

## **DIVORCE AND FAMILY CHANGE REVISITED: PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S DIVORCE EXPERIENCE IN TURKEY<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In this study we try to shed light on changed family structure through the act of divorce. Divorce reveals much about the nature of family life, particularly the challenges and stresses families face. The increased rate of divorce seen over the last decade is a sign of the stress families are experiencing. Liberalisation of divorce laws (i.e. enactment of no-fault divorce in 1988) and New Civil Code reforms are analysed as the mechanisms behind the increased divorce rate. At the same time, we scrutinise altered grounds for divorce, thereby revealing the role played by changes in individual perceptions of divorce.*

*Moreover, as is evinced by this study, another challenge for existing family structures manifests itself in the wake of divorce. Following divorce, alternative family forms such as single-parent families – often headed by women – and patterns of remarriage pose challenges to the monolithic family structure in Turkey. Therefore, understanding these diverse patterns is crucial to understanding changes in family structure in Turkish setting.*

*The current study aims to increase knowledge of the current condition of the family in Turkey. Through a qualitative study of one landmark society we hope to shed some new light on the current condition and future of families in developing countries.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The institution of the family in Turkey is facing challenges and, as the domino effect has it, a change in one realm sets off a train of similar changes in other realms. The phenomenon can be illustrated nowhere better than by divorce, given its far-reaching implications for each member of the family. Divorce is not just the act of

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two individuals' uncoupling, it also reflects family stress and social and cultural normative changes – it is “a barometer registering changes in the social conditions” (Levine 1982). In this respect, increased divorce rates allow us to comprehend social change, which, as this study shows, can simultaneously be considered cause and effect of the redefinition of gender roles and division of labour in the family. At this juncture, to gain a better sense of family change through the ‘lense’ of our sample of 31 divorced women, we concentrate on the grounds for divorce and on the overall experiences these women faced in the aftermath of divorce. Before examining the trajectory of change in the family, we review the family system and the characteristics of divorce in Turkey.

#### CHANGES IN THE FAMILY SYSTEM

It is difficult to talk about a uniform family system in Turkey, since traditional influences, Republican ideology and massive migration from rural to urban areas have impacted on family life, creating diverse family systems and cultural heterogeneity in society (Nauck and Klaus 2008; Aytac 1998). When the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, the modernising drive of the Turkish state manifested itself first and foremost in the domestic sphere. In an effort to instill ‘modern life’, the founder of the nation, Mustafa Kemal (and his associates), imposed a series of legal and social reforms which directly affected the family. The most important reform was adoption of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926, which brought important new regulations to Turkey including a ban on polygamy, establishment of minimum ages for marriage (15 for girls and 17 for boys), gender equality in inheritance laws and encouragement of the nuclear family to the detriment of the (“traditional”) extended family structure (Sirman 2007). Adoption of the Swiss Civil Code also led to equal legal rights to divorce, custody of children and the granting of property ownership rights to both sexes.

However, these new legal regulations did not spread evenly throughout the country, being effective only in urban areas. Moreover, there was resistance to the changes from various groups, who rejected Western lifestyles and espoused indigenous values and norms; as a result, a society was brought about characterised by both Western lifestyles and traditional values (Aykan and Wolf 2000; Aytaç 1998; Cindoglu et al. 2008). While the regulations changed family behaviours, resistance manifested itself through such practices as religious wedlock, the customary practice of bride money paid to the bride’s family before marriage, and highly differentiated roles in the family for the husband and the wife.

Moreover, as Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smith (2008) argue, the reforms did not reach out to the women in rural areas, specifically the eastern side of Turkey. As a result, women in eastern and south-eastern regions benefited less from legal regulations, and have had less favourable living conditions compared to urban women. For instance, while marriage through religious ceremony is quite rare in western and northern Turkey, almost one-third of women are married through religious ceremony in

eastern and south-eastern Turkey, depriving them of the legal rights and regulations provided by civil wedlock (Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smith 2008). The same is true as regards their access to basic education.

Massive migration from rural to urban areas resulting from the industrialisation and urbanisation of 1950s complicated family systems even more. While migrants were trying to adapt to city life, they simultaneously embedded many traditional elements of family life and practices in the new urban setting, resulting in a combination of both modern and traditional family behaviours. As a result of these developments, Turkey became a country where different family ideologies and behaviours coexist (Nauck and Klaus 2008). It is important to note that family systems in Turkey are still under the influence of these three factors, leading to hybrid forms where traditional and modern family forms integrate together. We can now turn to a discussion of the general characteristics of family life in Turkey.

The Ottoman Empire historically had both nuclear families and different forms of extended families. It was quite common for generations of the same family to live either in separate houses in the same yard or under the same roof (see Ortaylı 1994; Kağıtçıbaşı 1982; Duben 1990; Kongar 1976). This household system changed substantially with the advent of urbanisation and migration. Survey data today reveals that the nuclear family structure is dominant in Turkey (87% of all families) (Family Structure Survey 2006). However, even though they live separately, family members are expected to give material and emotional support to each other, especially when a member of family is in an economically difficult situation (Cindioğlu et al. 2008). Indeed, this familial support mechanism is one of the means of coping with difficulties emanating from migration, adaptation to city life and social change more generally in Turkey (Vergin 1985; Cindoglu et al. 2008).

Respect for age and authority in the family has long been an important norm, and young people are expected to show respect for their parents throughout the life course (Nauck and Klaus 2008). However, this pattern has changed somewhat over the past few decades and young people have increasingly become more autonomous (Kağıtçıbaşı and Ataca 2005). Parental control stands out as an enduring attribute of Turkish families in both urban and rural contexts. They tend to interfere continuously in their children's lives, particularly on important issues such as education, career and marital decisions. In fact, parental involvement continues throughout their children's lives, even after children get married. Parents feel they are responsible for being involved in their children's lives by giving them help and advising them when the married couple face difficulties. This involvement can get even more complicated because the traditional mother-in-law and bride relationship still persists as an important dimension of family ties in Turkey. Whatever her socio-economic status, a woman is expected to respect her mother-in-law, to visit her frequently and to help with household chores during each visit. This can be complicated when talking about educated and professional women, because this traditional relationship might conflict with professional women's work schedules and norms of independence. Turkish

parents also play a role in moments of family crisis – such as divorce – and try to help by playing mediatory roles. Although parental involvement may be helpful for couples, it might also complicate conflict-ridden marriages. According to a recent survey, parental interference was reported by 48% to be an important factor leading to marital conflict (Yurtkuran-Demirkan et al. 2009).

Getting married is a norm in Turkey, and as the following figures from 2008 indicate, almost universal. According to the Turkish Demographic Health Survey (TDHS), the majority of women (65%) at childbearing age are currently married. Arranged marriages were quite predominant in the past, but couple-initiated marriages have increased in recent years. The average age at first marriage is 22.9 for women and 26.2 for men (Turkish Statistical Institute, Turkstat, 2008). A general observation is that marital expectations have undergone change, as intimacy and companionship have become more important elements of marital unions, particularly in urban settings.

The total fertility rate in Turkey has decreased gradually: while in 1978 it stood at 4.3 per woman; it had decreased to 3 births per woman by the late 1980s, to 2.6 births per woman by the 1990s, and finally to 2.16 per woman in 2008, almost exactly hitting replacement level (TDHS 2008). To control population growth, after 1965 the Turkish government initiated family-planning programmes across the country. With socio-economic changes as well as changes in the family structure of the past few decades, fertility has declined. What Kağıtçıbaşı and Ataca (2005) term “the two-child norm” is now common.

#### PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN TURKEY

Participation by women in the active labour force currently stands at 24.9% (Turkstat Family Structure Survey 2006). Hence, in Turkey only one in four working-age women participates in the labour force, with half of those women working in agriculture, the rest holding positions in the formal economy. More highly educated women have higher labour force participation rates. According to the Household Labour Force Survey conducted by Turkstat in September 2009, 17% of illiterate women participate in labour force whereas 71% of female university graduates participate. These figures emphasise the significance of education in increasing women’s labour force participation rate. In Turkey, women’s access to higher education is vital for entering the labour force and holding high status positions at work.

Although there is a relatively small number of highly educated women in the labour force, women’s participation in high-status scientific and professional occupations is relatively high in Turkey (Ecevit et al. 2003). The rate of women occupying professional jobs within the formal economy is 29% (WWHR 2009). The percentage of female doctors and lawyers in Turkey is 15% and 18.7% respectively (Narlı 2000). The percentage of women at universities is particularly high, constituting 34% of all academic staff, 23% of them professors.

These contradictory facts are the outcome of the above-mentioned modernity project undertaken by the Turkish Republic. Ozbilgin & Healy (2004) in their study of gender and career development at Turkish universities relate these relatively high percentages to the legacy of representation of women in the public sphere left over from Republican ideology. Republican ideology promoted women's entry to professional jobs and increased their relative independence in society, particularly those of middle- or upper-class family backgrounds (Oncu 1982; Bora 2002). As stated by Öncü (1982), the large number of women who access education and professional jobs – almost equal to highly industrialised countries in 1970s – can be explained by class inequalities and state recruitment within the framework of the modernity project.

When it comes to decision-making positions, however, the percentages decrease significantly. For example, while 44% of teachers are women, only 8% are school principals, which, according to Kabasakal et al. (2004) is proof of the existence of the glass-ceiling phenomenon in the Turkish context. The same discrepancy is true of women entrepreneurs in Turkey. In 1990 “only 0.2 per cent of economically active women were in the position of employer and 7.3 per cent were self employed” (ibid, 285).

Although Kemalist reforms were part and parcel of the modernity project, paving the way for women's access to education, employment and politics, it would be an overstatement to say that it transformed women's social status and familial roles at the same time: male domination remained intact and the reforms did not challenge the prevalent family ideology, which assigned a domestic role to women and breadwinner role to men (Ozbilgin and Healy 2004, 366). The mindset still persists except for in small number of urban elite who consider their caring role their primary role. As stated by Kabasakal, et al.:

Despite significant attempts at the modernization of women, some conflicting and traditional roles are simultaneously present in Turkish society, even among middle and upper classes as part of Middle Eastern culture. These traditional roles promote segregation of gender roles, the role of women as mothers and wives and traits that are considered to be feminine (2004, 274).

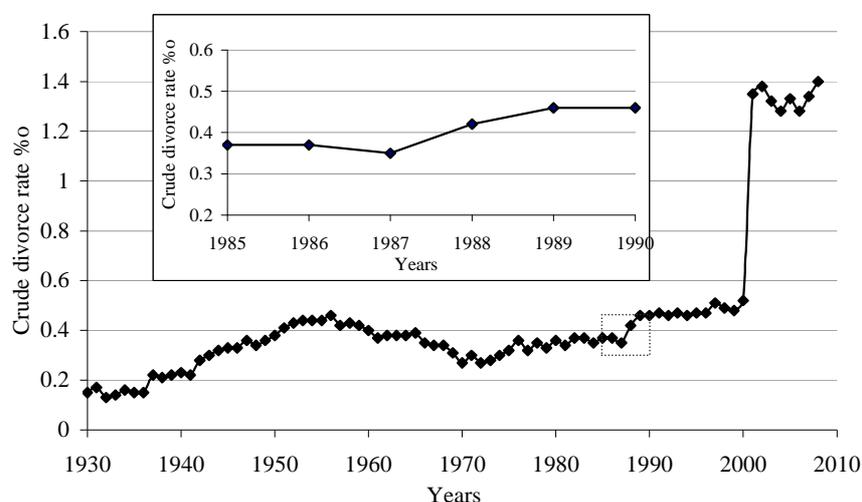
As a sizeable literature suggests, female employment does not fundamentally change the patriarchal system (Kağıtçıbaşı 1982; Kuyuş 1982; Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits 2008). Due to the entrenched intra-family division of labour, even if women are employed professionally, they are still expected to prioritise their domestic role. Therefore, women may see marriage as a barrier to career advancement. Kabasakal and Bodur (2002), comparing cultural practices and norms in Middle-Eastern contexts, report that 50% of women consider marriage a hindrance to their career, whereas no single men stated the same. Another study (Ecevit et al. 2003), on professional women's work experience in computer programming occupations in Turkey, finds that in order to pursue their careers successfully women attempt various

strategies such as “working hard, postponing marriage or not marrying at all, and managing marriage without a radical redefinition of their marital roles”; 50% of women in this study never married. What is more, the percentage of divorced, separated or widowed women in their sample is 14.5%, indicating the level of conflict these women face in reconciling marital role and career.

The women who participated in our study shared similar characteristics with most of the professional women mentioned above. As indicated in numerous studies and surveys, professional women in Turkey are still expected to follow traditional gender roles, and the sample in our study is no different. As we show in subsequent sections, the division of labour and men’s responses to transformations in women’s lives has become a source of conflict for the women interviewed.

### DIVORCE IN TURKEY

Divorce has always existed in Turkey. Before the foundation of the Republic in 1923 it was practised in the Ottoman Empire within the framework of Sharia law by Muslim judges (kadi). With the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the practice of divorce within Islamic Law was replaced by The Civil Code, instituted in 1926. In 1988 no-fault divorce law, which facilitated divorce legally by allowing divorce by mutual consent, was introduced. This significantly increased divorce rates, as can be seen in the following figure.



Source: The raw data were taken from Turkish Statistical Institute demographic database.

Figure I  
*Increase in Crude Divorce Rate as of 1988*

It would be an overstatement to say that divorce rates are increasing at a notable rate in Turkey. However, a marked rise over the last decade can be observed. During the 1990s the crude divorce rate (number of divorces per 1,000 people in the population, children and singles included) fluctuated between 0.46 and 0.52. The rate jumped to 1.35 in 2001 (with an additional smaller increase to 1.40 in 2008) – a 180% increase over the 1990s. This sudden change is unexpected. One explanation might be the method used for collecting divorce data. Before 2002, divorce data collected by Turkstat was gathered from public prosecutors every six months. Data thus produced was collected in an untimely manner, due to the overburdening of public prosecutors. From 2003, however, divorce data are taken from the Central Population Administrative System (MERNIS) database. Population statistics including divorce and marriage produced by the MERNIS are collected in a more timely manner, are more accurate, and are fully compliant with international standards. We speculate that the huge increase in the rate of divorce from 2001 on might have been caused by this organisational shift in data collection.

If this shift is not related to the change in method of data collection, we argue that the motives behind such a dramatic increase in the divorce rate over the 1990s are twofold. The first concerns the socio-economic condition of the country during the early 2000s. Within the framework of Turkey's bid for European Union membership, some regulations were changed in the Turkish civil code in 2002. The most significant change was in the property regime, giving each spouse an equal right to property acquired during marriage. This change might have encouraged spouses to end conflict-stricken marriages since the new property regime guarantees each spouse's property rights after divorce and divorce no longer entails one-sided economic loss. The second dimension of this socio-economic juncture concerns the economic recession of 2001; its later implications are reported to have upset family relationships considerably. In 2001 alone, we observe a 20% increase compared to the previous year (Divorce Statistics Report, Prime Ministry General Directorate of Family and Social Research, 08.09.2007).

Divorce rates in Turkey differ substantially according to region: the Aegean region on the western side of Turkey has the highest divorce rate at 2.05, while central-eastern Anatolia has the lowest rate at 0.49 (Turkstat 2008).

It is generally women who file for divorce in Turkey. According to a report published by the Bilka Research Centre, in 150 of 240 court cases, women filed for divorce (Bilka 1998). After divorce, women generally assumed primary custody of children. In addition, most divorces occurred in the first five years of marriage. Rural areas saw the opposite: men were more likely to file for divorce. This discrepancy can be considered as resulting from women's lack of education and financial security, as well as repressive social control of women. There is a large rural-urban gap in Turkey as regards divorce. In rural areas, where family is an economic unit and the traditional

family structure is the norm, divorce is a decision made by the whole family, rather than just the husband and the wife (Demircioglu 2000, 36).

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

The present study is part of a larger project in which 31 highly-educated and professional women were interviewed over a two-year period, between June 2007 and September 2009. We interviewed professional divorced women because in our experience professional women (more so than lower class women) are subject to ideational influences deriving from Western beliefs and values thanks to their easy access to communication technologies, contact with international companies and organisations, and frequent travel to other countries, which have tremendous implications for their perception of existing norms and values (see Thornton 2001, 2005).

During the initial phase potential participants were sought by using the snowball sampling technique. We focused on middle-class, highly-educated and professional divorced women. Those who did not fit this profile were excluded, as were friends and family members. Participants were all from urban areas and had full-time professional jobs at the time of interview. All lived in Istanbul, except for three who lived in small cities in eastern and central parts of Turkey. The average age of the women was around 38 years (with a range between 29 to 58). All of the women had been divorced for at least one year at the time of the study and they had got divorced only once – apart from one participant who had been divorced twice and married three times (she was married to her third husband at the time of the interview). Twenty-four participants in the sample had at least one child, with the average number of children per woman standing at 1.5 (range = 1 to 3).

### *Data Collection and Analyses*

We used an in-depth interview approach to gather the qualitative data used in this study. One researcher conducted the interview while another researcher transcribed and analysed the data. The 31 face-to-face interviews were carried out in between one and three sessions, at participants' houses or work places. The duration of interviews ranged from three to eight hours. The opening inquiries consisted of general questions about the participant's family, her place of birth, educational history, the stage at which she made the decision to marry, etc. Participants were then asked questions about their experiences of divorce and its aftermath. Through its unstructured nature, the in-depth interview method allowed us to capture subtleties, contradictions, and

meanings that surfaced during the interviews (see Reinharz 1983; Riessman 1993; Anderson and Jack 1991) and was entirely suitable for this kind of exploratory research. In addition, the in-depth interview was useful because it revealed a lot about the social life of the interviewees – “culture speaks itself through an individual’s story” (Riessman 1993). We used the grounded theory approach as an inductive means of data analysis, deriving analytic categories from the interview data as we coded it (Glaser 1992; Charmaz 2006).

In the next section we present the findings that emerged from the data analyses in two broad categories: (a) women’s experiences before divorce, and (b) the aftermath of divorce. In the first part of the analysis we examine participants’ grounds for divorce and expectations of marriage. This section allows us to tap into changes in patriarchy. The next section examines the aftermath of divorce in three areas: single parenting, experience of remarriage and societal attitudes to divorce.

## FINDINGS

### *Experiences Leading to Divorce*

#### Emasculation of men: A challenge to patriarchy

To get a better sense of family stress, it is important to examine the motives behind marital dissolution in Turkey, where for the most part grounds for divorce are framed in terms of incompatibility. According to court records, this is applicable to 95% of all divorces. Data on reasons for divorce are in short supply; therefore, we draw on individual pieces of research to fill in the gaps. A recent study carried out in urban settings helps us to get a better sense of the grounds that lead parties to terminate their marital unions. It reveals three major reasons: (1) lack of communication between couples (69%), (2) financial problems (i.e., credit card debts, financial mismanagement, lack of care in financial duties, bankruptcy, etc.) (34%), and, (3) child-related problems (29.8%). Another study (Demircioglu 2000) found irreconcilable differences of personality and mismatch between expectations and fulfillments as the major grounds for marital breakup; alcoholism coupled with domestic violence or gambling ranked second.

Participants related similar reasons for their divorces in our study. Overall, among all the reasons that drove these women to divorce, husbands’ reluctance to be involved in household financial expenses turned out to be the leading one. Of all the women we interviewed, 13 participants recounted how they were distressed by their husbands’ reluctance – or rather their refusal – to share in the family’s financial expenses. Domestic violence was the second most important reason that came into the picture during our interviews: eight participants recounted violence in physical or emotional form. Six participants related infidelity as their prime reason for filing for

divorce. Five women told of emotional estrangement from their spouses and two other women stressed that irreconcilable differences of character with resultant marital dissatisfaction put great strain on their marriages, becoming the major reason for divorce.

Women's grounds for divorce allow us to see how patriarchy, which has a strong hold on gender roles in the family, is facing challenges and undergoing modification. Thirteen women stated that they were the sole breadwinners due to their husband's avoidance of household expenses and lack of interest in household responsibilities. Since Turkey is characterised as belonging to "classic patriarchy" (Kandiyoti 1988), where male dominance is the norm, men withdrawing from their primary financial role can be considered a breach of the boundary of gendered division of labour in the family. This emergent trend runs counter to cultural gender ideology, which was even undergirded by a law in the civil code stating that men were head of the family; a law that was repealed in 2001. So these findings lend substance to the fact often raised in the literature that the familial norms stipulating that men be the major provider has been challenged by economic reality. This phenomenon is summed up adroitly by Bolak:

The traditional urban ideal of married women remaining at home and occupying themselves exclusively with family work has been increasingly challenged by the economic pressures of urban living, making women's employment crucial for the maintenance of [the] economic status quo (1994, 412).

The significant contribution of these women to the household budget allows us to tap the interplay between cultural expectations and family work dynamics and, in this case, the ensuing conflict which led to marital breakup. The following excerpt and quotation from our interviews evince this situation clearly:

– *Interviewer: Did you have any economic strain after divorce?*

– *Participant: Nothing changed. I was already managing myself; with divorce I got rid of one economic burden [referring to her ex-husband].* (Yasemin, Accounting Manager)

– *I am OK, because I no longer have to support someone financially! [laughs] It is even better, because I am receiving alimony of 150 lira, and for the first time I am spending his money.* (Emine, Quality Manager)

At this point it is important to note that in our study husbands' reluctance to be involved in household expenses does not necessarily emanate from an inability to bring in a family wage; except in one case, all husbands had stable jobs that would have enabled them to be a major economic provider. The following quotations reveal this situation:

– *When we moved to Istanbul he did not find a job. I mean, he is a medical doctor and assistant professor but somehow he failed to find himself a job! Unbelievable! He just sat at home, strolled around outside, did not even care for our children... our flat at that time was still under construction and with my salary, which was not enough even for our children's basic expenses. I was also paying for construction of the kitchen, bathroom and floors every month.* (Ayşe, Project Manager)

– *He was unemployed through to the end of our marriage. But the thing is that he wasn't taking care of the house while he was working either, it was always me who was in charge. You know what? I was even paying for the flowers he used to buy for me.* (Filiz, Sales Executive)

It is perhaps surprising, but it is the husbands in these marriages who were challenging patriarchy: it is the women who appear to call for a traditional allocation of roles. This can be illustrated by the following participant:

– *Our main problem was his leaning on me, I mean financially... he kept complaining about work, being tired and stuff, but a man works and provides for his family, this is how it should be, isn't it? Can you think otherwise?* (Emine, Quality Manager)

To elaborate on the situation: women were demanding that men be the major providers in the family – a reinstatement of men's traditional role. Note that this requirement may derive from women's emphasis on equality of sharing household expenses rather than their demand for a tradition to be preserved. Either way, the traditional male breadwinner role is being emphasised by the most non-traditional segment of society – highly educated and professional women. Husbands unexpectedly resist this traditional demand and the ensuing conflict is remedied through non-traditional means: divorce.

There is a strong interplay between gender role confusion and ensuing conflict. Cultural ideology prompts men and women to live up to certain gender roles, such as men being financially independent and women being obedient and dependent. Social change, however, complicates and blurs boundaries, leaving people feeling confused and potentially setting the stage for conflict. As stated by Levine:

In such a transition period, conservative ideals stand side-by-side with new egalitarian ideals. Many people are quite confused in their behavior, acting one moment as an egalitarian, liberal and the next like a chauvinistic conservative. Such confusion forms the basis of many conflicts in marriage and becomes the genesis of later divorce (1982, 328).

How this emerging trend will affect a renegotiation of ingrained gender role dynamics, as well as the economic characteristics of marriage, is an issue that deserves more research attention and in-depth analysis. However, since it is beyond our scope right now, it will suffice to note how the situation leads to conflict within a family and constitutes grounds for divorce in its own right. That said, we can speculate that changes in gender roles lead towards structural changes in the family, blurring the boundaries between the main provider and homemaker, lending itself to conflicts and resistance and thereby straining marital unions:

When [the] effects of urbanisation, female employment, and men's reduced economic power provide an occasion for a shift in the boundaries between the sexes, how rights and responsibilities are negotiated depends on the context of situational constraints and opportunities as well as cultural meanings (Bolak 1997, 429).

#### Fulfillment: Redefinition of Marriage

Another challenge revealed in the reasons given for divorce is changes in the participants' expectations and perceptions of marriage. The women interviewed made it clear that marriage for them did not mean financial stability or privileged status or protection, as inculcated in previously held norms and attitudes. By their accounts, participants first and foremost expected some emotional satisfaction from their marriages; all women in the sample chose their spouses themselves, and made the decision to marry on the basis of love. Fulfillment and satisfaction constituted the two main ideals of marriage. There is a certain tendency in Turkish society to hold women responsible for a failing marriage; upon divorce women are blamed for not having kept up the marriage and for causing 'moral decay' in society. More importantly, these cultural expectations cut across different socio-economic groups. As noted above, however, by getting divorced on the grounds of unhappiness or a lack of fulfillment, women in this study presented a different set of behaviours running counter to cultural ideology.

Moreover, the fact that it was the women who filed for divorce reveals that despite the cultural emphasis manifested in the Turkish vernacular, with such sayings as "man make houses, women make homes" (*yuvayı disi kus yapar*), "a good woman is a sacrificial mother for her family" (*kadın dediğin ailesi için saçını süpürge eder*) and "a good woman keeps her man" (*kadın dediğin kocasını elinde tutar*), women in this study do not seem to conform to cultural conception of gender roles and reveal less commitment to lifelong marriage than did older generations. This is quite in line with what Cherlin notes:

When social change produces situations outside the reach of established norms, individuals can no longer rely on shared understandings of how to act. Rather, they must negotiate new ways of acting, a process that is a potential source of conflict and opportunity (2004, 848).

One salient aspect of changing family dynamics in Turkey is therefore that individuals emphasise having more of a sense of self than in past decades. They increasingly question fulfillment and the level of satisfaction they derive from marriage, and feel more justified in leaving an unrewarding, unhappy marriage – an emerging trend that challenges marriage as a traditional institution.

Another way of reading these conflicts in marriage is by seeing increased individualism as a cause of stress. As Bumpass (1990) points out, when desires and interests clash, individuals face confusion as to how much weight to give to the interest of others at the expense of their own. For Bumpass, the shrinkage of the circle from a larger community towards the individual is best illustrated by the increasing rate of divorce in a society.

In line with the change in marriage that calls for for personal satisfaction and companionship, the tendency to end an unfulfilling relationship has increased. Particularly for the professional women in this study, when expectations of a fulfilling marital relationship were not attained, a resultant decline in marital satisfaction came to light. It was at this point that their professions came up as salient incentives for leaving an unhappy marriage, just as the existing literature holds that women's economic independence does not directly cause marital separation but leads to an unhappy marriage ending in divorce (Smock 2004) with economic independence functioning as a "facilitating factor". Our findings lend support to this viewpoint in the sense that the women interviewed brought a non-traditional element to marriage, viewing it more from a cost-benefit perspective. The following quotation from our interviews indicates how marriages are framed:

*– That marriage did not contribute to my life at all. On the contrary, it took five years from my life. (Isik, PhD )*

*– In that marriage I would not have developed myself, I would not have improved myself, I would have stayed with the same principles, I would be a narrow-minded person. After divorce, my social abilities, tolerance towards people and empathy grew. I noticed improvements in my personality. (Macide, Finance Manager)*

*– My husband and child are not the only things in my life. (Zerrin, Assistant Manager)*

Disillusionment with marriage and increased divorce rates render marriages fragile, prompting couples to feel insecure. As many women in this study reiterated, standing on one's own feet, namely gaining a sense of financial independence, loom

large resulting in “reduced investment in marriages” (Bumpass, 1990: 486). When asked how divorce changed them personally, participants stated:

*– Well, I came to be more rational. I learned to think in a more logical way. A feeling of “whatever you do in this life you do it on your own”. It is only you or you, nothing more than you. You have to pursue your life and not depend on anyone... Yeah, I am more rational right now; I guess my feelings are more controlled. (Nurgul, Journalist)*

*– I realised once again that a woman should stand on her own feet. In our society women like to stay at home and spend their husband’s money. I feel pity for such people! Particularly for those who had an education, training, their parents investing in them – it is just a waste of time and money. If you go to Europe you will see that young people want to work together and build a future together. They don’t dream about marrying a rich husband so that they sit back and enjoy life! You never know what to expect in life, what if you divorce one day, what will you do with no experience? (Mehtap, Administrative Assistant)*

### *Aftermath of Divorce*

This section explores the aftermath of divorce. The categories examined include single parenting, remarriage and societal attitudes to divorce.

#### Single Parenting

Census data across the world reveal that families headed by single mothers or fathers are increasing. The most recent Turkish Demographic Health Survey informs us about the proportion of female-headed households in Turkey. According to the survey, 12.8% of all households are families headed by women – 13% in urban areas and 12% in rural areas (TDHS, 2008). Variations in single-parent families are contingent on the very circumstances causing it, namely death, divorce and separation. Therefore, concomitant to the on-going increase in divorce rates, especially from 2001, we assume an increase in divorced single parents in Turkey. However, it is worth noting that Turkish culture finds it unacceptable for women to set up their own households, particularly after divorce; in many cases women are expected to “double up with other households rather than setting up their own households” (Koc 1997, 90). Moreover, a grandfather or a grandmother compensates for the absence of a non-residential parent. The concept of a single-parent home (tek ebeveyn), in the Turkish vernacular is therefore seldom used; it is a relatively new formation and notion in Turkey.

The most common characteristic of single-parent households formed in the wake of divorce is economic stress, which derives from going from a double-income earner family to a single one. For the most part, a single mother or, in rare cases, a single father provides all childcare expenses, accompanied by the cost of forming a new household from scratch. When single parents do not have a stable job to meet these expenses they can fall into poverty and struggle to allocate time between childcare and employment. With respect to its impact on children, a large body of literature highlights growing up in a single-parent house as an important dynamic affecting children's lives. As Paterson (1996) indicates, most of the literature associates deviance with the background of the family, and thus shows "single-parent homes frequently at the top of the list of at-risk factors for children". As a remarkable number of studies reveal, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, failure at school, psychological problems, etc., are correlates of growing up in a single-parent home (Matsueda and Heimer 1987; McLanahan and Booth 1989; McLanahan and Bumpass 1988). Findings from Turkey are no different (Sirvanlı-Ozen 2005).

In our sample, 24 participants were single parents. The majority of them lived on their own with their children, except for two women who lived with their families at the time of interview. Since all were also employed, they either had child minders or received help from family and relatives with the childcare. The ramifications of single parenting on familial change therefore deserve attention, particularly the experiences of single mothers in such situations.

First and foremost, the increasing number of single-parent families through rising divorce rates poses a challenge to the existing family structure, since as the numbers are rising and forming a pattern they diversify existing family types, thereby leading to structural change in families.

As stated above, most of the participants in our study were more or less comfortable with their new single-mother roles and saw their children as the single positive result of marriage. They expressly told us that they were glad that they had children. However, this does not necessarily mean that they disavow the hardships of lone parenting: 13 participants acknowledged the burden and challenges of parenting alone. They referred mostly to the initial stage of the post-divorce period. They often stated that financial difficulties and overload emanating from their need to work and to care for the children at the same time led to the problems. So even though the women created strategies to overcome stress, such as getting their parents to help for childcare, they nevertheless felt overwhelmed due to being sole parents and working extra hours to provide better conditions for their children.

Another aspect encapsulated in the experience of single parenting is the child's emotional reaction to losing a sense of family; to put it another way, missing the father's presence in the family. In our study, more difficult than being overburdened by childcare was coming to terms with the absence of a father in their children's lives. Indeed, perhaps the hardest strain facing single mothers was compensating for a "father absence". One participant summed up the views of many:

– *It [the distress] was so severe. No matter how strong you are, no matter how hard you try to withstand challenges, trying to make them not feel it [father's absence] was really exhausting. That was the most difficult thing I went through.* (Perihan, Public Relations Expert)

As regards children's adjustment to living in a single-parent household, the structural shift from a two-parent household to a single-parent household may not necessarily be that smooth. Children may have to "commute between two separate households". As one participant put it:

– *My little son has never experienced eating at a table with the whole family together.* (Belkis, Accountant)

More importantly, the concern that overwhelmingly preoccupies single mothers is the perceived stigma attached to children from single-parent homes. While studies reporting negative life events regarding children from divorced backgrounds make the participants worry about their children, they also think that there is an issue of stigma attached to single parenting, conveyed particularly in the media. Some of the women interviewed were defensive about single parenting, for example, juxtaposing it with unhappy intact families:

– *As a matter of fact there are many families that are legally intact but in reality shattered inside. Seeing such families makes us realise that maybe we [single mothers] are in a better situation because you cannot provide a secure and peaceful upbringing to a child in a family where the parents quarrel frequently. After all, you never know what is happening behind closed doors.* (Fulya, Training Manager)

Another important dimension of single parenting is its reverberations on societal attitudes, since "it is likely that these behavioral changes [are] accompanied by [a] change in public opinion" (Thornton 2009, 230). The women interviewed made it clear that the monolithic definition of the family marginalises single mothers and their families, and they stressed the need for diverse forms of families to be recognised by the population at large. One participant, in particular, stressed how the monolithic definition of the family in books, schools and media is upsetting for people who actually experience it:

– *In schools they teach a certain image of family, which is made up of a father, a mother, and a child. Of course that is one image, but they should also teach alternative family structures like single-parent families, families with father-child*

*or mother-child only. I mean, at least sometimes they should give examples of single-parent families.* (Filiz, Sales Executive)

All in all, in the aftermath of divorce the structural shift from a two-parent family to a single-parent family is imbued with difficulties and challenges for both single parents and children, affected by and affecting public opinion.

### Remarriage

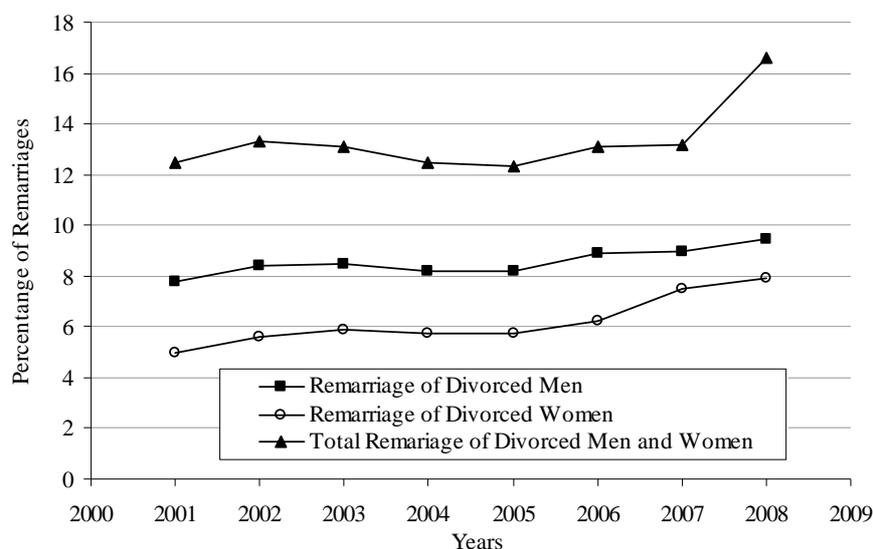
Remarriage renders a fundamental change in marriage patterns as well as in family structures. As stressed by Amato (2000):

The shift from [a] dominant pattern of lifelong marriage to one of serial marriages punctuated by periods of being single represents a fundamental change in how adults meet their needs for intimacy over the life course (2000, 1269).

It is worth noting that remarriage in the Turkish context is an understudied topic: no study has focused specifically on the phenomenon of remarriage except for a few studies on divorce which touch on remarriage as part of their research (e.g. Demircioglu 2000; Arıkan 1990). Drawing on these studies we maintain that remarriage is viewed positively by divorced women in Turkey. For example, in Arıkan's study, *Social and Psychological Problems of Working Class Divorced Women*, 37% of divorced women consider remarriage a serious possibility; in Demirci's study, where she administered questionnaires to 120 divorced women from different occupations, 70% of women express positive thoughts about remarriage.

In the light of our statistical calculation using the most recent data from Turkish Statistical Institute (Turkstat), we see that remarriage makes up an increasing proportion of all marriages. As illustrated in Figure II, while between 2001 and 2007 the remarriage rate was going back and forth between 12–13% of all marriages, in 2008 the total remarriage rate rose to 16.6% of all marriages. However, the statistics reveal a gender gap in remarriage in 2008: 8.5% for women and 11.3% for men. That is, men remarry at a higher rate than do women, a pattern consistent with the international literature (Bumpass et al. 1990; Glick and Lin 1986).

When remarriages of only divorced individuals are singled out, however, one notices a closing of the gender gap in remarriage. While 9.4% of divorced men made their second or higher order marriages, as many as 7.9% divorced women remarried in 2008 (see Figure II below).



Source: Authors' calculations based on marriage and divorce statistics of Turkish Statistical Institute demographic database, 2008.

Note: The authors calculated proportion of remarriages in total marriages in given years. Remarriages of divorced couples were singled out by using the data about couples' marital history before current marriage.

Figure II

*Percentage of Remarried Families, Remarriage of Divorced Men and Women in Turkey, 2000–2009*

### *Motives for Remarriage*

Remarriage is a quintessential example of how individuals fulfill their aspirations for a marital state encapsulated with emotional gratification. In our study, a number of women do not consider remarrying; most of the interviewed women see remarriage as a possibility, and seven participants were already remarried. By their accounts, emotional gratification overrides all other demands from marriage. The following expressions convey the main expectation of husbands:

- *He has to be a friend 99 per cent first of all.* (Filiz, Sales Executive)
- *I want someone in my life, a soul mate with whom I want to be and who can love me.* (Yasemin, Accounting Manager)
- *All I want is to be loved, nothing more than that.* (Neriman, Teacher)
- *He must be an emotional companion and my confidant.* (Burcu, Instructor)

*– I spend wonderful times with my son, if a remarriage cuts down on my time with him he must be deserving of this... he would have to be a very special man.*  
(Sevda, Real Estate Agent)

So second marriage for them is not repeating the traditional pattern of marriage, but envisioning a more emotional form of companionship. The quotes also reveal a prevalence of evaluating marriage from a cost-benefit framework.

A significant issue here concerns stability. Researchers find that remarriages dissolve at a higher rate than first marriages (Bumpass et al. 1990; Booth and Edwards 1992; Amato 2000). Three important causes of fragility of remarriages are enumerated by Booth and Edwards: lack of social support, lack of clear norms to follow and to provide guidance, and more readily considering divorce a solution to problems in a marriage than those who have not divorced before. Unfortunately, we lack data regarding the dissolution rate of second marriages in Turkey. With respect to the quality of marriage, however, Bir-Akturk and Fisiloglu (2009) in their study comparing marital satisfaction among those of different marital statuses (such as first-married, post-divorce married, and post-bereavement) stated that remarried individuals reported levels of satisfaction equal to those expressed by first-married couples.

#### Societal Attitudes to Divorce

Increased tolerance towards divorce *per se* gives us a means of assessing the challenges to existing family ideology in Turkey. It is clear that in Turkey disapproval of divorce has declined over the past few years. Legal changes since 1988 and new sets of laws from 2001 (in particular) facilitated legal procedures of divorce and made it more attainable. In turn, increasing numbers of divorces have made it more acceptable. However, this does not mean that negative attitudes have disappeared and divorced people escape blame and judgement. Attitudes towards divorce are dynamic and not easily distilled, with the actual divorce itself being viewed as an unpleasant event implying a failure of individuals and deviation from a socially valued form of unity. As the following quotations indicate, individuals still feel that they are held accountable and blamed for their divorce, and divorced women in particular feel this pressure. Arıkan (1996), in her study *Attitudes toward Divorce*, found that although Turkish people do not reject divorce outright – and even express a certain sympathy for divorce under certain difficult situations – divorced couples may not experience much of this social tolerance, since couples, and women in particular, are expected to keep marriage together and people do not tolerate divorce on the grounds of individual choice. It may be, for this reason, that divorced women in Turkey emphasise negative societal attitudes toward divorced women as an important problem after divorce (Demircioglu 2000).

In our study, interviewed women made it clear that the approaches and attitudes associated with stigma toward the divorced exist at every level of society. Among those interviewed, a large proportion of the participants (24) stated that they were concerned about possible negative reactions to their divorce and looked for ways to avoid exposure to that negativity. As the following quotations show, the attitudes that are associated with stigma appear spontaneously during everyday interactions:

*– I was very hesitant in my workplace. You know what people say about divorced women. Even if I am at university, even if people around me are all educated, they still treat you differently, make you feel you are abnormal. They think: now she is divorced she can do wrong at any time. You see what I mean? It's for this reason that I have withdrawn from people.* (Perihan, Public Relations Expert)

Another participant spoke of how she gained a vantage point after divorce, from where she could analyse people and society in a more crystallised way. In her own words:

*– I guess you start seeing realities more clearly, you truly understand your place in society, you see the looks in peoples eyes... I was working when I was married, right after my divorce I noticed changes in people's behaviours, you become a divorced woman you know, your male colleagues and boss especially treat you differently.* (Deniz, Marketing Assistant).

An interesting finding relates to women's strategies to avoid people's reactions. Trying to come to terms with their new marital status in a society where marriage is the only socially approved form of unity, women created strategies to cope with emotional distress and demoralisation. Some common behaviours emerged, including not telling people about the divorce, distancing themselves from male friends – particularly those who are married –, and dressing or behaving more conservatively. Nevertheless, some of the participants stated that their situations were better than those of older generations, particularly of their mothers, and that divorce is at least tolerated in principle, which for them is progress. The following quotation evinces this sentiment:

*– At times she [participant's mother] was getting grumpy, I remember, she was shouting at us. But we [participant and her siblings] understood her. I mean, it is not easy living in 1970's Turkey as single woman. I mean, alone with three kids. She tried not to reveal it to us but I'm sure she was facing a lot of social stuff [referring to negative social attitudes to divorced women]. She stood up for herself, she didn't need a man to take care of her. I admire her.* (Rezzan, Teacher)

More importantly, the women in this sample also have the ambition to change social attitudes for the better. As highly educated and professional women they feel they are role models for other women, and feel responsibility towards them. For instance, around one-third of the women in our sample (9 women) were members of Divorced Mothers Association (DMA), a civil association that women from upper- and middle-class backgrounds formed in order to help each other deal with post-divorce adjustment difficulties, and to help change the somewhat negative attitudes toward divorced women in society for the better. In fact, because they aim to educate people and challenge entrenched false beliefs in society, they considered the interviews a means to articulate their views and reach a larger number of people in society. After each interview session they expressed their gratitude to us for conducting the research and their hope that it will be a contribution to society.

All in all, just as in the case of single parenting, social attitudes toward divorce are affected by increased levels of divorce. Even though negative attitudes to divorce exist at all socio-economic levels, and the women interviewed in this study are concerned about these behaviours, this nevertheless does not change their decision to divorce in the first place. More importantly, many of the participants emphasised combating stigma about divorce and instilling tolerance through being more open rather than remaining silent on the issue. All of these factors have implications for attitudinal and behavioural changes in public, which might potentially lead to a shift in the existing family ideology and practice in Turkey.

## DISCUSSION

Divorce is an index of change in the family, not only because increasing divorce rates change individuals' marital status, but also because diverse family types such as single-parent and step families are formed in the wake of divorce; these have consequences on public opinion. The increased divorce rate of the past two decades in Turkey attests to family stress. Different dimensions of divorce address different challenges to existing family norms. And it seems the most pressing challenge occurs in the aftermath of divorce by either single-parent or remarried families. In this study we show that divorce gives way to structural and ideational shifts in family lives.

Through the lense of the narrative interviews of 31 divorced women, this study reveals that socio-economic reality changes difficulties for gender roles, allowing us to tap the interplay between cultural expectations and ideational shifts, and resultant marital breakup. As 13 participants in our study stated, they were the sole breadwinners due to their husband's avoidance of contributing towards household expenses, and lack of interest in taking care of the family. In a traditional society where the roles of husbands and wives are highly differentiated, and where male decision making is prevalent regardless of women's status, withdrawal of men from their primary role can be considered a challenge to the existing family ideology.

What is interesting from a sociological point of view is the unexpected way these traditional gender roles are challenged, namely, highly educated and professional women who deny traditional gender norms in effect are demanding that the traditional male breadwinning role be reinstated, even though this demand might be in the name of equality of sharing financial responsibilities. Men, on the other hand in a patriarchal setting, are shifting away from their socially expected roles of taking care of the family financially. And the conflict-ridden situation lends itself to severe family stress, eventually leading to marital separation. In other words, the conflict is remedied in a non-traditional way, which is a challenge to the traditional family system in Turkey.

Another challenge to the family structure is single-parent families formed in the wake of divorce. The majority of women interviewed, who were single parents themselves, stressed the need for diverse forms of families to be recognised, which may again lead to attitudinal changes in public opinion (Thornton 2009). In addition, the increasing number of remarried families renders fundamental change in marriage patterns as well as in family structures. In our study, no matter what the participants experienced, they definitely preferred the married state and valued the marriage experience in its own right. Moreover, their strong emphasis on emotional gratification and democratic relationships challenges the traditional meaning of marriage, where husband and wife are assigned certain roles in the family and male dominance is the norm.

There can be no doubt that these developments lead to changes in public opinion. Though divorce is deemed a deviation from socially acceptable family behaviour, the fact that the divorce rate is increasing and becoming more common has resulted in a more positive public image of divorce. In this particular study, despite the fact that women faced negative attitudes, they felt that they were nevertheless in a better situation than older generations. Moreover, some of the women who were actively participating in an association dealing with divorced women's well-being stated that they worked hard to change public opinion for the better. Changes in public opinion of divorce, as one might expect, potentially works towards making the social consequences of divorce more tolerable, which in turn makes the decision to divorce easier.

Finally, our findings must be evaluated in light of the study's restrictions such as limited sample size and gender. Subsequent research should investigate the impact of divorce on families of different social classes, for both genders, and with a larger sample.

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