

## Suriyeli Göçmen Aile Yapısında Kadının Konumu: Ankara İli Örneđi

The Status of Women in the Syrian Migrant Family Structure: Example of Ankara Province

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### **Abstract**

Immigration is a movement of displacement that has affecting societies economically, socially, culturally and politically. During the civil war in Syria that has started in 2011, hundreds of thousands of people have migrated abroad to save their lives. Women and children have been the most disadvantaged group of victims of this war. The war had many religious, social, economic, political and cultural consequences. One of them is the change in the family structure and the status of women. The immigration process caused the family structure of both host and guest countries to change. Immigration has made the role and status of women even more significant. Many families have migrated to different parts of Turkey due to internal disorders, war and political pressure in Syria. The aim of this research is to address the change in the family structure of Syrian migrant women who migrated to Ankara Province and reside in the districts of Mamak, Altındağ, Yenimahalle, Keçiören after immigration. This study has importance in the means of addressing the difference that immigration creates in women's status and responsibilities in the family additional to the religious, socio-cultural, economic and educational aspects. In this study, in which gereksiz qualitative research methods were used, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Syrian migrant women who had forcibly migrated to Turkey and reside in Ankara. Interviews range from 45 minutes to 3 hours. In addition, some time was spent with the social group with which the study was carried out while working in the field. By applying in-depth interviews, it is aimed to figure out the family structure and statuses of Syrian migrant women in Ankara. As a result of the interviews, topics such as demographic data, socio-cultural structure and family structure were discussed. As a result of the research, it was seen that forced immigration had impacts on the lives of female participants depending on their religious, social and cultural structures. These impacts have caused changes in the lives of the participants and their domestic relationships.

**Keywords:** Family Structure, Immigration, Impacts of immigration, Syrian Women, War

## **Suriyeli Göçmen Aile Yapısında Kadının Konumu: Ankara İli Örneđi**

### **Öz**

Göç, toplumlari ekonomik, sosyal, kültürel ve siyasi olarak etkileyen bir yer deđiřtirme hareketidir. 2011’de bařlayan Suriye’deki iç savařla birlikte yüz binlerce insan canlarını kurtarmak için ülkeden göç etmiřtir. Kadınlar ve çocuklar, bu savařın mađdur olan en önemli dezavantajlı grubu olmuřtur. Savařın çeřitli dini, sosyal, ekonomik, siyasi ve kültürel pek çok sonucu olmuřtur. Bunlardan biri de aile ve kadının konumunda meydana gelen deđiřimlerdir. Göç süreci, hem ev sahibi hem de

misafir ülkelerin aile yapısının deđişmesine neden olabilmektedir. Göç, kadının rolünü ve konumunu daha da önemli hale gelmesini sağlamıştır. Suriye’de yaşanan iç karışıklıklar, savaş, siyasi baskı gibi sebeplerle birçok aile Türkiye’nin farklı yerlerine göç etmiştir. Bu araştırmada amaç, Ankara’ya göç eden ve Mamak, Altındağ, Yenimahalle, Keçiören ilçelerinde ikamet eden Suriyeli göçmen kadınların, göç sonrası yaşadıkları aile yapısındaki deđişimi ele almaktadır. Bu çalışma göçün kadının aile içi konumu ve sorumluluklarında meydana getirdiđi farklılığını, dini, sosyo-kültürel, ekonomi ve eğitim yönleriyle ele alması bakımından önemlidir. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı bu çalışmada, zorunlu olarak Türkiye’ye göç etmiş ve Ankara’da ikamet eden Suriyeli 20 göçmen kadınla derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler, 45 dakika ile 3 saat aralığında deđişmektedir. Ayrıca sahada bulunulan süre içerisinde çalışma yürütülen toplumsal grupla kısmi zaman geçirilmiştir. Derinlemesine görüşme ile Ankara’daki Suriyeli göçmen kadınların aile yapısı ve kendi konumları anlamaya çalışılmıştır. Yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda demografik veriler, sosyo-kültürel yapı ve aile yapısı gibi konular ele alınmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda zorunlu göçün kadın katılımcıların hayatında dini, sosyal, kültürel yapılarına ilişkin etkiler meydana getirdiđi görülmüştür. Bu etkiler, katılımcıların yaşantılarında, aile içi ilişkilerinde deđişimin yaşanmasına sebep olmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Aile Yapısı, Göç, Suriyeli Kadın, Göçün Etkileri, Savaş

### Geniş Özet

Araştırmada farklı sosyo-ekonomik geçmişe sahip 20 Suriyeli kadın ile görüşülmüştür. Göçün katılımcıların hayatında dini, sosyal, kültürel, ekonomik hayatlarında ve aile yapılarında deđişimler yaşamasına sebep olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu süreçte dilin hala kadınları zorlayan en önemli engel olduğu görülmüştür. Bunun sebepleri ise, kadınların eşlerinin kimi zaman dışarıya çıkmasına izin vermemesi, kimi zaman da ev ve çocuk bakımını paylaşacağı aile dayanışmasından yoksun olması ve bunu ücretli karşılama noktasındaki maddi imkansızlıklarıdır. Kadınların hem pandemi döneminin etkisiyle hem de dil probleminin aşılmasından dolayı komşuları ile ilişkileri oldukça sınırlı kalmıştır. Kadınların çoğunlukla sosyo-psikolojik açıdan toplumla uyum sağlama sürecinde kolaylık sağlayan unsurun, ortak dini inanç olduğu görülmüştür.

Günümüzde aile bireylerinin rolleri, özellikle de karı-koca rolleri eskisi gibi kesin çizgilerle ayrılmamaktadır. Bundan dolayı her aile bireyinin farklı kişilik özellikleri olduğu gibi, her ailenin de farklı dinamikleri vardır ve bu dinamikler zamana ve mekana göre deđişebilmektedir. Göçmen Suriyeli kadınların Türkiye’deki kadın rollerinden etkilenerek günlük hayatta daha görünür olmaları, rollerde belirgin deđişikliklere neden olmuştur. Bu anlamda, artık kadınlar toplumun da beklentilerini içeren geleneksel rolleri sergilememektedir. Dolayısıyla Suriyeli göçmen ailelerde aile yapısı, ailenin işlevleri ve aile üyelerinin rolleri açısından gelenekselden moderne doğru ilerleyen bir süreç yaşanmaktadır.

Suriyeli kadınların eğitim seviyeleri oldukça düşüktür. Katılımcıların çođu ailelerin kız çocuklarını okutmaya yanaşmamlarından, evde iş gücüne duyulan ihtiyaçtan dolayı eğitimlerini yarıda bırakmıştır. Kadınların hepsi imkan bulabilselerdi kendi eğitimlerini tamamlayıp meslek sahibi olmayı istediklerini belirtmiştir. Bunun için de kız çocuklarının eğitimlerini tamamlayıp çalışmasını istemektedirler.

Paragraf

Suriyeli katılımcı kadınların hepsi evliliklerini görücü usulü ile gerçekleştirmiştir. Evlilikler, Suriyeli kadınlar için toplumsal kabul ve adaptasyon açısından kilit oluşturmaktadır. Kadınlar için evlilik, birey olma, statü atlama, prestij sağlama, güvenlik ihtiyacını karşılama anlamına gelmektedir. Türkiyeli biriyle evlenmek Suriyeli kadınlara hem yasal koruma sağlamakta hem de toplumsal cinsiyet normlarına yönelik bir himaye vaat etmiş görünmektedir. Suriye hukukuna göre boşanma hakkı bulunmakla birlikte görüşülen kadınlar, boşanmayı Allah'ın hoşuna gitmeyen helal olarak görmekte ve boşanmaya kararlılıkla karşı çıkmaktadır. Bunun en önemli sebebi ise boşanmanın toplum tarafından ayıp olarak görülmesi ve kadının tamamen savunmasız kalacağı düşüncesidir.

Kadınlar Suriye'de iken genelde çalışmamaktadır. Suriye'deki yaşam koşullarının Türkiye'ye nazaran kolay olmasından dolayı kadınlar çalışmaya mecbur kalmamıştır. Katılımcıların çoğunluğu, ekonomik olarak göç öncesi hayatlarının buraya kıyasla daha iyi olduğunu belirtmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra kadının çalışması Suriye'de ayıp karşılanmaktadır. Fakat Türkiye'de Suriyeli kadınlar ekonomik koşullara bağlı olarak çalışmak istemektedir. Ama kadının dil engelinden dolayı evden çıkmaması, ev dışındaki alanlarda tamamen eşlerine bağımlı hale getirmektedir. Bununla birlikte çocukların bakımı ve hanenin düzeninin kadına bağlı olmasından dolayı kadınların çalışmaları mümkün olamamaktadır.

Suriyeli ailelerde artık aile büyüklerinin denetimi azalmış ve aile içi ilişki biçimi değişmeye başlamıştır. Kadınların önemli bir bölümü, kendi haklarına ve toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkilerinde yaşanan dönüşümden duydukları memnuniyeti anlatırken bir yandan da bu değişimi Türkiye'de yaşamakla ilişkilendirmektedir. Suriyeli kadınlar, Türkiye'de kadının da erkekler gibi aynı haklara sahip olduğunu görüp burada kendilerini daha rahat hissettiklerini belirtmişlerdir.

Kadınların hemen hemen hepsi eşleri tarafından şiddete maruz kaldığını belirtmiştir. Fakat kadınlar, eşlerinin kendilerine uyguladıkları şiddetten dolayı ceza alıp sınır dışı edilme korkusu yaşadığını ve bundan dolayı da kendilerine yönelik şiddetin azaldığını belirtmişlerdir. Kadınların olumsuz şartlara karşı direnmelerinin en büyük dayanağı, çocuklarının varlığı ve onların sorumluluğunun kendilerinde olmasıdır. Bu durum kadınların hayatta kalma ve zorluklara direnme biçimlerine yeni boyutlar kazandırmaktadır. Çocukları olan kadınlar, eşlerine ve evliliğe daha bağımlı hale gelmektedir. Çocuk bakım sorumluluğunun kadında olması, annelik, özellikle eşin kadına karşı uyguladığı şiddet ve kötü davranışlarda dahi evliliğin sürdürülmesinin nedeni olmuştur.

## Introduction

Immigration gradually changes the homogeneous society models, which are the most basic feature of nation states, and transforms societies into multi-identity/multicultural societies. While immigrating, people bring their own religious beliefs, traditions and habits with them.

The civil war that intensified in Syria in 2011 caused more than 6 million people to be move and to seek refuge in many countries, especially border countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

The number of registered Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey has reached 3 million 736 thousand 91 as of 2022.

The total number of children aged 0-18 and women is 2,642,661. Syrian men comprise 53.8% of the total number of Syrians. The rate of Syrian women is 46.2%. When the distribution of migrants migrating to Turkey in 2019 is analysed by provinces, Istanbul is the province that received the highest number of migrants with a rate of 45.3%. Istanbul is followed by Ankara with 9.2%, Antalya with 6.5%, Bursa with 3.5% and İzmir with 2.2%. There are a total of 100,776 Syrians in Ankara. The ratio of registered Syrians under temporary protection to the Turkish population is 4.27% throughout the country (Ministry of Interior, Migration Administration, 2022). Although the settlements of Syrian migrants are more concentrated in the border provinces of Turkey, they spread throughout the country. Immigration is not a one-dimensional phenomenon. The changing relations of Turkish and Syrian citizens with forced immigration are multidimensional in terms of cultural, social and economic aspects. Forced immigration is the collective displacement of people to survive, due to conflict, natural disasters, famine, epidemics, ethnic oppression, or other social, economic, and political reasons. This movement as a result of immigration is not only a spatial change, but also a cultural, economic, sociological, psychological and legal change. This change emerging as a result of immigration affects both the migrants and the host societies. Especially with the impact of the trauma experienced during forced immigration, this change takes place sharply. Immigration is not limited to financial losses caused by displaced people. Social networks formed in families, friends and society also cover the mentioned losses. During forced immigration, where lives and properties are lost in many families and the number of unaccompanied children is around tens of thousands, both the social status of women immigrants and their role in the family become more important. This immigration has mostly affected children and women. The fact that both immigration and family concepts affect each other deeply increases the intersection areas of the two concepts. The social status of women and their importance in maintaining the family institution in a healthy way are undeniable as well.

In this research, it is try to address the Syrian family structure and the social status of women, the reflection of religion on women's lives, and the transformation observed before and after immigration. Considering that the concept of feminization of the immigration phenomenon is gradually taking place in the literature, it is important to remark that the seriousness of this issue is being recognized. When the scientific studies in the fields of sociology of religion or psychology of religion is scanned, researches

on immigrant women could be found. Additionally, studies on immigration, social and cultural adaptation have increased considerably in recent years.

Stating that immigration is a mutual interaction between migrants and locals, Yeter (2018) found that this interaction reveals itself in the changes in women's outfits in Kahramanmaraş Province. Sayın (2018) identified that Syrian women marry at an early age, that early marriages took place before the war as well and this situation increased even more after the war. Güngör (2016)) investigated the structural position of religion in mixed marriages taking place with post-immigration socialization. In the study, the changes in religion, family and culture after immigration are discussed. Yaşar (2018) discussed the employment status of women, the attitude adopted against difficulties, the change in religious practices before and after immigration. It has been identified that women are more affected by the immigration process than men. According to the quantitative study conducted by Ayten and Sağır (2014), depressive tendencies of Syrian refugee women are higher than men. This demonstrates that immigration and war have negative impacts on women. Barın (2015) touched upon the problems experienced by women who took refuge in Turkey. Coştu (2020) studied the reflections of immigration and being a migrant on religious belief and life experience.

### **Conceptual Framework Impacts of Immigration on the Family**

Family is a social institution that ensures the continuation of humanity, in which socialization emerges, which has its own rules, and transfers the traditional structures of the society to future generations. Family has economic, biological and sociological functions that are the most universal in all societies, fulfilling people's emotional needs. Family, which is the most fundamental element for individuals and societies, is the place where basic needs such as nutrition, care, affection, emotional development, psychological development, education, gaining cultural and religious values, and maintaining a healthy mental development, which have a very important place in individuals' lives, are fulfilled. Family is a small society and society is a large family. Family unity is a significant element that increases women's quality of life and ensures a safe and healthy life for the family. Women are the main players and important coordinators of this institution due to their position in the family. The role of women in maintaining the balance in the family and in communication with the environment is great.

The immigration process could cause the family structure of both host and guest countries to change. Immigration leaves its impacts on the religion, economy,

education, language, health, social life and culture of the family, and these impacts may create changes and transformations in migrating families' structures, family relations, and in matters such as decision making and responsibilities, role distribution, employment and social life in the family (Dumon, 1989, 254-256). At the same time, immigration could cause changes in the family type of immigrants (such as extended, nuclear or fragmented family, patriarchal or democratic family) by affecting the population increase or decrease in family members. Immigration has brought new additional burdens and responsibilities to women and has made the role and position of women more important in family balance and relations (Yıldırım, 2007, 968-969). Migrant women try to keep their families together, and during this period they face various risks due to the lack of adequate access to services such as health and education. (Hovey, 2002; 503) In addition, immigration has a liberating feature on women which positively changes the social position in the family. Immigrant women are able to get rid of the pressure they are exposed to by their family or husband in their origin country and if they have migrated to a more democratic society, they can increase their prestige at home, and can establish their own environment in a different culture (Asis, 2003).

Sometimes, a common religious belief could be an element that facilitates the adaptation of the immigrating women to their environment. Both religion and family, which are among the most important institutions of society, are means of socialization. These two institutions are in close relations with each other in preserving their values (Tekin, 2011; 235-263). Family is the primary place where feelings of love, respect, sharing and cooperation are experienced, identity is shaped, religion is learned and practices are performed, and the religious and moral behaviours expected by the society are gained (Kurt, 2009; 1-26). All religions in the world attach importance to the family and accept the family as the main centre of religious life and a major factor in ensuring social order. In particular, religion, which penetrates every aspect of life, is important in determining family relations and role distribution. Religion, which is one of the main elements that determine the limitations of women in life, has developed various doctrines that determine the status of women in society.

### **Method**

Our aim in this research is to examine the demographic, economic and socio-cultural characteristics of Syrian women, their position in the family, and the changes in their thoughts, attitudes and behaviours before and after immigration. In this research, qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis were used. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory

observations. The research area is limited to Ankara province Yenimahalle, Mamak, Keçiören and Altındağ municipalities.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

It is considered that the most appropriate and convenient method for the research to achieve its intended goals is the qualitative research method. In qualitative studies, human meanings are interpreted by the researcher. Qualitative research designs are based on the observation of people in their natural environments and are frequently used in attempts to understand participants' own worldviews through in-depth interviews (Ris, 2012; 374). While this method provides the participants with the opportunity to express themselves directly, it also allows the researcher to have an idea about the emotional states of the participants by observing their gestures and mimics (McCracken, 1988; 9).

The women were first reached by purposive sampling and then by snowball sampling method. The people who are relevant to the subject were identified and interviews were conducted with the sample group. After those participants were interviewed, other people who could give information about the subject were contacted with their guidance. In the study, qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis were used (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018; 41-118). Considering that more reliable results could be achieved by evaluating the qualitative data to be obtained through participatory observation and in-depth interviews, these techniques were used to collect data. Through in-depth interviews, it was aimed to understand the family structure of Syrian migrant women in Ankara and their own statutes. Thus, women were able to describe their situation in all aspects, and women's opinions about their own position in the immigration process were revealed. The interviews were recorded, notes were taken, the records were analysed and interpreted by the researcher by asking permission from the women for recording. Considering the privacy and safety of women, the real names of the women interviewed were not given, and different names were used in this article. Interviews with Syrian women who do not speak Turkish were conducted through an interpreter. In-depth interviews were conducted in places where external factors were less and women were comfortable expressing themselves. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 4 hours.

### **Analysis of data**

The descriptive analysis method was used in the analysis of the data. The data obtained in the descriptive analysis are summarized and interpreted according to the



previously determined themes. In this analysis, direct quotations are frequently given in order to reflect the views of the individuals interviewed or observed in a striking way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018; 242).

## **Findings**

### **Demographic Data**

Considering the demographic data of the study participants, the residence period of women in Ankara varies between 1 and 6 years. Women are between the ages of 15-62. Birthplaces of women are Idlib, Aleppo, al-Bab. Two of the women are illiterate, two of them continue their high school education in Turkey, two of them are university graduates (art teacher and accountant), the others have studied up to different grades between 3 and 9 and left school for various reasons. All of the participants are married, except for two high school students. Women have a minimum number of 3 and a maximum number of 13 children. The average number of children varies between 4 and 6. The average number of people in the family is 5-7 people. In general, the education level of women is low. When the reasons for immigration were investigated, it was revealed that the only factor was war. Their reasons to prefer Turkey is the common religious belief, physical and cultural closeness and that they have relatives who had immigrated before. During the immigration, women have experienced with casualties and loss of goods. Language issues are still one of the greatest obstacles for both Syrian women and their children.

### **Social Life of Women in the Context of Immigration Marriage and Divorce**

Marriage is a contract between two people based on economic needs, the desire to have a child, and love, as deemed appropriate by religion, law, and social law or custom. Marriage is a legal relationship controlled by the state through some laws and regulations (Özgüven, 2014; 19). The family, which is one of the most fundamental institutions of society, is a social union formed by parents, children and people who have blood relation. Through marriage, an institutional union is formed between men and women, which is considered legally and socially valid and provides a certain status to the children to be born. According to Bourdieu, who evaluates marriage as a universal social reproduction strategy, marriage includes cultural investment, economic strategies and fertility that allow the family to reproduce itself biologically and socially (Bourdieu, 2014; 120). Because marriage plays an important role in the manner of as a member of society for both men and women.

Immigration and war conditions cause to attribute different meanings and functions to the institution of marriage. When we have a look at the marriages in Syria, the

marriages were mostly realized by arranged method, where the future spouse was not seen until the wedding day. In this manner, Çiğdem (37) explains her marriage decision as follows:

*I saw my husband for the first time on the wedding day. In our family, marriage decision is given by our father. My father doesn't ask us about it. We will marry whoever the father wants. We can't say we don't want that. All families know each other there. Everyone knows which family is good and which is bad. If the boy or his family is bad, families do not allow their daughters to marry him anyway.*

Some participants had not seen their spouses until the wedding. In traditional family structures, while the parents have an active say in selecting a spouse, individuals who will marry in the process of change are more active in their own marriage and make their own decisions. While religious beliefs and values are important primary conditions sought in a spouse while getting married in traditional structures, factors such as education, social status and economic level are important in modern family structures (Akdoğan, 2002; 45). Everyone knows each other in Syria since the residence area is small. In marriages in Syria, close relatives are preferred more because of the sense of security arising from knowing them. This also strengthens kinship. However, in the new generation, this method is not very popular and is criticized. Sevin (18) expresses this situation as follows:

*My mom and dad had an arranged marriage. Since they lived in small places, the families already knew each other. It was like that in their times. But I don't want to. I'm going to study and work at the university anyway. I want to decide who my spouse will be. I want to select him myself. In this era, one cannot get married without knowing each other.*

Polygamous marriages are a phenomenon that exists in the family structure in Syria. However, none of the women interviewed had a polygamous marriage, and the women did not incline towards this situation. It is seen that Syrian women have embraced the modern family and lifestyle more. Ahsen (42) says,

*It is possible to marry more than one woman in Syria. I know this is forbidden for you. It is possible, but I do not want my husband to marry. It is not good. However, it was more common during my grandfather's times. My grandfather had two wives. They had many women and children. But it is not that common in our times.*

There is a legal system in Syria that allows polygamy, and that religious marriage is considered as an official marriage. It has been observed that the participating women who migrated to Turkey know that religious marriage is not official in Turkey. In

Syria, marriage is performed according to Islamic religious requirements. Mahr is given during the wedding. Women stated that they received *mehri muaccel* and *mehri mübeddel* while they were getting married. *Mehri muaccel* is the mahr paid during or before the marriage contract. Women spend the money to buy themselves household goods and gold and shop for their pre-wedding needs. In addition, they mentioned the *mehir-i müeccel*, which must be paid to the woman in case the marriage ends due to reasons such as talaq (divorce) or death, which is tied to a certain maturity and postponed. This amount has been promised by the family of the groom rather more than the *mehr-i muaccel*. But no woman we interviewed considers divorce anyway.

Ahsen (42) says,

*When we get married, we get mahr as the bride's party. Mahr money is spent for special needs of women, gold and household goods at our weddings. We go shopping, we buy what we want, we spend this money. In our culture, the groom's party organizes the wedding anyway.*

When asked about the bride price, everyone stated that there is no bride price. However, the purpose was clearly understood later on, since the interpreter was a university graduate Syrian who speaks Turkish well. In fact, fathers buy goods with some of the money they receive as mahr, and set aside some for themselves as bride price. Women are not interested in this situation and consider it normal. It was also stated that all expenses belong to the groom's party.

In Syria, it is not welcomed especially for unmarried girls to go out on their own and without permission. Çiğdem (37) says,

*It's not good for girls to go out on their own. If they do so, people say that she is bad (with a grimace). They say that girl is useless. You get a bad reputation. Nobody wants to get married then.*

It was stated that this situation continued after marriage and that married women did not go out without their husband's permission. Even women believe that they should receive permission from their husbands. Gender roles refer to the various roles attributed to women and men. Women and men are expected to "play" their roles, adhering to the "script" written by society. In the traditional social structure, women find a place for themselves as an object, not a subject, who are determined, not the ones determining (Çelik, 2010; 25-35).

Elmas (32) says,

*We were not able to go out on our own in our father's house. In fact, we were five sisters. Once people were coming to our house with an intention to see us for marriage purposes, one of our neighbours was surprised to hear that there were girls in our house. After marriage, we cannot leave home without permission of our husband. But my husband was not able to take care of the child's school affairs or to go shopping for the house needs, he used to allow me to go out for these reasons and I used to go out.*

Marriages between the two societies were considered natural due to historical relations such as business and trade-based relations, religious and linguistic common points, and kinship in the border provinces of Syria and Turkey for many years (Dedeoğlu and Ekiz Gökmen, 2011; 142). Getting married to Turks is preferred as a way out for young girls to feel safe and secure by obtaining legal status and rights, to escape from political and economic pressures, and as a solution against difficult living conditions. Therefore, young Syrian girls prefer to marry Turkish men. Ayşe (43) says,

*Young girls now prefer Turkish men for marriage. Because girls do not want to return to Syria and they want to stay in Turkey. Because here they have freedom. After marriage, they will have a kinship and issue an identity card here. There will be no financial difficulties. They want to be right holders here.*

As the security of women who have attained citizenship or residence permit through marriage in varying periods depending on the laws of the countries increases, the ways of coping with the difficulties they encounter increase. It is possible to observe this in different aspects in experiences of married migrant women in Turkey (Dedeoğlu and Ekiz Gökmen, 2011) or in the experiences of women migrating from Turkey to European countries (Öztaş, 2010; Erten, 2017).

Immigrants may experience anxiety, irritability, unhappiness, feelings of hopelessness or helplessness, rapidly changing mood and stress symptoms (Tekin, 2005, 138). It could be said that one of the most important ways for women to hold on in society and to make themselves take place in the society is to be a wife and mother. The main reason for the resistance of the interviewed women against negative conditions was the existence of their children and the women's responsibility for them. Elmas (32), who lost his husband in the war and had to migrate with her family says, *All the responsibility of life is on me. I feel lonely. This wouldn't have happened if my husband were alive. Because he would work, he would take care of us. It's hard for a*

*woman not to have a husband. Being a woman is hard. I take care of the house and the children. I have no one to lean on. But there are my children. I stand for them.*

Answering the question of what gender would you prefer if you had only one child, Ayşe (43) says:

*Whatever is fated to be. But if I had the right to have only one child, I would want a girl. Girls are fine. She would always be a supporter of her mother. But men are important to us.*

On the other hand, Meral (65) says,

*If you asked me before, I would answer as boy. Men are important in our country. You must have a son. When a woman gave birth to a girl, they would not care about the woman. But when a boy was born, everyone would congratulate, it would be a feast. When a woman gives birth to sons, everyone cherishes the woman. Even one boy is not enough. I have 6 sons and 5 daughters. But after I migrated here, my answer is girl. Girls took care of me. Men are busy with their own family, work, livelihood. They don't take care of me.*

In traditional societies, it is seen that women experience an increase in their status in society through marriage and gain some achievements by giving birth to a boy. It could be said that one of the most important ways for women to hold on in society and to make themselves exist is to be a wife and mother.

Syrian women do not take kindly to ending marriages and divorce. Divorce, in simple terms, means that the husband and wife completely end their marriage with a legal decision in a way to get married again. Divorce is not common in countries where traditional factors are effective.

Syrian women know that the man promises a certain amount of mahr when it comes to divorce in the future. Nadya's (38) opinions about divorce are as follows,

*In our society, women don't get divorced, they don't want to. There is a hadith, "The worst of halal things before Allah is divorce". A woman has the right, but she does not use it. Because this is very shameful. Her family wouldn't let her. She lives separately, but still does not apply to court. They say she has no right to do so. The woman is decried. Even if we are not satisfied, we still stand for our children. We are very fond of our children. Even if there is violence, it is not good, but still there is no divorce. Divorce is the last resort if it is very necessary.*

The life story of Ayşe (43) is quite interesting. Ayşe stated that she married to a Turkish man and decided to divorce 5 years ago due to severe disagreement and

physical violence. However, Ayşe's family did not take kindly to this because it contradicted their traditions and opposed it. Ayşe requested the annulment of the case that she had previously applied to the court for divorce since her own family did not give permission to divorce.

*Divorce is a right, it is the halal thing Allah dislikes most, divorce is shameful. My brother is a doctor, the other one is a lawyer. My family asked me to cancel my divorce petition that I had filed against my husband with whom I lived separately for 5 years. They said it wouldn't happen. They did not accept. I cancelled it. In order not to upset them. I currently live with my son. My husband lives in another home. We are not divorced, but we are separate.*

Although they have the right to divorce regarding to Syrian law, the women interviewed strongly oppose divorce. The most important reason is that it is considered shameful by society and the thought that the woman will be completely helpless.

#### **Decision making and responsibility in the family**

In traditional families, men are the authority, power and decision-making mechanism. It has been observed that the participation levels of Syrian women in decision-making mechanisms regarding family and domestic life matters are quite low. The women participants were asked what changes they experienced in family decision making, family responsibilities and role distribution before and after immigration. All of the participants stated that their responsibilities increased after immigration. Stating that their responsibilities about the household and children have increased because her husband works so hard, Elmas (32) says:

*My husband works more than he used to in Syria. He arrives home late, feels very tired when he arrives. I take care of the house. I do the chores and take care of the kids. I take the children to school, I pick them up.*

As supporters of family founding, women do not see themselves as equal to men. Leyla (41), who stated that her opinions were not asked about family decisions, especially when she was in Syria, and that even if her opinions were asked, her husband would implement his own decision, says:

*My husband never consulted me before. Nowadays, he has started to ask my opinion, but I always say okay to whatever he says. Because I know that even if he asks me, he will do what he wants anyway.*

Büşra (54) says:

*My husband has changed here more. Previously, he would either implement his own decisions or his family's decisions. He would never ask me. But, in Turkey, he asks my decision as well.*

The family structure in Syria has changed from the traditional extended family to the nuclear family before and after the immigration. While traditional authority patterns and sexist role distributions are dominant in the accepted family structure in Syria, more equitable role sharing is observed in the family structure after the immigration to Turkey. Now, the control of the elders of the family has decreased and the relationship within the family has begun to change. While a significant number of women describe their satisfaction with the transformation in gender relations, they also associate this change with living in Turkey. Stating that after the immigration to Turkey, there were changes in the decision making of the family, Ahsen (42) says:

*When I was in Syria, we shared the same house with my wife's parents and my brother-in-laws' wives. Here, I no longer live with my husband's family. There is no mother-in-law or brothers' wives here. My husband has started asking me while making a decision. It has changed here. In Turkey, women and men are equal.*

### **Employment and Working Life**

Because of the easier living conditions in Syria compared to Turkey and the social perception that paid work outside the home is not suitable for women, women mostly stated that they did not work. After immigration, women tend to work out of necessity as they have financial difficulties during the resettlement process. Both the difficulties of the pandemic period and the impoverishment brought about by immigration have caused the acceptance of women's participation in the workforce. It has been observed that women are socialized, and they are also informed about the job opportunities by participating in courses and similar activities for education by developing a network of relations through NGOs (such as the Migrant Rights and Social Cohesion Association, where an opportunity is found to make observations and conduct interviews).

Syrian women in Turkey have problems in accessing regular and secure jobs in which they could be paid enough to sustain their lives. Women who work outside their houses) can only start working after getting the approval of their husband or family, and women who are not allowed to work outside tend to do piecework in the home (İçduygu & Diker, 2017, Körükmez, L., Karakılıç, İ.Z., Daniş D., 2020; 18).

It is seen that women in Syria tend to assume the role of an ideal housewife. Çiğdem (37) from Aleppo, whose husband's financial situation was good before she moved,

and who had never worked as a paid employee, states that she would prefer a job provided that her husband is with her. She describes this as follows:

*Even if women are educated, they devote themselves to their husbands and children and do not think of working. In Syria, women did not work. Men had to work. There was no such thing as house rent, we all had a house. Our husbands had jobs. We had a car. Our furniture was nice. We were comfortable. We used to travel and go on vacation. In fact, when my husband came to Mersin, Turkey for a business meeting, I came as well and visited there. But here my husband was laid off. They were already working too much. The money my husband earned was not enough, they pay less. I have never worked. But if I had worked here, it would have been on the condition that my husband would also work with me. It is possible if my husband works in the same place where I work. Otherwise is not possible.*

It is seen that some of the families have experienced the loss of class and status as well as socio-economic losses. In the study conducted by Charles and Denman (2012; 201), this situation is expressed that middle- and upper-class women living in cities such as Damascus and Aleppo have much more opportunities than others, and although the difference between men and women in terms of education level is very low in Syria, women's education is not rendered into employment sufficiently.

In general, women consider that it is not right for women to go to work or work alone as well. However, Nevin (32) stated that she contributed to the family budget by cooking in a private girls' dormitory in Ankara, but she thought that housework and taking care of her four children conflicted with her workload and she decided to quit working because she had to:

*I would like to continue working. It was fine. I was earning money. But I couldn't manage both at the same time anymore. I was very tired. I couldn't work both inside and outside the home at the same time. It was very difficult. The house was empty when the children came home from school. I didn't have enough time for housework.*

Women did not want to work in Syria with the thought that it will be shamed in society, they want to work in Turkey to provide financial support to the family, but they stated that they have a lot of responsibilities in their family and they are busy with housework and their children. As a matter of fact, Nadya (38), who states that mothers bring their children to school and pick them up every day in Turkey, even how hard this is during the day, says:

*I would like to work. But who will look after the children? Children will be left unattended. My husband works. We have no one. In Syria, our children used to go to*



*school themselves. Here, cars pass by on the roads leading to the school. An accident may take place. We are worried. That's why we bring the kids ourselves. This keeps us busy.*

The main reasons behind the avoidance of Syrian women from business life in Turkey are the disruption of childcare, disruption of home order, not knowing the language and the negative perception of being together with foreign men in the workplace. The fact that Syrian women cannot benefit from job opportunities outside the home is also directly related to their position in the family. The fact that women are dependent on their husbands' permission to go out, lack of family solidarity to share home and childcare, and the inability to meet this need on a paid basis constitute obstacles to working. Social life for Syrian women who do not speak the language and leave the home, who are completely dependent on their husbands outside the home, seems very limited and it is difficult for them to join business life. In the interviews, it has been seen that women who had migrated to Turkey in the first years of the war still do not know Turkish. Lack of social environment is a factor that prevents women from joining employment. Because, as revealed from the interviews, the interaction of Syrian migrant women with the host society is limited. Ayşe (43) says:

*Before the pandemic, we were on good terms with our neighbours. We were getting together with our Turkish neighbours to recite the Qur'an. We were going to their house. I was understanding them a little. We don't see each other anymore after covid.*

One of the factors that facilitate the social adaptation of Syrian women is to have a common religious belief. In the process of socio-psychological adaptation by establishing bonds with individuals in the host society, a common religious belief paved the way for developing common belongings. Women stated that they had come together to recite the Qur'an with their Turkish neighbours before the pandemic. However, with the pandemic, neighbour relations have weakened, social relations have become distant, so the language problem has not been overcome yet.

### **Education**

The education level of women is quite low. Conducted research shows this as well. While 62% of Syrian migrant women are at primary school or low education level because they dropped out of their education, 19% have never been to school and 21% are high school graduates. Only 5% have received higher education. The rate of girls who drop out of school between the ages of 12 and 14 is higher than boys (Yücel, A., Utas, C., Luchsinger G., Kavlak, İ.V. , Kristjansdottir IB , Freizer, S., 2018; 19).

Participants were asked questions about their own and their family members' educational lives. Almost all of the participants drop out the school due to the fact that their families considered it unnecessary to educate their daughters and that there was a need for workforce at home. Nevin (39) says:

*Our father was sick. While my brothers worked outside, we girls worked in our own fields. As we were crowded, we were getting our work done. There was no need to recruit anyone else.*

Elmas (32) says:

*I was going to school. I was the oldest child in the house. While I was in lessons, my mother used to summon me from school to take care of my siblings at home. I was leaving the lesson and going home. The teacher was also surprised by this.*

Most migrant women who do not continue their education after primary education maintain their roles in the family by getting married. Considering the age at first marriage of Syrian migrant women aged 25-49, 38% state that they got married before the age of 18, 55% before the age of 20 and 12% before the age of 15. The average age at first marriage for Syrian women aged 25-49 is 19.3%. Studies show that a Syrian migrant woman in Turkey gives birth to an average of 5.3 children. The highest fertility rate is in the 20-24 age group (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, 2019; 2-3).

When we asked the participants what the age of marriage should be for girls, the answer we got was the age range of 22-25. Mothers stated that their daughters should not marry at an early age, but marry after completing their education. Some of the women who have daughters attach particular importance to their education because they regret that their education life was hindered. Nevin (39) says:

*Girls should get married at the age of 23 or something. Because they must complete school first. They should find a job. They should earn their own money. They should feel confident and then get married. They shouldn't get married early like in our times.*

Meryem (15), who could not attend high school after completing the 8th grade even though she wanted to, stated that both her mother and she were upset because she could not enrol in the high school close to her home. Meryem, who could not continue her education due to financial impossibility and insecurity, expresses her difficulties in primary education as follows.

*Previously, we couldn't speak Turkish. We could not understand our lessons, we could not write. So we couldn't do our homework. Our teachers were giving us low grades.*

*Our classmates did not be friends with us. We were excluded. Our technology design teacher took care of me because my painting was so good. I just received high grades in that course. We couldn't sit at desks in front of the class. We were standing aside. We have always made friendship with ourselves. The girls here are spoiled. They are disobedient to their mothers and fathers. We do not have such attitudes. We were surprised at first. It seems strange to us. But now we're used to it. They are like this because they are teenagers.*

Almost all Syrians receive assistance. Women participants stated that some of their sons work because high school expenses are high and they want to contribute financially to the family, and they drop out school for their shelter and food needs. Elmas from al-Bab (32) describes her situation as follows:

*Whether children go to kindergarten or primary school, they ask for money. That's why we are not able to send them to kindergarten. We also need money for their lunch box. The cost is too much. There are also families who take children from school when they grow up and let them work. Even if girls go to school, boys may have to work.*

All of the women stated that they wanted to complete their education and have a profession in the past. In Turkey, they want their daughters to be educated. The impacts of immigration on education can be seen clearly here. Sevin (18), on the other hand, describes her family's attitude as follows:

*If I were in Syria, maybe I wouldn't go to school. My mother really wants me to receive an education. Some families do not send their children to school and have them work to earn more money. But my mom wants me to graduate from a university and become a paramedic/emergency medical technician in ambulances to give first aid to patients in need. Because she wanted to be a healthcare professional. As my brother didn't want to study, she picked him up from school and made him work for my education.*

It is observed that the reason why children do not attend school in Turkey is due to financial difficulties (such as stationery, school supplies, school uniforms and transportation expenses).

### **Domestic Violence**

Violence is a negative action that causes physical and mental harm, injury and disability to people. The most common form of domestic violence is violence by a husband against his wife and by parents against their children. Violence against women occurs in many different forms and intensities, negatively affecting women's lives and harming their physical and mental integrity. According to the conducted

research, the forms of violence that Syrian migrant women are exposed to may vary and change. It has been revealed that 9 out of 10 refugee women are exposed to physical violence, 8 to emotional violence, and 8 to sexual violence (Survey Report on Determining the Needs of Syrian Women Applying to Women's Health Counselling Centres Related to Services in Reproductive Health and Gender-Based Violence, 2019; 36-37).

The women stated that they were exposed to violence in different ways before and after immigration. Most of the women state that they were exposed to violence by their husbands more while they were in Syria, and when they came to Turkey, violence decreased because it is a crime. Ahsen (42) says:

*My husband used to beat me more especially in Syria. Because I had my mother-in-law and sister-in-law in the family. He would behave more masculine and ruthless when we were with them. But he was more compassionate when we were on our own. The situation has changed after coming here. Because my husband is afraid of being deported, and he no longer beats me because his family is not with us.*

In general, in Turkey, Syrian men are not relax about violence as they do in their countries, both because they are afraid of being deported by law enforcement officers and there is no authoritarian family pressure. Hirma (25) describes the violence she was exposed to as follows:

*I got married here. I am exposed to violence from both my husband and father-in-law. I cannot do anything. I never go out. If I go out, my husband will beat me. Occasionally, my mother-in-law visits. We are four sister-in-laws. She stays at our home to control us. My father-in-law is also evil. Always his decisions are implemented in the family. When my husband's older brother beat his wife, she reported to the police. Thereupon, my brother-in-law got very angry and left her pregnant wife at her mother's home for nine months. The boy was born there. Then she came back. Her husband still beats her. But she can't do anything because she is scared.*

Father-in-law and mother-in-law are the decision mechanism in the family. In traditional extended families, authority is usually given to the oldest members of the family. The main determinant of authority in the traditional family is age as well as gender. That is, in traditional extended families, authority is usually given to the oldest members of the family. These people are either the man's father or mother. It is seen that close relationships consisting of family, relatives and acquaintances are important

support mechanisms for women, but they can also be challenging and a source of violence.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the experience of 20 Syrian women from different socio-economic backgrounds, some of whom I share their stories here, immigration has led to changes in the religious, social, cultural, economic lives and family structures of the participants. Language is still the most important barrier that compels women. The reasons for this are that their husbands not allowing them to go out, lack of family solidarity which they will share the care of the house and children, and their financial impossibility at the point of paying for this. Due to the pandemic and the inability to overcome the language problem, women's relations with their neighbours have been very limited. Common religious belief has been the factor that facilitated the process of women's socio-psychological adaptation to society.

Today, the roles of family members, especially the roles of husband and wife, are not separated as sharply as they used to be. Therefore, as each family member has different personality traits, each family has different dynamics and these dynamics could change according to time and place. The fact that immigrant Syrian women are getting more visible in daily life by being influenced by women's roles in Turkey has led to significant changes in roles. In this sense, women no longer play traditional roles that include the expectations of society. Therefore, in Syrian migrant families, there is a process that progresses from traditional to modern in terms of family structure, family functions and roles of family members.

The education level of Syrian women is quite low. Most of the participants left school because of the families' reluctance to educate their daughters and the need for workforce at home. All of the women stated that if they had the opportunity, they would like to complete school and have a profession. For this reason, they want their daughters to complete their education and work.

All of the Syrian women participants got married in an arranged way. Marriage is a key factor for migrant women in terms of social acceptance and adaptation. For women, marriage means being an individual, getting a higher status, obtaining prestige, fulfilling the need for security. Marrying a Turkish person seems to have promised Syrian women both legal protection and protection of gender norms.

Although they have the right to divorce as per Syrian law, the women interviewed consider divorce as *halal*, which Allah dislikes, and are firmly opposed to divorce. The most important reason for this is that divorce is seen as a shame by society and it is believed that women will completely be vulnerable.

Women generally do not work in Syria. Since the living conditions in Syria were easier than in Turkey, women did not have to work. The majority of the participants stated that their pre-immigration life was economically better than here. In addition, women employment is considered shameful in Syria. However, Syrian women in Turkey want to work depending on the economic conditions. However, it is not possible for them to work since they do not go out due to language barriers, they are completely dependent on their husbands outside the home, and children care and the order of the household depend on the woman.

In Syrian families, the control of the elders has decreased and the relationship within the family has begun to change. While a significant number of women describe their satisfaction with the transformation in their rights and gender relations, they also associate this change with living in Turkey. They see that women in Turkey have the same rights as men and they feel more comfortable here.

Almost all of the women have been exposed to violence by their husbands. However, their husbands' fear of deportation caused violence to decrease in Turkey. The greatest basis for women to endure these negative conditions is the existence of their children and that their responsibility is on them. This situation adds new dimensions to the way women survive and endure difficulties. Women with children become more dependent on their husbands and marriage. The fact that the responsibility of childcare belongs to the woman, motherhood has been the reason for the continuation of the marriage especially even when the husband uses violence and behaves badly against the woman.

As a result, it is necessary to produce various solutions in order to eliminate the problems brought by immigration. The most important problem of Syrian migrant women in Turkey is the language barrier. In this regard, both public institutions and non-governmental organizations have some responsibilities. Education, guidance and information activities for migrant women need to be expanded. It is necessary for the media to avoid discourses that will leave a negative mark on the social memory against Syrian women, and to facilitate the social integration processes of women by supporting their socio-economic development. It should be ensured that social assistance and services are carried out effectively. All stakeholders interested in the

situation of immigrants in Turkey should work to remove the barriers to refugee girls and women's participation in both basic education and vocational training, and develop special support programs that will be designed according to different needs to be determined for this purpose. Women should be provided with more secure working conditions. Necessary studies should be carried out for the employment of these women in the workforce by creating vocational courses for Syrian women. Efforts should be made to ensure that women who are employed in the labor market are supervised, that is, to prevent unregistered employment, and to put women in a formal employment by increasing inspections in the informal sectors. The number of people who provide psycho-social assistance to post-war traumatized women should be increased, group therapy should gain weight, and legal support services against violence should be increased. Working effectively with non-governmental organizations, it should carry out activities to raise awareness and empower women in accessing their rights to Syrian women

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