

A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH ON KIN MARRIAGES IN TURKEY

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Abstract

This paper intends to do a sociological analysis of kin marriage, a subject matter of sharp discussions both in Turkish society and in European public. Traditionally, to some extent, practiced and largely approved by the society in Turkey, this type of marriage was opened to discussions during the second half of the last century. The discussions started to be gradually dominated by a medical discourse that focuses on bio-medical results of kin marriage and treats it as a risk factor. Although such views are widely accepted in society, kin marriage insistently keeps its existence. Based on a sociological perspective, this paper aims to analyze the factors leading to the existence of kin marriage despite wide spreading disapproval thoughts and attitudes against it.

Keywords: Kin Marriage, Marriage, Medical Approach, Sociological Approach, Turkey.

Türkiye’de Akrabalık Evliliklerine Sosyolojik Yaklaşım

Öz

Bu makale, gerek Türkiye toplumunda gerekse Avrupa kamuoyunda keskin tartışmalara konu olan akrabalık evliliklerinin sosyolojik bir çözümlemesini yapmaktadır. Geleneksel olarak Türkiye toplumunda belirli oranlarda yapılan ve geniş toplum kesimleri tarafından onaylanan bu evlilikler, geçen yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren tartışılmaya açılmış ve bu tartışmalara giderek tıbbi söylem egemen olmaya başlamıştır. Tıbbi söylem, akrabalık evliliklerinin biomedikal sonuçları üzerinde yoğunlaşmış olup bu evlilikleri bir risk faktörü olarak telakki etmektedir. Bu konudaki görüşler toplumda giderek yaygınlaştığı halde akrabalık evlilikleri ısrarla varlığını sürdürmektedir. Makalenin amacı, kanaat ve tutumlardaki negatif gelişmelere rağmen akrabalık evliliklerinin hangi etkenlerle bağlantılı olduğunu sosyolojik bir perspektiften çözümlemeye çalışmaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Evlilik, Akriba Evliliği, Türkiye, Tıbbi Yaklaşım, Sosyolojik Yaklaşım.

Introduction

Being a universal institution, marriage is generally defined as a contract between partners who decide to live together while it is also considered to be the basis of family. Both Turkish Civil Law and the religion of the majority in Turkey, Islam, define marriage as being a contract (*akit*); it is considered to be legitimate as long as it is established in front of an authority and witnesses. According to national researches, the majority of Turkish people (86%) find both civil and religious marriage ceremonies necessary and they apply both. The rates of those who have only civil marriage (10%) or that of those who have only religious wedding (4%) are very low.¹

On the other hand, the scarcity of those who find religious wedding ceremony unimportant or unnecessary indicates religious and conservative structure of Turkish society. A recent national research finds that the rate of those who say “religious wedding is not necessarily needed” (16,5%) and that of those who say, “religious wedding is definitely unnecessary” (4%) are all together 20%.² Those data also show the scarcity of secular thought and lifestyle about marriage and family in Turkey. The link between marriage and religion not only points out the importance of marriage but also plays an important role in its justification. A research in the beginning of the 1990’s found out that the majority of the subjects (63, 5%) saw marriage important “for the sake of children and for reproduction of the society” while 35% of them saw it important “because the religion requires it”.³ In both arguments, the effects of Islamic teachings on marriage are clear.

Although there seems to be significant changes on marriage and family matters in contemporary Turkish society, principles of patriarchy, monogamy and exogamy continue to be dominant characteristics of Turkish family structure. The fact that, in the process of adaptation

1 Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu ve Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü, *Aile Yapısı Araştırması* (Ankara: TÜİK Matbaası, 2006), 6.

2 Sosyal Ekonomik Araştırmalar Merkezi, *Türkiye’de Aile* (İstanbul: SEKAM Yayınları, 2011), 68.

3 Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, *Türk Aile Yapısı* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık, 1992), 93.

to European Union legislation, the expression of “man is the leader of family” was dismissed from the Civil Law is indeed an indicative of change in patriarchal character of Turkish family in practice too. Nevertheless, polygamy – seen more often among Arabic Muslim societies– appears to be a marginal fact in Turkish society. If group is defined as a unity consisting of a family, then exogamy should be the major principle in Turkish society as in all societies. All relationships contrary to this principle are considered to be incest and therefore are disapproved.

What are said above are some characteristics observable in Europe as well as in other societies. However, kin marriage –appearing to be unique to Turkey– attracts quite attention in Europe and is rejected with a Eurocentric attitude. Traditionally kin marriage is a marriage between cousins and nephews. In Turkey, kin marriages between cousins are most common. Who are the appropriate candidates for marriage is determined in all cultures by traditions and religion. According to Islam, illegitimate candidates for marriage are clearly listed in the Holy Qur’an: “your mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, daughters of your brothers and sisters, foster mothers who lactate you, foster sisters, mothers-in-law, daughters of your wives with whom you have intercourse, the wives of your own sons, two sisters at the same time are all forbidden for you to get married with”.⁴ There seems to be no ban in Islam for marriages of uncle or aunt children with each other.

It is known that kin marriage –approved by tradition as well as by Islam– has many social benefits. First of all, it reinforces social and psychological ties among relatives while it also brings continuity for such ties. Secondly, kin marriage reduces marriage related risks and facilitates family interventions of solutions for likely problems between couples. In traditional societies, those factors play important roles in keeping marriages and family structure stable and strong. On the other hand, it is also a fact that kin marriage has an economic aspect too. It helps people to avoid from heavy bride prices, to keep family wealth

4 The Qur’an, 4:23.

inside the same social system and to safeguard it against foreigners.⁵

However, what are emphasized the most today regarding kin marriage are its medical inconveniences and harms rather than its social, psychological or economic benefits. It is fair to say that the discussion now turned out to be in medical terms while people of medicine appear to have more say on this subject. This is not something that can be explained only by fascinating developments in medicine. In developing countries like Turkey, scientists together with some types of professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers, engineers) hold the highest prestige in society. Due to their high prestige, some societal segments and political powers pay more attention to what those professionals say on just about everything. This way, scientists and high prestige-enjoying professionals become unquestioned authorities whom society respects the most. If anybody dares to question those so-called authorities, then s/he is excommunicated and labeled as someone who is just ignorant of new scientific developments.

Actually the ideas of scientists on kin marriage are one-dimensional and they are definitely questionable. While some scientists, by exaggerating bio-medical risks of kin marriage, suggest to follow policies that ban or at least put limitations on kin marriage others find their explanations overdramatized and claim that the risk in kin marriage is too little and insignificant. A Dutch cultural-anthropologist, J. A. Born, collected discussions on medical aspects of the issue in a book published in 2002. According to him, negative effects of kin marriage are exaggerated and the public is misled. Studies conducted in the UK and the Netherlands show that the likelihood of children of kin marriage to be disabled is insignificant. For this reason, according to the author, it is unethical to intervene to the lives of immigrants who have kin marriage.

Turks and Moroccans are the first group of people to come to the mind in Europe when the issue at hands is kin marriage. Nevertheless, this

5 Feridun Merter, *1950- 1988 Yılları Arasında Köy Ailesinde Meydana Gelen Değişmeler: Malatya Örneği*, (Ankara: Başbakanlık Aile Araştırma Kurumu Başkanlığı, 1990), 42-43.

type of marriage can be observed among Jewish and Christian communities as well. In fact, scholars like Bernadette Model and Aamra Darr⁶ point out that at least 20% of marriages in the world are kin marriages, that 8% of all children have kin parents and that it is not fair to equate kin marriage only with Muslims. The reasons why kin marriage is found weird should be searched in ethnocentric approaches of Europe and in the problematic relationships of Europeans with Muslim immigrants such as Turks and Moroccans. Discussions taking place all over Europe, including the Netherlands, are usually based on the European intentions to stop a special immigration pattern led by the fact that kin marriage is related with second or third generation immigrants' tendency to get married from their motherlands. The facts that European countries increasingly developed selective immigration policies and that they hold persistent demands of integration prevent them to think in a healthy way when discussing family unity and kin marriage.

When researches on kin marriage in Turkey are examined, it becomes clear that especially people from circles of medicine pay more attention on this subject matter. It is interesting that those researches focus on areas of Eastern and Southeastern regions where this type of marriage is more common. To give some examples of such researches, a research conducted in Erzurum in the 1990's investigated the frequency and results of kin marriage among those women who had normal birth giving and those who had intervened birth giving. This research concluded that the relationship between kin marriage and possibility of disabilities of newborn children is risky although not so significantly.⁷ Another research, conducted in the Tilfindır Cottage Hospital region of Şanlıurfa in Eastern Anatolia, found out that the rate of kin marriage among women is quite high (37%) and that there is a significant relationship between this fact and child mortality under five years old.⁸

6 Bernadette Model ve Aamra Darr, "Science and Society: Genetic Counseling and Customary Consanguineous Marriage," *Nature Reviews Genetics* 3, sy. 3 (2002): 225-229.

7 Özel v.dğr. "Akraba Evliliği." *Tıp Bülteni* 23, sy. 1 (1991): 64.

8 Miyaser Kayahan v.dğr., "Şanlıurfa Tilfindır Sağlık Ocağı Bölgesinde Akraba Evliliği Prevalansı ve 5 Yaş Altı Ölümlere Etkisi," *C.Ü. Hemşirelik Yüksek Okulu Dergisi* 7, 1 (2003): 1-5.

Furthermore, another research, conducted in Malatya city center during 2005-2006, the rate of kin marriage among randomly selected 409 women is 28,4%. There is a significant difference, the research concludes, between women with kin marriage and child mortality under five years old.⁹ Likewise, another research, conducted in the city center and provinces of Afyonkarahisar located in Southwest of the country, found out that the rate of kin marriage is about 20% and that families of kin marriage have more frequency of spontaneous abortion and congenital anomaly compared to those families of regular marriage (couples being not relatives).¹⁰

Although not as many as medical studies, there are some sociological studies on local practices of kin marriage too. Such studies usually analyze factors that affect kin marriage. As an example, studies, conducted in Denizli and Düzce, give us some clues. The study in two rural provinces (Çameli and Sarayköy) of Denizli ascertained 17,4% of kin marriage. The impact of this type of marriage on the number of normal and disabled children could not have been identified. It was observed that cultural factors rather than socio-economic ones have more determining effect on kin marriage.¹¹ The data shows that not only kin marriage in rural areas has a higher percentage (12,8%) than the regional average but also that cultural factors are more effective in rural areas compared to urban areas. Likewise, another study investigated the frequency and reasons of kin marriage among women in a province (Yığılca) of Düzce City while it also questioned those women's perceptions on the impacts of this type of marriage on disabilities. According to this study, the rate of kin marriage is about 20% while the most frequently mentioned reasons for it are love and getting along with each other (56%), family pressure (28%), and family desire (16%). The majority (72,7%) of women who participated in the study

9 Ayşegül Kutlubay, "Malatya İlinde Akrabalık Evliliği Sıklığı ve Tıbbi Sonuçları" (Yüsek Lisans Tezi, İnönü Üniversitesi, 2007), 57.

10 Hale Şamlı v.dğr., "Afyonkarahisar İlinde Akraba Evlilikleri ve Bunun Doğumsal Anomaliler ile İlişkisi," *Kocatepe Tıp Dergisi* 7, sy. 3 (2006): 72-73.

11 Galip Akın "Denizli Kırsal Kesiminde Akraba Evliliği ve Bunu Etkileyen Faktörler," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 40, 3-4 (2000):67-80.

think that kin marriage has indeed a negative effect on child health. Only 14,6% of them thinks that kin marriage would have no impact on this at all. The rest (5,8%) said that they had no opinion.¹²

Conceptual Framework

This paper tries to move from a medical approach to a sociological one and wishes to show what variables are related to kin marriages. What a sociological approach means is explained in many ways in the sociological literature. Among them, there is probably no other concept as much important and popular as C. W. Mills' **sociological imagination**. In this regard, he says the followings: "What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality, I am going to contend, that journalists and scholars, artists and publics, scientists and editors are coming to expect of what may be called the sociological imagination."¹³

Mills introduces sociological imagination as one of two different understandings: "Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure.' This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science"¹⁴ For him, sociological imagination refers to examination of seemingly personal issues in their social and historical context. "We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society

12 Atilla Senih Mayda v.dğr., "Düzce İli Yığılca İlçe Merkezinde Akraba Evliliği Sıklığı ve Etkileyen Faktörler," *Düzce Tıp Dergisi* 12, sy. 2 (2010): 36-41.

13 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Londra: New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 7.

14 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 8.

and by its historical push and shove.”¹⁵ Thus, sociological imagination requires thinking the concepts of individual, society and history all together and in their mutual relations.

In order to understand kin marriages from a sociological perspective, the following questions seem to be significant: what is the profile of people who practice kin marriage? Which factors play an increasing or decreasing role in kin marriages? What is the general trend in terms of kin marriage from the past to the present? What can be said about the future of kin marriage based on this trend? Those questions will be investigated through data sets coming from national researches conducted in Turkey.

Methodology

When exploring the above-mentioned questions, the author will benefit from data on family that come from the studies of institutions like State Planning Organization (DPT), Prime Ministry General Directorate of Family and Social Researches (ASAGEM) and Turkish Institute of Statistics (TUİK). For the first time in Turkish history, in 1987, DPT founded a committee of experts with the aim of determining the structure and problems of Turkish families. With contributions from official experts and academicians, this Family Committee has prepared a report that was based on a literature review and that discussed family structures and problems in depth together with a suggestion of carrying out a large scale empirical research. A year later, the first research with a representative sample was conducted and the findings were published in a book titled “Turkish Family Structure” (1992). This study provides information on matters such as qualifications of households, perceptions of marriage, distribution of roles and statuses in families, education and vocational training of children, and attitudes, behaviors and expectations on certain issues.

The study was repeated in 2006 and collected data on changes in recent years. Being conducted by ASAGEM and TUİK, this study asked some of the questions in revised forms although some other questions

15 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 6.

were kept as before. Differing forms of questions sometimes make it difficult to make comparisons.

The current study will report new developments by using data only about kin marriages. Both of previously mentioned studies measured opinions and attitudes of people on kin marriage as well as their practices of kin marriage. Therefore, this paper will deal not only with factual data but also with data on opinions and attitudes of people on kin marriage.

Findings

Before outlining the profile of kin marriages, it will be useful to mention some characteristics of family structure in Turkey. According to the findings of the study titled “Turkish Family Structure” (2006), nuclear family has become the dominant family structure (81%). This study defined “nuclear family” as the type of family consisting of mother-father and unmarried children. The next largest family structure is extended family with the rate of 14%. Contrary to the nuclear family, extended family often tends to host close relatives like grandparents, aunts, uncles etc. in addition to parents and unmarried children. Though some differences exist between urban and rural areas, it would be unfair to say that nuclear family is specific to urban areas whereas extended family is specific to rural areas. Nuclear family continues to be the dominant family type both in urban areas (83%) and rural areas (76,3%). The ratio of extended family is higher in rural areas (18%) than urban areas (10,3%). The ratio of those who live alone is insignificant in Turkey. Households with a single person consist of those who come to urban areas either to study or to work.

In the very first research, families were differentiated not according to family types but according to the number of household members. For this reason, it is not possible to follow changes in family types. However, if Timur’s study at the beginning of the 70’s is taken into consideration, it can be asserted that there is a 20% increase in nuclear family type; that is to say an increase from 60% up to 80%. Similarly, the ratio of extended family can be said to be decreased from 19% down

to 13%.¹⁶ Many factors might have played a role in the transformation of family type from traditional extended family to nuclear family. Among those factors, the most important ones might be mentioned to be industrialization, mechanization of agriculture, unemployment, immigration and emigration, changes in the structure of the population, urbanization, increase in and widening of educational opportunities, improvements in communication and transportation means. Those factors not only changed family structures but also affected many other processes in marriage and family establishment, processes like age of marriage, decision making to get married, partner selection, flirting, kin marriage, bride price, wedding, and multiple marriages.

Age of marriage is getting increased in Turkey just like all over the world. Timur determined that average age of first marriage was 17 for women and 22 for men at the beginning of the 70's¹⁷. Başol suggests that it was increased up to 18 for women and decreased to 21 for men in the middle of the 80's.¹⁸ According to the last study of TÜİK&ASAGEM, on the other hand, 58% of men and women get married for the first time at the age group of 18-24.¹⁹ It can be claimed that unemployment as well as economic conditions affect the increase at the age of marriage.

Like in age of marriage, changes are observed in decision making on marriage and selection of partners as well. Even though parental influence is still at work in this regard, it is a fact that there are some changes in ratios. At the moment in Turkey, 36,2% of marriages of women are made in a way of prearranged marriage with parents' decision. Only 35,2% of marriages of men are made with the freewill of men and with the approval of their parents. Those ratios were much higher 30-

16 Serim Timur, *Türkiye'de Aile Yapısı* (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yay., 1972); Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu ve Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü, *Aile Yapısı Araştırması*, 6.

17 Serim Timur, *Türkiye'de Aile Yapısı*, 94.

18 Koray Başol, *Demografi: Genel ve Türkiye* (İzmir: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi İ.İ.B.F. Yayınları, 1984), 140.

19 Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu ve Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü, *Aile Yapısı Araştırması*, 4.

35 years ago. By then, 67% of all marriages were arranged by parents and candidates of marriage used to accept decisions of parents.²⁰ New findings point at a certain level of individualization in Turkish society over those years while they also show that more people make their own decision on who they want to get married with.

Kin marriage and bride price are still in the agenda of today's Turkey. Those practices are still observable due to traditional structures and their functions in such structures. Although traditional structure was broken up with the effects of domestic migration and urbanization, it is known that practices of kin marriage and bride price still goes on even in urban areas. While the ratio of kin marriages was 67% during the 70's, today it decreased down to 21%.²¹ A similar decrease is in the practice of bride price as well. While this practice was observable in 53% of all marriages in the past, this ration is only 16,8% today.²²

When looked closer at kin marriages, the most eye catching point is that such marriages show significant differences region by region. Kin marriages differ between 5% and 40%. As can be seen in Table 1, the ratio of kin marriages in 8 regions is above Turkey's average. Among those regions, the high point is in the Southern Anatolian Region. This region is not only the least developed region of Turkey, it also reveals a diversity of many different ethnic groups. Kin marriage is common especially among Kurds and Arabs. Since the time of the Ottoman Empire, this is a region where the state and the law have been absent and where an unwritten law called "töre" (moral laws) is dominant. Middle and Northeastern Anatolia regions come next in terms of kin marriages.

The region of Western Marmara - possessing the smallest ratio of kin marriage – not only is the most developed region in the country but also inhabits the largest numbers of immigrants who are called "mu-hacir" or "macir" by local people. Kin marriage is seen as a taboo by the people of those immigrant communities originally coming from the

20 Serim Timur, *Türkiye'de Aile Yapısı*, 70.

21 Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu ve Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü, *Aile Yapısı Araştırması*, 8.

22 Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu ve Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü, *Aile Yapısı Araştırması*, 8.

Balkans and Caucasians. The most striking point in Table 1 is probably the fact that kin marriage is relatively high (15,3%) in a metropolitan city like Istanbul. This fact can be explained by a waves of immigration taken place in years. Massive immigrations took place into this metropolitan city from relatively less developed areas of the country, especially from Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions. Istanbul at the moment is a city where the largest Kurdish population lives in. Same thing can be said about the other big cities as well. For instance, while the ratio of kin marriage is 17,5% in Ankara, it is only 13,4% in a developed city like Izmir in the Western Turkey. Like Istanbul, those cities too attracted and keep attracting large numbers of immigrants from other regions. Process of adaptation to city life takes a time of a few generations because of chained immigration, unfit dwelling and insufficient urban opportunities.

<i>Table 1. Distribution of Kin Marriages by Regions (%)</i>			
TURKEY		20,9	
Western Marmara	4,8	Middle Anatolia	25,7
Istanbul	15,3	Western Black sea	21
Aegean	17,4	Eastern Black sea	28,5
Eastern Marmara	14,3	Northeastern Anatolia	30,3
Western Anatolia	21,1	Middle eastern Anatolia	30,7
Mediterranean	23,2	Southeastern Anatolia	40,4
<i>Source: Family Structure Survey, 2006 (TUİK&ASAGEM)</i>			

Just like regional differences, urban/rural inhabitation also plays an important role in the distribution of kin marriages. This type of marriage is more common in rural areas (24,6%). There is a difference of 5,5% between urban and rural areas. Rural areas continue to be the places where traditional structures and values are kept and where marriage within a village and among relatives is a traditional custom.

Kin marriage can also be interpreted as a matter of generational gab and of education. This is because this type of marriage is more com-

mon among people of older generations and of less education while it tends to be less common among people of newer generations and of higher education (see Table 2). The fact that kin marriage is less common among people with higher levels of education should not be interpreted as a success of education only. People who immigrate to cities from their villages and small towns for higher educational opportunities usually get involved in new social networks and increase their options of marriage. Adaptation to city life often takes place with gathering of people from different regions and classes as well as with marriages of such different people.

Illiterate	28,4
Literate with no diploma	27,5
Graduate of elementary school	22,4
Graduate of elementary middle school	17,6
Graduate of high school or of equivalent	16,4
Graduate of university or higher level	14,1
<i>Source: Family Structure Survey, 2006 (TÜİK&ASAGEM)</i>	

It will be appropriate to compare data from the past with the ones from the present in order to see if there is any change in kin marriages and, if any, changes in what direction. When data from the study of DPT at the end of the 80's is compared with data from the study of TÜİK&ASAGEM in 2006, then it can be asserted that there is a partial increase in the ratio of kin marriages. While the ratio of all kin marriages in Turkey was 17,22% in the former study, it became 20,9% in the latter. Similarly, while it was 14% in urban areas, it became 19% now. Furthermore, the ratio of kin marriage was 21,5% in rural areas during the 80's whereas today it increased up to 24,6%.²³ When examined

23 Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, *Türk Aile Yapısı*; Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu & Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü, *Aile Yapısı Araştırması* (Ankara: TÜİK Matbaası, 2006).

from regions' point of view, again significant differences are seen between the past and the present. For instance, despite of differing ratios, Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia are the regions of biggest ratios of kin marriage but the region with the smallest ratio of kin marriage is Black Sea region, not Western Marmara. How can those differentiations be explained? The first thing that comes to mind is the likelihood of opinions and attitudes on kin marriage being developed in a conservative mindset.

It is worth questioning if any change occurred in opinions and attitudes on kin marriage due in time. If yes, in which direction has this change occurred?

It seems to be difficult to make healthy comparisons due to the fact that questions of attitudes on kin marriage were asked in different ways in the above-mentioned studies. In the study by DPT, options of answers were "I prefer it", "I have no idea, I leave it to chance", "I don't tolerate it" and "I am definitely against it". In the other study by TUIK&ASAGEM, on the other hand, people were asked if they found this type of marriage appropriate or not. Provided that differences on the wording of questions in both studies are taken into consideration, it looks like a more tolerant attitude on kin marriage has developed in due time. By looking at it from the opposite side, it can also be interpreted as most people find it inappropriate. While the ratio of people who did not tolerate it or who were definitely against it was 76% in the former study, this ratio became 88% in the latter.

Another national study of family conducted by a civil research institution, SEKAM, found out that the ratio of people finding kin marriage definitely inappropriate is 45,2%, that of people finding it normal (acceptable) is 12,7% while a large number of people (37%) find it "acceptable but not preferred".²⁴ This large number of people point at the existence of a tolerance field ranging from "acceptable" to "not preferable". They find it acceptable even if they do not prefer it. For this reason, it does not make much sense to compare those who find it appropriate with those who prefer it as shown in Table 3. Furthermore,

24 Sosyal Ekonomik Araştırmalar Merkezi, *Türkiye'de Aile*, 56.

it might be misleading to think that there is a significant increase in the number of people who hold a positive attitude on kin marriage.

	I prefer it	I find it appropriate
	1988	2006
Turkey	6,35	12,5
Urban	3,82	11,5
Rural	9,71	14,2

Source: Family Structure Survey, 1988-2006 (DPT; TÜİK&ASAGEM)

Confirming attitudes of kin marriage is above the county average in five regions as Table 4 shows. In parallel to likely expectations, Southeastern Anatolia among them emerges as the most kin marriage practicing region as well as the most kin marriage approving one (37,3%). In this regard, Mediterranean region (15,2%) and Western Anatolian region (13,1%) follow Southeastern region. As mentioned before, those regions are also the ones with highest rates of practicing kin marriage.

TURKEY		12,5	
Istanbul	9,1	Middle Anatolia	11
Western Marmara	2,5	Western Black Sea	7,6
Aegean	5,7	Eastern Black Sea	8,7
Eastern Marmara	7,6	North-eastern Anatolia	19,2
Western Anatolia	13,1	Middle-astern Anatolia	22,8
Mediterranean	15,2	South-eastern Anatolia	37,3

Source: Family Structure Survey, 2006 (TÜİK&ASAGEM)

Although there seems to be no big difference between Ankara (8,9%) and Istanbul (8,7%), the rate of people approving kin marriage is only

4,4% in Izmir, a city located in western part of the country. ²⁵According to the study by DPT, only 4,83% of the people living in the center of the city prefers kin marriage. Thus, about 20 years ago, like today's Izmir there must have been a hesitant attitude in the city center. But again it should be kept in mind that there is an important difference between "preferring" and "finding it appropriate".

Illiterate	25.8
Literate with no diploma	20.5
Graduate of elementary school	12.5
Graduate of elementary middle school	9.4
Graduate of high school or of equivalent	7.3
Graduate of university or higher level	5.1
<i>Source: Family Structure Survey, 2006 (TUIK&ASAGEM)</i>	

In terms of approving kin marriage, sex does not seem to be playing a significant role. Both men and women approve kin marriage with a rate of 12%. Similar to the case in practicing kin marriage, education seems to be affecting attitudes on kin marriage. As Table 5 shows, approval of kin marriage gets decreased, as level of education gets higher. Only 5% of those who hold a university degree or more approve kin marriage while this rate is about 25% among illiterate people.

25 Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, *Türk Aile Yapısı*, 124.

Table 6. The Rate of People Approving Kin Marriage By Age Groups (%)

18 - 24	9.7
25 - 34	11.6
35 - 44	12.2
45 - 54	13
55 - 64	15.8
65 +	17

Source: Family Structure Survey, 2006 (TUIK&ASAGEM)

Approval of kin marriage by age groups indicates that this is a matter of generational gap. As Table 6 shows, approval of this type of marriage is 16-17% among older generation while it decreases to 12-13% among middle age group and down to only 10-11% among younger generation.

Although an increase in the approval of kin marriages is unclear, effects of various other factors should be taken into consideration in kin marriage practices. One of the important and yet to be researched factors at this point is the fact of inter-regional migration in Turkey. This continuous migration to more urbanized areas in Turkey results in a change in the distribution of occurrence in kin marriages between the regions and possibly promotes such practices. Poor education and resulted low-income levels among the new urbanites are likely to favor the less-complicated marriages with relatives. Concerns of both sides about future problems likely to arise between partners makes it very difficult to imagine a marriage with someone from a different social network. Thus, choosing a spouse from relatives makes more sense to these people and seems to be more appropriate. Another reason behind the increasing rates of kin marriages can be considered to be the adaptation of some segments of the society to the Turkish culture. As reported by some researchers, kin marriages are no longer a taboo among the Georgian youth and traditions against kin marriages are not as effective anymore.

Data on both attitudes on and practices of kin marriage it provide suffi-

cient information to portray practitioners and validations of this type of marriages. It can be stated that kin marriages are a common phenomenon with more rural and regional aspects. Aforementioned regions and people from these regions can be considered poorly educated, closed to modern-urban influences while they tend to start families according to their traditional dictates. These facts stand true especially for the Southeastern parts of Anatolia. However, it does not essentially mean that the traditional way of life is restricted to rural and underdeveloped regions. With the effect of migration, living in slums, intense acculturation and fast communication, this traditional way of life and kin marriages are becoming pervasive in urban too. Nevertheless, kin marriage practices lose popularity among better-educated new generations and views upon this fact become less favorable. Media and medical authorities and intellectuals who could effectively distribute their remarks via media played important roles in developing negative opinions on kin marriages. New generations do not see any social or psychological uses in kin marriages, but indeed regard it as a medically hazardous practice. Findings along with multitudes of researches conducted with medical perspectives support these opinions.

Conclusion

Research findings reveal that the kin marriages issue is more complicated than it is presumed and such marriages are persistent in existence. While concerns become widely popular on consequences of such marriages, rooted customs and functionality on the other hand make kin marriages a continuous and even increasing practice. This paradoxical situation reminds the words of Bergson: ‘... life transcends intellect’.²⁶

To sum up, profiles of people involved in kin marriages are determined by rural, regional and ethnical structure. Place of residence, ethnicity, age, time of marriage and education are effective variables in increasing or decreasing kin marriages. Migration, while increasing the chance for some groups decreasing for others, effects kin marriages in a macro scale. Immigration certainly serves as an increasing factor in

26 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, Inc., 2005), 53.

kin marriages. Although there is a partial increase in kin marriages by time, attitudes towards it fall well behind the factual situation. The big difference between the desired and present conditions gives the clue of decrease in kin marriages. Moreover, a decrease in kin marriages can be expected with increasing educational levels. New generations with formal education and under the influence of mass media are influenced with the medical statement against kin marriages. Majority in Turkey no longer embrace and prefer kin marriages. But this does not essentially mean that kin marriage practices will soon disappear.

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