant and was also partner in a family owned residential construction business. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in economy. The third Karaj-based respondent had a business major and worked as a human resources manager in an electricity distribution company. The fourth respondent from Karaj graduated in 2015 with a bachelor degree in computer science and have since his graduation been unemployed. The final respondent studied nursing and worked as a nurse in a medical clinic.

**Table form 2. Overview of the respondents, ages, residence, educational background and occupation**

| <b>Respondents</b> | <b>Ages</b> | <b>City of Residence</b> | <b>Education background</b>                           | <b>Current occupation</b>   |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------------------|---|---|
| Respondent 1       | 25          | Tehran                   | Currently in law school.                              | Full-time student, completing her final semester.   |
| Respondent 2       | 25          | Tehran                   | Currently in law school.                              | Full-time student, completing his third year in law school and intends to graduate during spring 2017. He works also part-time in his father's Internet café. |
| Respondent 3       | 25          | Tehran                   | Currently in law school.                              | Full-time student, Completing his third year and plans to graduate in spring 2017. He works also as a part-time seller in an electronic store.                |
| Respondent 4       | 28          | Tehran                   | Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree in economics. | Accountant in a bank.   |
| Respondent 5       | 30          | Tehran                   | Post-secondary educational degree in dentistry.       | Dentist in a medical clinic.  |
| Respondent 6       | 30          | Karaj                    | Bachelor's in Business and Marketing.                 | Business owner of a boutique that offers a variety of beauty and health products.   |
| Respondent 7       | 29          | Karaj                    | Bachelor's degree in economy.                         | Accountant and partner in a family owned residential construction company.  |
| Respondent 8       | 30          | Karaj                    | Bachelor's degree in Business administration.         | Human resources manager at an electricity distribution company.   |
| Respondent 9       | 28          | Karaj                    | Bachelor's in computer science.                       | Unemployed.   |
| Respondent 10      | 30          | Karaj                    | Bachelor's in nursing.                                | Nurse in a medical clinic.  |

#### **4.6 Ethical considerations**

Ethical responsibility follows the researcher during the research process and refers to moral principles that have to be taken into account to contribute with scientific research of high quality. There are a number of ways of incorporating ethical considerations into a research process (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 537).

For example, the researcher is required to be clear about the research purpose and not deceive the respondents into any form of exploitation to act according moral principles (Rani and Sharma, 2012, p. 45-46). This gives as a result a trustworthy impression that can make the respondents to open up during the interviews.

The respondents were in this case warmly greeted and the interviews began with a casual conversation over a coffee to create a pleasant atmosphere where they could feel relaxed. This approach gave a trustworthy impression, which in turn made the respondents confidence to communicate freely without being hesitant.

Another example to take moral principles into account is by giving the respondents full attention during the interviews to prevent inconvenient situations for them. By carefully listen to them and observe abnormal changes in their body languages, behaviours and voices, I was able to capture uneasy situations.

Luckily there were no inconvenient incidents that occurred during the interviews.

An additional example is to protect the respondents by offering them confidentiality and anonymity (Flink, 2000, p. 10). All of the respondents choose in this case to be anonymous since the research included political implications.

This was considered as risky to discuss with a foreign researcher due to the limited freedom of expression and speech within the country. At last, upholding transparency is an additional ethical consideration that was taken into account to demonstrate openness and honesty (Rani and Sharma, 2012, p. 46).

I strived to maintain an objective standpoint to avoid biases that could affect the respondents and the research. I also took an objective stance during the secondary data collection by not reflecting upon the gathered data with any presumed views and furthermore included authentic and reliable material. This contributed with data of high quality and increased the reliability level of the research (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015, p. 537).

## **5 Results**

This chapter introduces the findings of the primary research that were gathered through qualitative semi-structured interviews with ten participating respondents and analysed through the use of a content analysis to provide with relevant data. The primary findings is categorized into a number of themes and presented according to the order of the interview questions. This creates a consecutive and clear structure for the reader. The interview questions can be found within the interview guide by the end of this research.

The respondents were asked about their financial situations in the sanction era and how imposed sanctions affected their private economies from a historical perspective. Questions about their expectations and perceptions of the sanctions relief were also asked during the interviews. The respondents were furthermore asked about whether they predicted more economic opportunities in the approaching five years and how they experienced the sanctions relief to affect their private economies in the post-sanctions era.

### **5.1 Effects of the sanction era on the private economies of the respondents**

The respondents' economic situations in the sanctions era, including impacts of the sanctions on their private economies, varied quite a lot within the sample group. Four out of ten respondents considered their economic situation as “stable” and “unaffected” by the imposed sanctions during the era of imposed sanctions. Three additional respondents described their economic situation as either “stable” or “decent” but pointed out that they have been affected by inflation and limited business opportunities as a result of the imposed sanctions. This has as a result, negatively affected their economic situation.

Respondents 1 meant that the imposed sanctions never affected her but knew people in her social circle that faced economic pressure by the imposed sanctions. She said that they had a hard time finding jobs and complained about reduced work hours, which lowered their income level and consequently negatively affected their private economy.

Respondent 3 described his economic situation as “decent” since he began to work in 2014 but struggled financially prior to that. In order to pay for the tuition fees for his law studies, he works part-time in an electronic store. He said that his family had initially supported him financially during the first year of university, but started to become concerned over their own financial situation due to the budget cuts at the company they worked for, which lead to lower salaries. The reduced incomes created economic instability for him and his family, which made him look for a job in order help them out to pay his tuition fees. He claimed also that everything has become more expensive in Iran and as a result challenging to have a good lifestyle, without worrying about money.

Respondent 7 is an accountant and partner in his family’s residential construction business. He explained his economic situation as quite good but yet affected by the inflation, which has increased the prices for building material and as a result made it less beneficial businesswise. He also said that people’s incomes are negatively affected, which makes it hard for them to buy his services. This has consequently, limited him from reinvesting and developing his company further due to the unstable market.

Respondent 4 has worked as an accountant in a Tehran-based bank and described her financial situation as stable since she graduated in 2013 but yet affected by a salary reduction in February 2014 due to the bank’s budget cuts. She said: *“less business deals, economic transitions and investments gives us less workload at the bank but I rather keep my job and have a lower salary, than becoming unemployed. I was also lucky to know someone at the bank that could help me to find a job that was related to my field of studies after graduation. I know many people that hold high academic degrees, but are unemployed because of limited job openings.”*

The three remaining respondents had a slightly different economic situations compared to the previously mentioned individuals and claimed that their economic status was negatively affected by the impacts of the imposed sanctions. Respondent 2 has worked part-time in his father's Internet cafe in parallel with his studies since 2010 and described his economic situation as challenging. He said that the imposed sanctions have led to limited business opportunities resulting in lower incomes. This in turn has affected his private economy and the economic status of ordinary Iranians overall.

Respondent 6, a Karaj-based business owner that specializes in selling health and beauty products explained her financial situation as unbalanced because of the inflation, which has resulted in increased prices for goods. She said: *“people's priorities are different; they rather use their money to pay rent and buy food than buying my products. I understand it completely, but has as a business owner been negatively affected. The imposed sanctions lead to in inflation, which have increased the price level and made it harder for me to sell the products. I buy the goods at relatively expensive prices and have to sell them for more expensive prices, which is difficult since people's incomes are restricted.”*

Respondent 9, an unemployed Karaj-residence explained that he has searched for jobs with relevance to his field of study since his graduation in 2015 but is still unemployed. He expressed a feeling of frustration over his economic situation and described it as: *“...really bad, I have searched for a job during a long time period but not managed to find anything that is relevant to my field of study. Several employers have called me for job interviews but none of them has hired me until now.”* He claimed furthermore that several of his friends were unemployed and also experienced the same challenge, which made it hard for them to become independent, earn their own incomes and move out of our families' homes.

## **5.2 Youths' expectations of the sanctions relief**

Most of the respondents (seven of ten) from both Karaj and Tehran had expectations upon the sanction relief and hoped for various improvements. Respondent 4 had high expectations and were hopeful that the government would create more job opportunities, find solutions to problems of prostitution, and reduce drug use and the poverty rate. She meant that these issues are based upon lack of economic opportunities and access to money and said: *“we have a high rate of drug use and addiction in Iran, which is related to lack of occupation and income that drives youths into addiction. The case of prostitution is similar; women are forced into prostitution at a young age because of lack of money to able to support themselves. We live in a Muslim country and these types of issues should not exist. The government should help the citizen instead of turning a blind eye to it.”*

According to respondent 6, the agreement is a necessary deal for Iran's economy since the country has been isolated for years and thereby should become a part of the international economic and trade platform in order to develop. She also said that the Iranian government now could show some sort of commitment towards the citizens by including them in their decision. *She stated: “we are a great country with a high percentage of highly educated people, valuable natural resources and the potential to grow stronger as a country. It is therefore important that we can show that to other countries.”*

The remaining three participants responded differently and had varied expectations upon the sanctions relief. One of them claimed to have an open-minded outlook upon the sanctions relief but did not have high expectations due to lack of trust for the government to create any opportunities for ordinary Iranians. The other two respondents were more pessimistic and had either low expectations or no expectations upon the sanctions relief because of the bureaucratic corruption and the regime's false attempt to create more jobs as well as helping ordinary Iranians to improve their economic situation.

Respondent 5 said: *“Iran is a class-based society and the people you associate with, defines your power position. My family are not governmental supports but pretend to be in some contexts, to not be excluded from some advantages. The lifted sanctions are beneficial for government representatives to gain more economic power and dominate the bureaucracy. Committed government supporters are also the winners since they benefit through to higher salaries and positions within governmental institutions. The lifted sanctions mean nothing for me.”*

### **5.3 Youths’ perceptions of sanctions relief**

Six out of ten youth had optimistic perceptions and the remaining four respondents had either pessimistic perceptions or responded more alternatively towards the sanctions relief. The youths with more positive perceptions embraced the implemented deal and perceived it as a change that provided them with more hope towards the future. They expected the sanction relief to improve ordinary Iranians’ lives, including the social and economic development within the country. They mentioned more work opportunities and higher incomes through the access to more economic opportunities as examples of expected improvements that could help to develop ordinary Iranians’ lives. They also mentioned economic reforms, expansion of the business market, including the country’s export sales together with an expanded tourism sector to improve the country’s economic situation and simplify for them in various ways. Less corruption within various government institutions and corporates were also outcomes that they expected and viewed as important factor that could lead to development in Iran.

Respondent 3 meant: *“I hope that the government expand the business market, offer more jobs and combat corruption within various institutions and corporates. Rouhani's government is more committed compared to previous leaders and I believe that he will create economic reforms to improve the Iran’s economic situation. I do not usually believe in politicians' promises but Rouhani has demonstrated some form of commitment to us by joining the agreement, which has resulted in removed sanctions. This has given Iranians hope for a better future.”*

Respondent 4 explained: *“the sanctions will allow Iran to expand their export sales, establish international business opportunities and open up their country to tourism, which will create more jobs and incomes. The government will most likely use the revenues to invest in further business innovations, education, infrastructure and technologies, which are great for the development. I think however that it is also important to reduce the poverty rate since it is the root to all of our social issues in Iran. This would benefit both the regime as well as the citizens as time unfolds.”* Respondent 7 were optimistic towards the sanction relief and said that the deal was important to him, including his family since they have been waiting for a change. He added: *“I almost lost hope for the future since the country has faced so many obstacles by the imposed sanctions but are now hopeful again.”*

The four remaining participants had divided perceptions of the sanctions relief. Two of them (respondent 2 and 5) had pessimistic perceptions and did not perceive the sanctions relief as a positive change. Respondent 2 meant that the sanctions relief would help only the government to benefit from economic deals and not involve ordinary Iranians, not deal with corruption, poverty, drug addiction and infrastructure problems. *He said: “the regime does not care about us. They only care about themselves and their families. Hassan Rouhani might represent himself as more committed leader compared to our previous president, Ahmadinejad but of them seek for more privileges.* Respondent 5 agreed with the previous respondents and meant that the *lifted sanctions would give government representatives more economic power and opportunities to dominate the bureaucracy.* He also said that committed government supporters would benefit through access to higher salaries and positions, which would bring them power and ignore ordinary Iranians.

The last two respondents had more alternatively perceptions. Respondent 8 was open-minded towards the sanctions but had few expectations. She said: *“...I do not rely upon the government to create better opportunities for me. I only depend on my own choices to improve my life.”*

Respondent 9 was hopeful but had yet an ambivalent perception of the sanction relief. He said that it was too early to draw any conclusions about the lifted sanctions since transitions still are uncertain but meant that the government has not made much for youths from a historical perspective. He was however still hoping that they would change their strategies and create more job opportunities in the future. He stated: *“I need some kind of change in my life to be able to develop. I feel that Rouhani genuinely cares about Iran and its people in contrast to Ahmednejad and have a vision to drive the country forward. Rouhani is certainly aware of the issues but I believe that he is dealing with them step by step, the lifted sanctions is one of them. It will take time but things will change eventually. Nothing lasts forever in life, and certainly not when it comes to politics.”*

#### **5.4 Impacts of sanctions relief on Iranian youths’ private economies**

The impacts of the sanctions relief on respondents’ private economies showed that nearly all of them (nine of the ten respondents) were financially unaffected by the lifted sanctions and did not experience any change in terms of economic progress in the post-sanctions era. A few of them pointed out that it might change and lead to economic progress as time unfolds. Respondent 7 said: *“my private economy has not been affected by the lifted sanctions yet, but I think it will improve eventually. It takes time for things to evolve, nothing happens over a night.”*

Respondent 9 claimed also to be financially unaffected by the sanctions relief but meant that his unemployment status might be the reason behind the economic situation he faces and added that it could change in the future. Only respondent 7 claimed to have experienced a small economic change and meant that more customers have visited her store in the last couple of weeks, which has increased her sales by a small percentage.

### **5.5 Future economic opportunities**

Seven of ten respondents were optimistic towards potential economic opportunities within the upcoming five years and predicted some type of economic progress in their private economies. Two of ten respondents were however pessimistic about future economic opportunities and did not perceive any economic progress in their private economies. Only one respondent claimed to have an uncertain attitude towards economic opportunities and were not sure if more economic opportunities would arise within the future.

Respondent 4 predicted more economic opportunities in the upcoming five years and added: *“I think that it will improve in the future. More economic opportunities and investments will require more work efforts at the bank, which most likely will provide me with a higher salary in the upcoming years.”* Respondent 7 said that people’s economic situations would improve with time and allow them to consume more. This would as a result, provide his company with more business deals.”

Respondent 2 had a more critical outlook towards potential upcoming economic opportunities and explained that it only would be available for governmental representatives, rather than ordinary Iranians with average jobs. She said: *“governmental representatives have access to economic deals and powerful positions, which gives them economic privileges while the rest of the country is struggling.”* Respondent 5 shared in similarity to respondent two, a critical outlook and said: *“I do not think my private economy will change by the sanctions relief in any sort of way. It will only affect the government’s access to more economic opportunities. I would be surprised if I personally would have access to more economic opportunities in the future, since I don’t consider myself as a regime supporter.”* Respondent 8 was more doubtful and explained: *“I am not sure if the sanctions relief will arise more economic opportunities for me in the future due to unexpected circumstances within the politics that either will bring more challenges or opportunities with time.”*

## **5.6 Youths' experiences of the sanctions relief**

Six of ten respondents experienced the sanctions relief as positive and were more optimistic as well as hopeful about the future. Four of ten respondents claimed to be unaffected by the sanctions relief and did not have any particular experience so far. Respondent 1 had a hopeful view and said: *“the change has given me some sort of hope towards the future. It feels like I could achieve anything if I set my mind to it, since the walls of isolation has fallen apart, both for Iran and me.”* Respondent 3 shared a similar experience and added: *“my experience is good, I feel that people experience a new period of change, which has created a more positive vibe. Although nothing has changed in practice yet, there is a strong belief for a more hopeful future.”* Respondent 10 had also a positive experience in similar to the previously presented respondents and was hopeful for the future. She added: *“the imposed sanctions had no positive impacts on this Iran or upon the people so I am glad that this era of instability and restriction eventually will end.”*

Respondent 2 claimed that his general experience of the lifted sanctions has been unaffected and added: *“not much has changed in practice, beside from some people's hopes for better opportunities.”* Respondent 5 stated: *“not much has directly happened since the sanctions were removed. It is the same type of people that begs on the streets and the same type of people that drives around in expensive luxury cars, everything is pretty much the same in Tehran.”*

Respondents 8 and 9 were also unaffected yet but assumed that it might change as the time unfolds.

## **6 Discussion**

This chapter presents a brief overview of key findings from the primary data, followed by discussion of the findings in light of the previous literature and theoretical framework. The chapter ends with some reflections on the discussion.

### **6.1 Overview of key findings**

In summary, the data demonstrates that Iranian youths from middle class backgrounds in Karaj and Tehran experienced the impacts of the imposed sanctions on their private economies differently and had varied economic situations. Four of ten youths were unaffected by the imposed sanctions and defined their economic situation as “stable”. Three out of the ten youths were negatively affected by the sanctions, but still had stable or relatively decent private economies. Three additional youths described their economic situation as weak, unbalanced or challenged by various factors that derived from the sanctions. Inflation, limited work and business opportunities, including reduced work hours at the workplace were some of examples that were mentioned as negative outcomes that lowered their incomes. The inflation also resulted in rising price levels of housing, food and transportation, which negatively affected their economic situations. Several youths claimed that some of their acquaintances, family members or friends also were financially distressed due to budget cuts or reduced work hours at the workplace, including limited work opportunities.

The gathered primary data showed also that the seven out of the ten youths had some form of expectations of the sanctions relief. They predicted a more stable economy, higher incomes opportunities, and an increased value of the Rial, more work opportunities, societal development and poverty reduction to occur in the post-sanctions era. Three of ten had either few expectations or no expectations on the sanctions relief due to the corrupt bureaucratic system. The government’s lack of commitment to create more jobs for Iranians to improve their economic situations was another factor that affected lowered their expectations on the sanctions relief.

Youths' viewpoints on the sanctions relief were mainly positive. Six of ten had optimistic perceptions and embraced the implemented deal. Their responses indicated some form of hope for various improvements that would lead to progress in their lives, including within the economic and social spheres. They hoped for an expanded business market with international opportunities and export sales, as well as economic reforms. They also wanted higher income levels and more work opportunities, prevention of corruption within various organisations and access to an open tourism sector.

Two out of the ten youths were more critical of the sanctions relief and claimed that it would only benefit government representatives, and government supporters, rather than ordinary Iranians. They said that it would provide them with access to beneficial economic deals, higher salaries and position, which consequently would expose them to increased bureaucratic and economic power.

Real challenges such as corruption, drug addiction, infrastructure problems and poverty would continue to be ignored. Two additional youths were open-minded and hopeful but yet hesitant towards the sanctions relief due to the same reason as the previous youths.

Nearly all youths said claimed to be financially unaffected by the sanctions relief in the post-sanctions era, except one youth who experienced small economic progress. Seven out of the ten youths presumed economic opportunities and predicted some type of economic progress in their private economies within the approaching five years. Two out of the ten youths were more critical towards future economic opportunities and did not perceive any economic development within their own private economies. Only one youth claimed to be unsure whether more economic opportunities would materialise in the future.

## **6.2 Youths' perceptions of the sanctions relief**

The key findings from the primary data confirm Biersteker (2015), Salehi-Isfahani (2010) Devarajan and Mottaghi's (2015) arguments. It shows that the imposed sanctions have negatively affected several youths' private economies and limited their employment opportunities. Youths' attitudes towards the sanctions relief can be explained through the lens of historical times and geographical locations. The influences from previous historical events that they have experienced during the sanctions era together with the environment they experience in Iran has as exposed them to various challenges. This has consequently shaped youths' perceptions upon the sanction relief in important ways (Elder, 1995, p. 107-108).

The lens of "timing of life" helps to explain youths' perceptions, based upon influences from several combined factors such as their interaction with historical time periods, development process, environments, events, including social interactions/connections (Elder, 1995, p. 114-115). For example, youths that experienced challenges during the sanctions era within Iran and furthermore had acquaintances, families or friends that were negatively affected by the imposed sanctions likely influenced their perceptions of the sanctions relief. Several youths encountered some transitions, which can be seen as an additional factor that influences their viewpoints.

The lens of "linked lives and social ties to others" examines youths' perceptions of the sanctions relief as a result of their influences from social interactions and relations with various people. This can expose them to various limitations or opportunities in life, which as a result shapes different perceptions of the sanctions (Elder, 1995, p. 112-113). For example, several youths had, from a historical perspective, experienced negative interactions with the Iranian government due to lack of trustworthiness. They also said that the regime never cared about ordinary Iranians and that the government had not provided youths with meaningful opportunities. This made them either sceptical or ambivalent towards their government's intention in the post-sanctions era due to the negative interactions that occurred in the past, which shaped their mind-sets.

The last lens of the life course perspective “human agency and personal control” looks at influences from youths’ previous life choices to explain their current perceptions. Their life choices can however be affected by various circumstances, events and dispositions, which can expand or limit their capabilities to control their choices that thereby influence their perceptions (Elder, 1995, p. 110-111). The Iranian youths might, during the sanctions era, have taken various decisions that either has dispositioned them or led them to better life options, which consequently has shaped their current perceptions of the sanctions relief. The perceptions could for example, be positive or negative towards the lifted sanctions depending on their experiences that have been directed by their previous life choices.

### **6.3 Experiences of Iran’s sanctions relief on youth’s private economies**

Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba (2015) claim that the Iranian government intend to use the regained financial assets to implement new economic reforms and develop the business context in various ways. This would in turn improve Iran’s economy and create more employment opportunities for citizens, which as a result would financially benefit them in the post-sanctions era (Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba, 2015, p. 3-4). Devarajan and Mottaghi (2015) suggest that economic policies are needed in order to establish economic progress and business opportunities and are agreement with Dubowitz, Fixler and Ziemba that it would benefit Iran’s economy and create more employment opportunities.

They add that such development will also likely lead to increases in wages as result of such economic progress. Devarajan and Mottaghi also predict more involvement of women in the labour market, which consequently would financially benefit their economic situation as time progress. The incoming oil revenues are also expected to be invested within the domestic economy and thereby establish growth in various sectors such as automobile, pharmaceuticals, construction, tourism, banking and communications. The growth would consequently create additional employment opportunities for ordinary Iranians (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015, p. 13-14, 16).

The primary data shows that nearly all of the youths were financially unaffected by the sanctions relief, except respondent 7. The previously mentioned authors' arguments and predictions can therefore not be confirmed in relation to youths' experiences because of the weak correlation between their experiences and the authors' arguments or predictions. This does not mean that the authors' predictions or arguments are incorrect but rather insignificant due to the recent removal of the imposed sanctions, which makes it hard to see any progress in youths' private economies. The predictions might occur in the approaching year and positively affect Iranian youths' private economies but it is hard to predict yet.

The first lens of the life course perspective explains youths' economic positions in the post-sanctions era by influences from historical events they have experienced during different time periods, the settings that they have lived within in Iran in addition to the sanction relief. (Elder, 1995, p.107). Most youths were unaffected by the sanctions relief, which can be explained by various events during the sanction era that has exposed them to settings that not been affected by the sanction relief yet. The youth that were positively affected lived in a geographical location that gave her an opportunity to experience a positive financial gain in relation to the sanction relief.

The second lens of the life-course perspective incorporates the timing of events, historical time periods, settings, social interactions/connections together with transition processes as important factors that influence youths' private economies (Elder, 1995, p. 114). Therefore the sanctions relief itself is not the only influential factor that can influence youths' economic status in the post-sanctions era. For instance, the respondent that were positively affected by the sanction relief financially has experienced environment events, historical time periods or transitions that have exposed her to a better outcome in Iran compared to the other youths.

The third lens describe youths' private economies in the post-sanctions era through various influences from their interaction and social ties to other people that has exposed them to limitations or opportunities, which in turn has affected their private economies. The sanction relief itself can influence their private economies but cannot be considered as the main factor that change their economic status but rather an influence together with the impacts from the previously mentioned elements (Elder, 1995, p.112-113). Most of the youths were unaffected financially by the sanctions relief, which means that they have not been exposed to any opportunities that can benefit them through the influences from the various elements and the sanction relief itself. The respondent that experienced a small economic gain have been affected positively through access to business opportunities with customers, which bought her product and as a result lead to an economic change in her private economy in the post-sanctions era.

The last lens of the life course perspective explain youths' current economic situation, influenced by the choices they made during the sanctions era. Their choices can also be affected by other factors such as circumstances, events, economic position or settings, which limit or expand their capabilities to control their decisions. The sanction relief can be an influential factor that influences youths' private economies but not a determining factor that improves their economic status (Elder, 1995, p. 110). Some of the youths were negatively affected by inflation, restricted employment opportunities, and reduced work hours during the sanctions era, which limited their choices to influence their economic situations according to the lens. A number of them were also negatively affected financially through their social ties with their families and the companies they worked for that faced economic difficulties due to the different influences from the imposed sanction, which also exposed them to restricted opportunities to control their economic situations. Youths that were unaffected by the imposed sanctions had from a historical perspective, either capabilities to make better life choices or been influenced by the previously mentioned factors that has exposed them to better choices that could positively influence them by the sanction relief relation in contrast to the youths with restricted choices.

#### **6.4 Reflections on the discussion**

The key finding of this research shows a strong correlation between the previous literature and the life course perspective. The previous literature included relevant information that showed various examples that could be identified with the findings of this research and contributed furthermore with future predictions that potentially could positively influence Iranian youths' private economies in the approaching years. Some aspects were however not covered by all of the authors, which consequently restricted their ability to provide the reader with deeper understanding for youths' perceptions of the topic. The previous literature also included an analytical prognosis of changes that could financially affect Iranians citizens in the post-sanctions era, which differ from the key findings and where thereby irrelevant to this research.

Furthermore, there was a strong correlation between the four lenses within the life course perspective and the primary findings. The perspective added a number of various elements that could be linked to the youths' perceptions, including their experiences on how sanctions relief has affected their private economies. This contributed with a deeper understanding of their perceptions of the sanction relief was shaped and how other influences together with the sanction relief can take part in shaping their private economies in the post-sanctions era. The perspective can therefore be considered as a highly suitable approach in relation to this research.

## **7. Conclusion**

The amount of research that addresses what the sanctions relief means for Iran's youth and their private economies has been limited. Therefore, this research aimed to empirically investigate Iranian youths' perceptions of the sanctions relief and whether the sanctions relief had any effects upon their private economies in the post-sanctions era. The following research questions were into consideration in order to obtain the broader research:

- What perceptions exist on the lifted sanctions amongst young Iranians from middle class backgrounds in the Iranian cities of Karaj and Tehran?
- In what ways (if any) have the lifted economic sanctions affected young, middle class Iranians' private economies in Karaj and Tehran?

I conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions among ten youths, which enabled me to answer the two research questions of this research project. The primary data has shown that six of ten youths were positive towards the sanctions relief and perceived it as an influential change. Two of ten youths had pessimistic perception towards the sanctions relief since they believed that it would only benefit the government and not ordinary Iranians. Two additional youths were either open-minded or hopeful toward the sanctions relief but also hesitant.

The primary data also demonstrated that nine of the ten youths was unaffected financially by sanctions relief. Most of them stated that their economic situations have been the same as prior to the sanctions relief. Only one respondent claimed to be financially affected through a small financial progress in her private economy. The primary data were analysed by a conventional content analysis and furthermore discussed in relation to existing academic literature together with the life course perspective.

The previous literature contributed with knowledge that was recognized within the key findings of this research and predicted economic progress in Iran, which potentially could have positive effects on Iranians' private economies in the approaching years. Some aspects were however missing in the previous literature, which consequently limited the authors' ability to demonstrate with an in-depth understanding of youths' perceptions on the sanctions relief. The life course perspective explained youths' perceptions, including, experiences on how the economic sanctions affected their private economies from four different lenses that were highly relevant and provided with a deeper understanding for their standpoints

### **7.1 Avenues for further research**

Due to the limited amount of information that shows a broad representation of Iranian youths' perception of sanctions relief, including its effects upon their private economies, this research can pave the way for future research that deals with the same topic but in a larger scale. Firstly a quantitative study through surveys can be applied to determine the perceptions of young Iranians. This would contribute to a more extensive statistical representation of their perceptions and experiences and draw upon generalizations from larger sample. This is in contrast to this research where the possibility of drawing generalizations is minimal due to the small sample size.

Secondly this research can also be a basis for further research that deals with the same topic. A longitudinal study can be conducted in intervals of two or five years to examine how the sanctions relief is affecting the youths' private economies in the long-term. It would be relevant to examine a group with the same characteristics as this research but in a larger scale in tandem with a qualitative study for the purpose of gaining in-depth knowledge. This research can furthermore serve as a foundational analysis that explores the level of trust among young Iranians towards their government to continue to follow the Joint Plan of Action. This could potentially be conducted through a qualitative research where a substantial number of individuals would participate in interviews from which

level of government trust and the reasons behind this trust can be assessed. Lastly, this research could be used as a basis for a comparative analysis with a different country that has experienced imposed sanctions that followed by a sanctions relief. For example by comparing the youth from Iran to a country like Iraq can be useful in identifying similarities and differences between the two cases. The researcher could analyse the different factors to determine whether the sanctions relief has resulted in more economic opportunities in one country compared to another. Such a comparison could help identify these factors and what they depend upon. For example factors such as democracy, socio-economic opportunities, security, more trade or stability within a country could play important roles in paving the way for youths' economic opportunities.

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## **Appendix I - Interview Guide**

This appendix includes various interview questions that have been used during the interviews with the respondents. The questions are structured according to the interviews disposition and are divided in three parts to show a clearer structure.

### **Part I**

- Tell me about your age as well as the your current city of residence
- What is your post-secondary educational background?
- What is your current occupation?

### **Part II**

- Describe your economic situation prior to the lifting of economic sanctions?
- How has the imposed sanctions affected your private economy?
- Describe your expectations upon lifted sanctions?

### **Part III**

- What is your perception upon the lifted sanctions?
- How has the lifted sanctions affected your private economy?
- Do you think the lifted sanctions will arise more economic opportunities for you personally in the upcoming five years, and, if so, please explain why.
- How would you describe your experience of the lifted sanctions until this point?