

## **Attitudes toward Concepts of Marriage and Divorce in Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

*Family plays a central role as the buffer institution in the society. During time of social change, family ensures the smooth functioning of this transformation process in the society. For this reason, the institution of family is of vital importance for every society. Family is not only an institution of intense feelings. Its social function is also very significant (Merter, 1990: 3). It is for this reason that changes arising inside the family influence the entire social structure to a great extent. This study explores marriage and divorce aspects of two researches conducted by the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry General Directorate of Family and Social Survey (GDFSS) and Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) together with other studies on the relevant subject pursued in Turkey. Family dynamics of Turkish society in Turkey and in the world are identified. In this way, the paper aims to present findings of studies on marriage and divorce in Turkey to make them available at the international level.*

**Keywords:** Marriage, Institution of family, Divorce reasons

### **1. Introduction**

The phenomenon of divorce cannot be explained through a single cause. Every subject matter, in which the individual is involved, results under the influence of various elements. This fact is also valid in defining divorce. Therefore, factors influencing divorce change across time and in different societies. This study will examine elements directly influencing divorce under distinct headings. Results of the study are identified through a comparison with researches conducted in the United States of America. In the 2006 Family Structure Survey, 24647 individuals above 18 years-old were interviewed in 12280 households across Turkey. Interviews were conducted through the face-to-face interview technique. According to this survey, 6 % of residents in Turkey are composed of single person households, while 80.7% are nuclear families and 0.3 % is composed of other household types. In the 2011 study, 23379 people were interviewed. The average household size was found 3.59 (TURKSTAT, 2006:1- 2011: 151).

### **2. Age at First Marriage and Number of Marriages**

Age at marriage is among the most important factors affecting the course of marriage and divorce. Many studies highlighted that there is a direct relationship between age at marriage and divorce. 58.7% of women and 58.2 % of men got married for the first time during the age interval 18-24 in 2006. Similar results were found and 95.4 % of respondents were married only once in 2011. When we look the mean of age at first marriage, it is found that the age at first marriage are 19.9 for women and 23.5 for men. 58.8 % of women and 55 % of men got married for the first time during the age interval 18-24. It is also found that since the 1950s there has been a rapid decrease in the rate of men getting married under 18 years old (While the rate for the years 1951-1955 is 23.4 %, the rate in 2006-2011 is 0.3 % ) (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2011: 181-190). According to the 2010 average, age at first marriage in the USA is 26.7 for women, while it is 28.7 for men (ncfmr). It is designated that teenage marriages are more prone to result in divorce than adult marriages. Furthermore, a decline in teenage marriages has been observed in recent years (Martin-Bumpass, 1989:39). Teenage marriages increase the risk of divorce, due to incomplete psychological maturity of the individual (Amato-Previti, 2003:606).

### **3. Form of Marriage**

Form of marriage is one of the crucial subjects examined in divorce studies. Form of marriage can differ in every society and across time.

In American society, debates on the tension between values related to freedom and responsibilities in marriage and the effects of this tension on family relations will always continue (Amato-Irving, 2006: 55). Studies show that being married or having a partner enables the elevation of socio-economic status, particularly for women. Also, the end of marriage or partnership leads to the decrease of socio-economic status of the women as well as to stress (Waite-Evelyn, 2003; Avellar-Smock, 2005; Hahn, 1993). When statistics in 1996 are considered, the ratio of widow women is greater than the ratio of re-married women. Many old women live alone and this rate for women is greater than the rate of elderly men living on their own (Bianchi-Spain, 1996:13). However, currently an increase in the rate of re-marriages is visible.

According to the study conducted in 2011, a great majority of decisions for marriage (82.9 %) are made on the will of the couple and through the consent of their families. The rate for those getting married unwillingly on the request of their families is 9.4 %. The rate for arranged marriage in rural areas is 48 %; thus, it is 42.5 % more than the rate in urban areas. In 2006, 36.2 % of women and 24.8 % of men got married through arranged marriage on the request of their families, while 27.4 % of women and 35.2 % of men got married on their own will and with the consent of their families (TURKSTAT, 2006:6). Family factor in Turkey is very influential particularly during the process of marriage. Even if the rate of marriage where spouses are chosen on free will increases, individuals still want to get the consent and support of their families. Moreover, another important remark to be noted is the fact that the concept of “arranged marriage” has changed over time. In fact, this concept was being used to define marriages that take place through the guidance of the elderly and after seeing each other for a couple of times. However, it has come to be used for defining every kind of marriages in which spouses are introduced to each other for the purpose of marriage.

The rate of kin-marriage throughout Turkey in 2006 is 20.9 %, while this rate goes up to 40.4 % in the Southeastern region of Anatolia (TURKSTAT, 2006: 8). It is seen that this rate gradually decreases in the subsequent years. The rate of kin-marriage throughout Turkey in 2011 is 23.3 %. While this rate increases to 28.2 % in rural areas, it decreases to 21.1 % in urban areas. It also differs by the educational and economic situation. As the education level and economic income level decrease, the rate of meeting the first spouse inside the family and kin circles increase (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2011: 192). One important reason why individuals choose their spouses from the family environment is the idea that the spouse will be trustworthy, because she is an acquaintance. Besides, one major risk in this form of marriage is the possibility that there will be too much family influence on the marriage. Also, the process of divorce becomes more difficult in kin marriages.

#### **4. Characteristics Sought in Spouses**

Characteristics sought in spouses are seen to be important in the scope of our study, because expectations and desires of individuals and the possibility of realizing these define the course and the status of the marriage.

According to the 2006 survey, for men, the most important characteristics of women to be married are “being in love” (90.1 %), “having similar family structures” (80.8 %), “getting married for the first time” (85.8 %), “being beautiful” (59 %), “having a job” (35.9 %) and “working for few hours even if the income” is very low (29.7 %). For women, the most important characteristics of men to be married is “having a job” (95 %), “being in love” (90.4 %), “having similar family structures” (87 %), “getting married for the first time” (79.4 %), “having more income” (56.7 %), “being handsome” (43.7 %), “being more educated” (43.3 %), “working few hours even if the income is very low” (35.3 %) (TURKSTAT, 2006: 9). When we look at the study in 2011, the most important quality of women to be married is “getting married for the first time” (85 %).

This is followed by “having similar family structures” with a rate of 76.5 %. “Having high income” is the last characteristic sought by men in potential spouses with a rate of 30.6 %. The leading characteristic which women seek in the potential spouse is “having a job” with the rate of 90.9 %, as it was the case in the 2006 survey. It is shown that the second most important quality of men to be married is “getting married for the first time” with the rate of 84.1 %. Furthermore, the rate of men who want the potential wife to be beautiful is 54.4 % and it is 48.5 % more than the rate of women who want the potential husband to be handsome (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2011: 224- 227). Within the time period between 2006 and 2011, there has not been change in the first characteristic sought in the potential husband. Wanting to be married to a man with a job is a common attitude among women. The most significant qualities men seek in women, particularly in the first marriage, are being beautiful and getting married for the first time.

The presence and absence of a negative feature in the spouse, which is recognized prior to marriage, is crucial within the scope of our study. According to a study conducted on divorced people in 2009, 43.2 % of the respondents stated that their spouses had been irresponsible even before their marriage. Irresponsibility of spouses is shown as an important reason for divorce. 32 % of the respondents claimed that they realized that their spouses had been over fond of their families even before marriage. Standoff and alcohol problem are among the leading negative characteristics recognized before marriage (Asagem, 2009: 63). Some problems which are realized before marriage may become the main reason for divorce. This study reveals that some of the problems of the divorced individual were recognized before marriage.

### **5. Divorce Rate**

According to the TURKSTAT data, while the crude divorce rate was 1.35 out of thousand in 2001, this rate became 1.34 out of thousand in 2007, 1.62 out of thousand in 2010 and 2011, and 1.64 out of thousand in 2012. 93489 couples in 2006, 120117 couples in 2011 and 123325 couples in 2012 got divorced. 636121 couples in 2006, 592775 couples in 2011 and 603751 couples in 2012 got married. As seen, marriage and divorce rates by years are increasing. Despite partial differences by years, it is a crucial fact that 40 % of divorce in Turkey occurs in the first five years of the marriage (TURKSTAT, 2006-2011b, 2011a-2012).

A great majority of divorces in the USA also occurs during the first five years of the marriage.(Cherlin, 2010: 405). In 2011 one of every two marriages in the USA ended with divorce. According to statistics, the rate of re-marriage is also high. In the mid-1990s in the USA, 69 % of women and 78 % of men got married again (NCFMR, 2013). Women apply for divorce in 70 % of all divorce cases in the USA. If men want the custody of their children, most of the time they do not make the application for divorce. Only 19 % of the examined court cases were cases where men wanted the custody of their children and two-thirds of these court cases were filed by men (Simpson, 1998:14). This situation is the same for Turks living in and outside Turkey. Most divorce cases are filed by women. However, the year of divorce is different for Turks living in Germany. Here, the effect of migration on culture and practices are very apparent. At the same time, migration results in the unconscious attempt to keep the cultural structure alive and stronger. Especially after 1985, marriage became the first reason for Turks to come to Europe (Sen-Koray, 1993:23).

More than half of the second generation of Turks living in Germany chose their spouses from Turkey (Strassburger, 2004: 212). They aim to have a spouse from the same culture, despite individual differences, and they want to raise the next generation in this direction. When we look at Turks living outside Turkey, we see that their reasons for divorce are a bit different due to the structural differences during the process of establishing marriage. This study shows that divorce in Turks living in Germany occurs in the seventh year after marriage (28.6 % after 7-10 years), because it takes time to learn the language and rights relating to marriage for spouses migrated from Turkey through marriage (AtilaDemir, 2010:181).

#### **5.1. Reasons for Divorce**

Reasons for divorce are explained in the second book of the Law Numbered 4721 of the Turkish Civil Law. Accordingly, adultery, attempted murder/maltreatment, delinquency, living a dishonest life, abandoning, psychiatric disorder, breakdown of the unity of marriage / high conflict are defined as the reasons for divorce (tbmm.gov.tr).

According to the statistical data of 1996 in Turkey, fundamental elements relating to divorce can be summarized as follows (Asagem, 2009:32-33-Arikan, 1996):

- Crude divorce rate in Turkey is less than one in a thousand.
- The most important reason for divorce is stated as high conflict (approximately 98%). However, economic, social, cultural and psychological reasons might be underlying in this reason for high-conflict divorce.
- 47 % of divorces take place within the first five years of marriage. Although this rate differs by years, the period in which most divorce occurs is again the first five years
- When the average age is considered, divorced women are around 20-34 years old, while divorced men are within the 25-39 age intervals.
- In 76 % of divorced couples, men are older than women.
- 45 % of divorced families do not have any children. 25% of divorced families have one child, while 17 % are with two children and 5 % have four or more children.

When we look at the divorce reasons in the 2006 survey, the most significant reason for divorce is seen as woman's adultery of her husband (87.2 % in women, 92 % in men). Man's adultery of his wife is an important reason for divorce with a rate of 60.6 % for women and 57.6 % for men. An alcoholic/gambling woman is another important reason for divorce with a rate of 83 % for women, and 83.7 % for men. An alcoholic/gambling man is a significant reason for divorce for women with a rate of 70.4 % and for men with a rate of 71.2 %. Woman's maltreatment of her husband (76.6 % for women and 77.4 % for men) and man's maltreatment of his wife (71.2 % for women and 70 % for men) are among the leading reasons for divorce. Furthermore, other reasons for divorce include the inability of men to provide for the family, women's improper domestic work, not getting along with the family of the spouse, not being able to have a child (TURKSTAT, 2006: 10).

According to the study conducted in 2011, as the number of marriages increase, possibility for divorce also increases. When we look at the reasons for divorce in Turkey, the most important reason is stated as irresponsible and indifferent attitude with a rate of 27.3%. This is identified as the most important reason of divorce for both men and women. This reason is followed by the inability to support the family with a rate of 12 % and adultery with a rate of 11.7 %. Besides, beating/maltreatment and alcohol/gambling are stated among other significant divorce reasons with rates of 11.4 % and 8.8 % consequently. One striking point in this study is the fact that divorces caused by beating/maltreatment is higher in urban areas. This situation can be explained through the following facts: domestic violence is higher in cities; women living in cities are more informed in such situations; and urban population is much higher. Considering divorce reasons by gender, once again, the most important divorce reasons for both men and women are irresponsibility and indifference. For women, the second most main reason for divorce is beating/maltreatment, while for men it is disrespectful behavior towards the families of spouses (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2011: 229-230). Furthermore, in this study, adultery, bad habits, maltreatment and disgraceful crime are demonstrated as the most likely factors for divorce among possible divorce reasons (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2011: 229-232)

In this study, respondents are asked "what is the reason for divorce?" Infidelity/adultery is stated as the most significant cause for divorce. The rate of this reason is higher in female respondents. An incompatibility /conflicting personality is described as the second most important reason for divorce. Also, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of love, personal problems, unemployment, economic problems, unhappiness in marriage, not having a child, lack of communication, not participating in family gatherings are among other important divorce reasons (Amato-Previti, 2003:615). According to the 2010 Family Values Survey in Turkey, 60.6 % of 6035 respondents think that unhappy marriages should be ended with divorce. 21.2 % of the respondents do not perceive divorce as a solution to conflict in marriage (Asagem, 2010: 94).

According to a study conducted on 1200 divorced people in 2009, it is found that education level does not directly affect divorce. In due course, ratios of divorced people from all education levels are similar to each other (Asagem, 2009: 53). Divorce rates of Turks living in Germany are much higher than divorce rates in Turkey. The 28 % divorce rate in the third generation Turks, according to the 2007 rates, proves this fact (AtilaDemir, 2010:7-turkpolitika.com, 27.12.2007). Cultural difference is specified as the most significant reason for divorce. In other words, a young individual being brought up in Germany has a different opinion of marriage and family from someone coming from Turkey. Differences in values, practices and even sense of humor are stated as major causes of divorce. Furthermore, influence of the family and lack of respect are considered among other reasons for divorce (AtilaDemir, 2010: 172).

American family structure has been rapidly changing in the recent years. Cohabitation, late marriages, homosexual marriages, decrease in the number of births, increase in the number of families without children, increase in divorce, and etc. influence the transformation of the family structure (Bianchi-Spain, 1996:5). A study conducted in the USA examined 66 countries and found a dual relationship between the divorce rate in a country and its status of economic development, rate of women workers, gender rate and the dominant religious faith. The most striking feature of this study is the finding that divorce rate of a country increases as the rates of its economic development and female workers increase. In the USA, the female worker ratio is an important indicator used in the prediction of divorce rates. Here, woman's status and her ability in negotiation influence divorce (Trent-South, 1989: 391-393). Even the working hours of women have effects on divorce rates. Women who work for 35 hours and above in a week have more possibility to get a divorce than women working for 20-25 hours a week (Greenstein-Davis, 2006: 255). The relationship between women's participation in the labor force and divorce is examined through two distinct approaches.

While one approach highlights that women's participation in the labor force increases divorce, the other argues that women's participation in the labor force decreases indecision on marriage. It is expressed that the possibility for divorce decreases when woman shares her income with the family (White, 1990:908). According to the 2009 study, the factor that delays divorce the most is defined as the children factor with a rate of 57.4 %. The second most important delaying factor is identified as the environment with a rate of 26.1 %. The study stated that there was family intervention in the marriages of 28.2 % of the sample. Also, 58 % of the participants maintained that they were exposed to humiliating behaviors of their spouses. 41 % of the respondents expressed that they suffered oppression of their spouses on issues related themselves (Asagem, 2009:81-93). These features are generally described as "high conflict" due to legal reasons.

According to the study conducted on 1200 divorced people in 2009, 43 % of male participants stated that working spouses affect the order of the family negatively. Considering the increase in women's participation in business life, it is plausible to argue that this situation altered the traditional structure of marriages. 37 % of divorced individuals do not have any children. Although having a child does not directly prevent divorce, respondents in the study stated that having children delays divorce. One important point in this study is that 26 % of male and 36 % of female respondents are individuals who experienced divorce either in themselves or in their family. It is known that individuals, who experienced divorce in their families, have less trouble during their own divorce. When respondents are asked to consider the subject of re-marriage, 64 % of divorced men and 42 % of divorced women stated that they could get married again (Asagem, 2009:83-132). The most important reasons for divorce are stated as follows (Asagem, 2009:134-137):

- Indifference of the spouse to problems and myself.
- Communication problems, spouse's being oblivious, humiliation, not listening
- Economic problems (over spending, financial troubles)
- Problems related to children (lack of interest in children, different educational approaches)
- Intervention of the spouses' families
- Extreme jealousy
- Sexual incompatibility
- Spouse's lack of interest in the house

Besides these statements, there are other special factors influencing divorce. For example, higher rates of divorce in cities in comparison to rural areas can be explained through high levels of heterogeneity and low levels of social control in cities (Shelton, 1987: 828). As stated above, divorce cannot be explained through a single cause. It can be explained partially only through some leading reasons and the relationships among them.

## **5. Conclusion**

In order to be able to define attitude toward concepts of marriage and divorce, first of all, these concepts should be clearly defined within the particular social structure. For that purpose, individuals' age at first marriage is among the elements influencing the continuity of marriage all around the world. Each society constitutes its own cultural average. Likewise, form of marriage is re-defined as it transforms through social change. The individual constructs her own expectations within the cultural average and changing circumstances at stake. Congruence between individual expectations and the reality of the constituted family influence divorce rate. Therefore, social research is deemed necessary to be able to identify stability of marriage and to conduct required arrangements.

Studies on marriage and divorce have been increasing particularly in recent years. One of the most important reasons for growing scholarly interest on the subject stems from the perception of individual and individualization, which has been changing along with the course of globalization. Aforementioned, inevitable disintegration of the family structure is described as an indispensable result of social and technological transformation and developments. Shifting definition of the individual has more and more influenced the attitude toward marriage and family. Today, notwithstanding cultural differences, common problems and expectations are visible. For this reason, it is significant to produce studies that can be followed at the international level. This study is a product of such a need.

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