

SINGLE MOTHERS DOING FAMILY: RE-FORMING TRADITIONAL FAMILY IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

In this study, my main purpose is to grasp how women whose marriage is ended up either by divorce or the loss of the husband experience the life after marital dissolution as a widow and a divorced woman in economic, social network and social support, cultural stigma and single parenting issues in Turkey. I claim that widowed and divorced women are trapped in between family, market and state; and that gender based, family oriented patriarchal society and social policies do not allow these women to live their life the way they want and to stand on their own feet, and make them lean on their families or men. In this study, my argument is that divorced and widow women are doing family in order to cope with the difficulties of being single mothers. In order to understand the change in women's experiences with patriarchy, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nineteen divorced mothers and seventeen widow mothers living in Ankara. This study shows us while the divorced mothers were trying to construct a new family; they reconstruct the traditional family approach by letting grandfathers to be authority figure in the family. The findings of this study point out that divorced and widow women families are defined by the family ideal. Single mothers try to perform the family by adopting traditional family norms in their family after marital dissolution because of the pressure of patriarchal system in the society. The cases of divorced and widow women show us that family ambivalence and authority problems occur because single mothers do not fit the traditional family model in Turkey.

Keywords: Honor, Family, Divorce, Widowhood, Single Mother.

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BEKAR ANNELER AİLE OLUYOR: TÜRKİYE’DE GELENEKSEL AİLENİN YENİDEN İNŞASI

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada ana amacım, boşanma ya da kocanın kaybı ile evlilikleri sonuçlanan kadınların ekonomik, sosyal ağ ve sosyal destek, kültürel ön yargılar ve Türkiye’de tek ebeveynlik meseleleri gibi konuları dul ve boşanmış bir kadın olarak nasıl deneyimlediklerini kavramaktır. Temel argümanım, dul ve boşanmış kadınların aile, piyasa ve devlet arasında sıkışmış olması; cinsiyete dayalı iş bölümü, ataerkil toplum algısı üzerine kurulmuş sosyal politikalar, bu kadınların yaşamlarını istedikleri şekilde yaşamalarına ve kendi ayakları üzerinde durmalarına izin vermiyor olması. Bu çalışmamda, boşanmış ve dul kadının, bekar anne olarak yaşadığı zorluklarla başa çıkabilmek için Türkiye’deki geleneksel aile kalıplarını yeniden inşa ettikleri göstermeyi amaçlamaktayım. Kadınların ataerkilliğe ilişkin deneyimlerindeki değişimi anlamak için, Ankara’da yaşayan boşanmış on dokuz anne ve on altı eşi vefat etmiş (dul) anne ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapıldı. Çalışmanın bulguları, boşanmış ve eşi vefat etmiş kadınların ailelerinin “ideal aile” anlayışı tarafından tanımlandığını göstermektedir. Bekar anneler toplumdaki ataerkil sistem baskısı nedeniyle evlilikleri sonlandıktan sonra ailelerinde geleneksel aile normlarını benimseyerek aileyi gerçekleştirmeye çalışmaktadırlar. Boşanmış ve eşi vefat etmiş kadınlar, ailelerin çelişkiliğini ve otorite sorunlarını ortaya çıkarmaktadır; çünkü bekar anneler Türkiye’de geleneksel aile modeline uymamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Namus, Aile, Boşanma, Dulluk, Bekar Anne.

INTRODUCTION

Several studies have discussed positive and negative consequences of single mother² families. More recent studies have searched the interaction within single mothers and their children and the family process after marital dissolution. This study pays attention both absence and presence of the parent and interaction between absent and present family members, although most research focus on consequences of single parenting for children (Weiss, 1979; Amato, 1987; Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986). This research for this particular reason aims to examine the interaction of single mothers, children, fathers and other family members. The theory of family ambivalence which is related with doing family, boundary ambiguity and cultural ideal family type, provides framework for the examination of single parenting in Turkey.

The Importance of the Study

There are various factors that necessitate further academic interest on divorced and widow women in Turkey, and that pushed to conduct a research on this issue. First of all, although there are a lot of discussions about divorce and its consequences on society, the voices of those who experienced divorce, especially women, are mostly not heard. Looking for and listening to this voice is meaningful in itself. The literature in Turkey mostly focuses on the divorce itself not on the individuals. These studies examine marital dissolution as a “problem” for the society, the family and the children. They examine divorce with the presumption that it results in a “broken” family, and they analyze the negative consequences of marital

² Single parenthood/single mother is a status that people come into in a variety of ways (Millar, 1989). There are many routes of entry into single parenthood: divorce, long-lasting separations, desertion, death of a partner, birth of a child outside marriage. There are also different routes out: marriage, re-marriage, and cohabitation, placing children for adoption, children growing up and leaving home. Due to this variety of transitions to single parenthood, there is no internationally recognized definition of a single parent and, there is no standard definition, either. Thus, the definition of single parent/single mother I used in this study is not fully homogeneous and therefore the sample presents some diversities: a single parent is defined as a person not living in a couple (either married or cohabiting), who may or may not be living alone or with others (own parents/friends), who is divorced or widow and who has at least one child. The majority of single parents are women and the focus of this study is on single parent women, therefore, the literature review uses the term "she" in reference to single parents.

dissolution rather than focus on the experiences of individuals after marital dissolution. A few studies, though, provide information about one's marital status or new marital status has impact on his/her daily life (Kavas, 2010; Özar and Yakut-Çakar, 2011; Özar and Çakar, 2012; Demircioğlu, 2000). Upon divorce, single parent families are considered as a challenge to the ideal family structure in the society. In contrast to divorced women in Turkey, widow women are considered to be protected by society and the welfare state in Turkey. To illustrate, with recent social policy arrangements, it was decided to give monetary help to widow women.³ However, before this arrangement, the research (Özar et al, 2011) was prepared for arrangements in the social policy which included all single mothers with a wide range of statuses, such as separated, divorced, widow women and women whose husbands had abandoned them or were in jail. The financial help was only given to widow women after marital dissolution. Those different perceptions for divorced and widow women in Turkey made me think if there is a difference between experiences of divorced and widow women after marital dissolution. Moreover, while searching for a research topic, one of my aunts divorced and I witnessed what she lived and experienced. The stigma and violence she faced compelled me to study divorced women, and I started to question whether widow women are in a more advantageous position than divorced women because contrary to divorced women, the widow women I have known so far were shown great respect.

In this study, post dissolution experiences of divorced and widow women is scrutinized in a comparative way. Researching what happened to divorced and widow women after marital dissolution, what they experience after marital dissolution, what challenges and difficulties they faced, and the strategies that divorced and widow women developed are important to understand the attitudes toward divorced and

³ The First Payment for Widow Women Will Be In April (Eşi Vefat Eden Kadına İlk Maas Nisanda), with this social policy arrangement, widow women will be paid 250 TL monthly (<http://www.cnnturk.com/2012/ekonomi/genel/03/08/esi.vefat.eden.kadina.ilk.maas.nisanda/652297.0/index.html>, accessed in 17.01.2015).

widow women in Turkey, and these form the backbone of the questions in this study. This study searches for answers to the question of whether or not there is a difference between the effects of post dissolution via the act of divorce and the death of the husband for divorced and widow women. This study argues that in some areas divorced and widow women experience difficulties and challenges which may put them in an isolated positions. However, this study points out that divorced and widow women also develop coping strategies through which divorced women reread traditional norms and values. Therefore this study departs from other studied in the literature.

On the whole, the significance of this study is to increase information about the conditions of divorced and widow women in Turkey; to elucidate the dilemmas and difficulties these women experience. In a discussion about family, marriage and women, this research aims to evaluate the relation between the women and society because question of how the conventional definition of family and womanhood in Turkey is re-created is significant in this research.

In more recent international studies, however, divorce or being a widow is not a problem in the way it is still a problem in Turkey. Recent studies mostly focus on issues such as being single mothers by choice, how single mothers should be integrated to the labor market as a mom or as a worker (maternal employment), welfare to work discussions, psychological aspects of widowhood and divorce, physical and mental health problems of single women. However, in Turkey marriage and family are still important institutions and concepts in examination of the gender division of labor and women's roles in the domestic sphere, in discussions of abortion, the norms of sexual behavior, sexuality and increasing divorce rates. Thus, end of marriage through death or divorce has many impacts on the many areas of the divorced and widow women's lives in Turkey. However, this area is an almost ignored issue except for a few studies (e.g. Kavas, 2010). Although the issue of marital dissolution is an area of intensive research, hardly any attention is directed to its consequences. Consequently, in this study, it is aimed to contribute to filling this

gap by analyzing the post dissolution experience of divorced and widow women in terms of doing family and traditional family understandings.

METHOD OF THE STUDY

In this study a feminist theoretical framework has been used in an attempt to analyze the experiences of divorced and widowed women. Feminist perspectives criticize dominant traditions and challenge the status of women in the society. This study will use feminist approach not only as a theoretical framework but also, with the help of this approach, it will try to grasp the ways in which women cope with difficulties. Feminists generally deny a “universal” or single idea of the family. Rather, feminists provide new points of view and make us to reconsider the assumptions about the family. Thus, putting women’s experiences at the center of the study will provide us an opportunity to understand the relations between women and family (Glenn, 1987). Accordingly, feminist perspectives on post dissolution focus on the implications of divorce and widowhood. By doing so, this study aims to contribute to family studies by examining the post dissolution experiences of divorced and widow women in a feminist perspective, which is not explored adequately in Turkey. This study moves beyond documenting inequality in the family; it addresses the contradictions of family relations after marital dissolution, and how women cope, adapt or challenge to their difficulties after marital dissolution. This study with a feminist methodology will generate the research based on women’s words and experiences. This study places women’s experience at the center of the study and puts personal experience in a broader social context. Hence, what distinguishes this study as a feminist study is not because the constructing the research questions are done through feminist methods but also data evaluating process is also done by feminist methods and perspective.

Within the scope of the research, for this study, thirty six women were interviewed; nineteen divorced women and seventeen widow women in the years between 2013 and 2015. The most prominent characteristic common to the study group was that they got married once. While conducting pilot interviews some remarried women, married and divorced twice or more were also interviewed to see if it was possible

to expand the field of research; however as the profile of the population seemed to be quite mixed, it was decided not to include those women. Moreover, the women interviewed had to meet a time criterion: they had to be divorced or widowed for a minimum of one year, and a maximum of ten years. By focusing on women who have been widowed or divorced for a particular time period, it was hoped to talk to women who would not be overdramatized the negative consequences of marital dissolution. Women who have just recently gone through a marital dissolution have had the possibility to overemphasis on negative dimensions of marital dissolution. Indeed, according to Sev'er and Pirie (1990) upon closely examining studies which are conducted shortly after dissolution of marriage, the overemphasis on the negative aspects of divorce can be seen. And unfortunately, these studies dominate the related literature about divorce or marital dissolution. In order to examine personal experiences of these women, it was excluded those very recently divorced or widowed and remarried women. This criterion was put in use to eliminate individuals who are in the initial reaction or adjustment stage of divorce or widowhood.

In this sense, the age of the respondents served as another determining factor in the selection of the research subjects. According to Bennett and Morgan (1992: 56), “differences in age among widowed, separated, and divorced women may translate into different choices and behaviors, regardless of the way in which their marriages ended.” Hence, in this study the interviewed women who were approximately the same ages, on average. With the age restrictions of the sample, the sample differences were much smaller. By limiting the age range it was planned to limit the variations that might happened as a result of age. While doing field work, it was sought to interview women between the ages of twenty five and fifty five. During the pilot interviews it was able to observe that interviewing women older than a certain age may cause difficulties providing clear answers. During these interviews, the women over sixty have often had difficulty remembering their past, or had problems understanding what is asked for.

The selected women in this study are also determined by the dynamics of class. The women interviewed were generally from lower middle class families. By lower middle class, a woman with an income level that is substantially not above the nationally established poverty line is meant.

The majority of them had attained a similar type and level of education, elementary and high school graduated.

Women with at least one child were selected to be interviewed. The selected women in this study are either living alone or living with their families but without a male partner.

SINGLE MOTHERS "DOING" FAMILY

The notion of “doing family” has been adopted from the concept of “doing gender.” This approach focuses on “interactional activities that create and sustain family ties, define family boundaries, as well as specify appropriate behaviors for different family members” (Sarkisian, 2006: 804). Furthermore, Naples (2001: 33) claims that doing family is like doing gender which is socially constructed rather than the enactment of naturally existing personal relations. She discusses this perception while studying LGBT individuals’ families and adds that this outlook becomes apparent when the family does not fit the normative, ideal model of family. Nelson (2006) argues that while single mothers do family, it is considered by the society who is counted as “not” a family. In this way, it is assigned appropriate behaviors, tasks and obligations for single mothers. Both Nelson’s study (2006) and Naples’ study (2001) remind us that how we do gender is like how we perform family which is shaped by material and cultural practices that are often seem invisible to us (Naples, 2001: 33).

Nelson (2006) focuses on single mothers since their doing family are most obvious for nonnormative families. Nelson (2006) and Naples (2001) studied activities that create and enhance links between family members, boundary work which defines who counts as family and who does not and what rights and

obligations are accorded to those who do. All of those activities also identify how single mothers perform families.

Sarkisian (2006) went one step further and developed this concept as “doing family ambivalence.” She claims "doing family ambivalence" might be a more accurate description of what happens in the single mothers’ lives. She (2006: 805) argues that “even though these women construct the boundaries and create the rules, they experience indecision, conflicted feelings, and uncertainty in the process. That is, there is a high degree of ambivalence involved in their choices.” According to researchers, ambivalence occurs because single mothers do not fit the traditional family model and because of issues related to this new family such as relations with nonresident fathers, grandmothers, and new social network.

The Family Boundary Ambiguity in Single Parent Families

The post dissolution period is related to the multitude of changes that occur in the spousal and parenting relationship. As a former partner, the woman needs to establish new authority and roles for parenting in their new family structure, and at the same time, she needs to reform their roles as ex-wife. Family boundary ambiguity was discussed by Boss “a state when family members are uncertain in their perception of who is in and out of the family or who is performing what roles and tasks within the family system” (Boss, 1987: 709). However, in the context of single mothers, this boundary ambiguity is much more than "who is in and who is out" in the family. As Nelson (2006) pointed out, single mothers need to create an authority based on family obligations and need to provide respect to themselves and their children. In that sense, Sarkisian (2006: 805) argues that “the main problem these mothers experience seems to be in determining the relative "importance" of their children's non-resident biological fathers, grandparents (especially grandmothers), and potential stepfathers.” For instance, in their study of parenting issue after divorce, Madden-Derdich, Leanord and Christopher (1999) claims that there can be conflict between former partners because defining a partner as co-parent but not a spouse cause uncertainty in the roles of these members in the family after divorce. Moreover, Emery (1994) examines boundary ambiguity about reorganization of

roles and tasks of both parents and children after marital dissolution. The argument that Boss (1980) makes on how a woman internalized traditional gender roles can face difficulties in restructuring her new family life as a single mother since she also stereotypes being single woman as deviant and she may believe that the spouse who is supposed to be disciplinarian and breadwinner is the husband. Thus, this may put woman under pressure to construct role model of the father and cause difficulties about presence or absence of the father after marital dissolution.

Another dimension of family boundary ambiguity is about role ambiguity which has especially impact on single mothers whose children are taken care of by grandparents (Landry-Meyer & Newman, 2004). The significance of role ambiguity for single mothers is about the difficulties to reconstruct parental authority in the family and the authority problems between single mothers and their mothers since those grandparents involve and interact in raising and caring of the children after marital dissolution. Nelson's study (2006) points out those single mothers can limit grandparents' role in childcare while the grandparents are the major actor in childcare. Cherlin (2006: 801) gives an example of single mothers in Vermont and states that single mothers consider grandmothers' roles limited with emotional and material support but making decisions about children should be theirs.

Consequently, the relations between their children and parents become ambivalent about rights and privileges of grandparents in the family which are considered appropriate for a father. Because of traditional, ideal family understanding, single mothers consider particular tasks appropriate for the father. Hence, in order to take care of themselves and their children, single mothers need financial help. The financial condition and child care push these mothers do family which they think contradictory to their cultural beliefs.

Cultural Ideal of Traditional Family and Stereotyping of Single Mothers

In the discussions of “doing family” or “doing family ambivalence”, there is an ideal family type. According to Smith (1993), the ideal family type is like a “genetic code” of the society that constructs the way we think about families, family members, and the way they should live or behave. Smith (1993: 52) adds “it is an ideological code which is a constant generator of procedures for selecting syntax, categories, and vocabulary in the writing of texts and the production of talk and for interpreting sentences, written or spoken, ordered by it.” This ideology implies heterosexual parents that raise their children to follow the same values, culture, religion and other ideologies of the family, the same ordering of organisms from generation to generation. Smith (1993: 52) states that the ideal family is a family in which legally married couple sharing some responsibilities such as the adult male in paid employment; his earnings provide the economic basis of the family-household and the adult female’s primary is to care for the husband, household, and children. According to Edgel and Docka (2007: 27),

This family ideal is pervasive in popular culture, legitimated by religious leaders and other moral and philosophical spokespersons, and facilitated through a wide range of institutional, legal, and economic arrangements. It places gender and sexuality at the heart of family ideology, being both heteronormative and dependent on a gendered division of labor oriented around reproduction.

Cherlin (2006) use the analogy of HIV for this perception of the family since the family studies or single mothers doing family is much like "infected." The definition of a family is constructed according to traditional family type. This concept is useful because single mothers try to sustain traditional notions of the family. For instance, Nelson (2006) claims those single mothers’ involvements with men as attempts to recreate the traditional family in their lives. In this way, a single mother is trying to build such a family trying to recreate the traditional family model. In other words, traditional family type is structuring experiences of single mothers’ doing family since it defines “standards” for a particular family. Studies discussing family ambivalence (Nelson, 2006; Cherlin, 2006; Sarkisian, 2006) showed us those alternative

families such as divorced and widow women families are defined by the nuclear family ideal, the idea of traditional family. This idea remains a powerful cultural impact on single mothers' life and perceptions about single mothers.

To sum up, there is not much research about single mothers' problems about the process of restructuring their single parent families by adding their own parents, relatives or ex-husbands. This study attempts to fill this gap by providing experiences from Turkey. The study aims to gain further insight into how social context affects single mothers' perception of a proper family in Turkey.

THE FAMILY APPROACH IN THE PATRIARCHAL ROUTE OF AKP⁴

The social system in Turkey has traditionally been based on a patriarchal family model in which women and unmarried daughters rely on the status of the male head of family as passive beneficiaries. According to this model, women and unmarried daughters are dependent on the status of the male head of the family. This ideal type of a male breadwinner is also reflected in the survivor pension, which favors female over male survivors. Accordingly, women left without a male breadwinner are expected to be protected by the family. As depicted in Lewis' male breadwinner model, rights have been attached to the extended family relationships or marital status and women have been insured as dependents.

When we consider about the context of Turkey during AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, AKP government's conservative family discourse is related to "AKP's version of patriarchy"⁵ as discussed in the study *New Grounds of Patriarchy in Turkey? Gender Policy in the Age of AKP*. Coşar and Yeğenoğlu stated that there is "a new mode of patriarchy exemplified in AKP's gender policy" (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu,

⁴ Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi as in Justice and Development Party.

⁵ In their study, Coşar and Yeğenoğlu define three periods of patriarchy in Turkey: republican, liberal and neo-conservative. Republican mode of patriarchy: women's emancipation from the Ottoman Empire and Islamic way of life (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1986). Liberal mode of patriarchy: wifehood and motherhood roles are disconnected from the public sphere, considered as matters of individual choice concerning private sphere. Briefly, equal individuality to women is discussed. The third one is Neoliberal-conservative patriarchy: AKP's version of patriarchy intertwining of neoliberal, nationalist and religious politics.

2011: 557). In other words, while AKP has given a voice to the women's movement in legal adjustments, it has also continued the conservative approach to women in terms of the familial sphere. The strong Turkish family is applied as the primary solution to all major socio-economic and political problems facing Turkey (Yazıcı, 2012: 112). According to Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011), AKP's version of patriarchy defines the family as the natural sphere for women. Additionally, AKP's patriarchy emphasizes women's participation in the labor market, but reminds women of their familial responsibilities in the same line with liberal patriarchy. The outcomes of Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011) shows us that in this context, women might be asked to participate in the labor market and also to stay at home. They are expected to adjust to flexible working conditions without neglecting wifhood, motherhood and homemaking.

Although AKP has made some regulations for and amendments to the women's social and economic situations, its policies are made by the gendered perception, hence, the policies revolve around the issue of somehow restricting the women to the home and to childcare within the home. For example, the policy of "female work at home" (Bugra and Yakut-Çakar, 2010: 533) can seem to facilitate women to work without leaving the home. It is a policy provided for the women who want to or have to work without paralyzing their housework and caring responsibilities. In this way, the government puts its own responsibility - of the provision of social care services and of the creation of necessary legal, social, economic regulations required for children whose mothers work outside home - on the women without spending from the state's treasury. Social security policies in Turkey have traditionally conceptualized women as dependent on the family, and are careful about the new gender-neutral policies, which are introduced with no consideration of existing patriarchal norms, gender roles and the gender division of labor.

In summary, the focus on "strong family, strong society" has also consequences for divorced and widow women because this discourse not only conceals "the forms of subordination in the labor market but also [justifies] the government's attempts at shifting social care from state to family and to women as primary caregivers" (Yazıcı, 2012: 115). To insist on having "the strong Turkish family" while highlighting the

family as a problem solver, resolves the “burden” of the state and defines the state’s “proper” role as the protector of the family (Yazıcı, 2012). Insisting on the strong family ignores the marital dissolution, or people outside the family. This family discourse hence signals family breakdown as the underlying cause of major “social problems.” As a solution, emphasis is placed on the idea of “protecting and strengthening the family.” The importance attached to the principle of protecting the family is to be understood in terms of family values and honor.

In May 2016, the parliamentary commission established an investigative commission called “Protecting the Integrity of Family,” with the purpose of investigating the causes of the skyrocketing divorce rates and the factors influencing negatively the unity of the family suggested several policy proposals that would destroy many gains of women in Turkey in name of preventing divorces. The draft report of the commission, nicknamed Divorce Commission, has been making waves. AKP tend to see this debate as a reflection of the party’s efforts to maintain stability in the country, by supporting the unity of the family. However, a number of provisions in it that are aimed at making it more difficult for women to obtain a divorce, get maintenance/alimony in the event of a divorce, and escape an abusive marriage. Given the fact that employment rates for women are very low in Turkey, the recommended changes in alimony would mean women without an income should strive to survive in their unhappy marriages to avoid becoming destitute. The report advocates that the religious councilors intervene the cases of divorce to reconcile the couples. Another problem with the report is that divorce cases should be held in secrecy to protect the privacy of the family, which will keep women activists away from observing the courts.

To sum up, there is centrality of ‘the family’ in Turkey. In order to protect the family and prevent divorce, while the aforementioned examples are put in use; on the other hand, social services for children in Turkey are inadequate. This condition is also related to the socio-economic role of the family in Turkey. In terms of family arrangements, it can be argued that in Turkey divorced and widow women with children have

vulnerable positions. In the booklet of AKP's 2023 vision⁶, the emphasis on family is about empowering the family in terms of neo liberal labor market risks. The naturalization of the gender division of labor is sustained in the case of women by reassuming their primary roles as mothers and wives. Moreover, women are only linked with reproduction both in this 2023 political vision document, and in the main policy understanding of AKP. In the government program, it is stated as "If Turkish society is still intact after so many problems that have been experienced recently; we largely owe it to our strong family structure"⁷ (cited in Buğra and Keyder, 2004: 17). In order to deal with the problems and issues related to social care, the family is assigned as the best agent to ease the "social burden" on the state (Yazıcı, 2012).

RE-FORMING A NEW TRADITIONAL FAMILY

When one parent leaves the family either by death or divorce, the relationship between the remaining parent and children will clearly go through some change. One of the changes after marital dissolution is the restructuring of the family. The accounts of divorced and widow women confirm Nelson's (2006) perspective about doing family. As Nelson (2006) claimed, society defines the appropriate definition of the family in which single mothers' family form is ignored. Hence, single mothers try to perform the family by adopting traditional family norms in their family after marital dissolution because of the pressure of patriarchal system in the society. The cases of divorced and widow women show us that family ambivalence and authority problems occur because single mothers do not fit the traditional family model in Turkey.⁸

⁶ See, "2023 Political Vision", <https://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/2023-political-vision>, accessed in 17.01.2015.

⁷ Presented in Parliament by Former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, 59th government Program.

⁸ This study does not victimize the divorced and widow women. All the interviewed women expressed that they felt the pressure of patriarchal system that push them to stay in an "ideal" family. There are three solutions for those women in this study remarriage, moving back to origin of family or being a family again. This study claims that patriarchy in Turkey makes these women doing family. On the other side, the study is aware that these women get rid of violence, problems with husband, etc. when they divorce. However, these issues are not the scope of the study. For this discussion, see Gedik, E. (2015), Trapped in-between State, Market and Family: Experiences of Moderately Educated Divorced and Widow Women, Unpublished Dissertation, METU Department of Sociology.

In patriarchal societies, the family form is considered as heterosexual partners and kids. In the patriarchal setting, family is considered as the building block of the society. To break the family bond damages the next generation because of the loss of family values. According to this patriarchal structure, it is believed that for the sake of well being of children, they should be raised within two parent families. In this family form, women are kept responsible for child care and motherhood is considered as sacred. Hence, when a woman decides to divorce, they may feel that they failed to raise their children and they failed to be a good mother.⁹ When we consider the predominance of the idea of the male breadwinner in society, it is really hard for divorced and widow women in this study to be the head of the family. When we consider the traditional family structure in Turkey, fathers are expected to be strict and distant; they are the authority in the family and primary disciplinarians. On the other hand, in this family structure, mothers are expected to be warm and patient (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1982: 12). When their marriages ended through the divorce or death of the husband, the women had to (re)gain the authority in the family. However, for the children and the other members of the family (such as grandparents) who used to accept and respect only the father as the authority figure in the family, accepting the mother as the head of the family was really difficult. Many women complained about authority issues after marital dissolution. Emine (widow, 46 years old, with two boys), for instance, mentioned:

Of course since they are boys I had to follow them about. If they had a father, everything would be different. They didn't listen to me, they did whatever they wanted. They bought a car, had an accident, this and that, I had a lot of problems. I was all alone. I couldn't establish any authority.

⁹ Marital dissolution might also have a positive impact on women's empowerment. The accounts of working divorced mothers show that they took control of their income and financial lives. They became empowered because of financial independence they gained after marital dissolution. Many divorced women's main approach to working as "I like being in control of money and spendings by myself. Stand on my own feet makes me feel strong." to be able to leave violence intensive marriages make these women feel relief and empowered. Leaving the violence intensive marriages and trying to stand on their own feet and to make future plan both for themselves and their children are significant steps for women's autonomous lives.

Over the last year, I managed to put them on the right track. It has been six years since my husband died. We have been in peace for one year. They returned from the army and did things. They keep themselves to themselves, they don't bother me but it is very hard Esra.

Zeynep (divorced, 48 years old, two children) stated that she had to balance the relations between her two sons since her bigger son didn't accept her as the head of the family, and blamed her for damaging their family. On the other hand, her little son got used to her being the head of the family: "The little son understood the situation, I have the parental right anyway. We live together but the elder son got cross with me, he is very angry with me. He lived with his father then moved to Germany."

Meral (widow, 43 years old, having two children) expressed that

My son wore me out a bit; after his dad passed away he let go of everything altogether. He used to sit in front of the computer, without getting up. Somebody needs to buy bread, "go get us some bread, son," he wouldn't. Somebody needs to take out the trash, "go take out the trash, son," he wouldn't. I mean, he wouldn't get up. He was sitting around all the time. He would say he was hungry. He wore me out so much. I couldn't stand it; I had a nervous breakdown and fainted. It was seven or eight months after my husband. I fainted.

The accounts of these women confirm the findings of Kavas and Gündüz-Hoşgör's study (2012) which interaction in single mother families in terms of the theory of boundary ambiguity. As the quotations show, there is a strong adherence to traditional sex roles. Thus, members of the single parent family can resist the new structuring of the family. To compensate the loss of father, children also experience adjustments. Although women use some coping strategies to deal with the loss of father, children took the breadwinning role. Moreover, findings of my study also confirms another study conducted in Turkey. According to Kavas' (2010) study, divorced women families create "substitute authority figures" (Kavas, 2010) since the female head of the family is not accepted in the society.

Nazlı (widow, 49 years old, with three children) talked about how her son took over his father's role: My daughters always got it from the boy, his compassion. They were so little. My son was being a dad to them, and he also made their weddings. Somehow he also faced people; he made conversations, and tried to be supportive.

Although they stress how family helped to support them to a great extent, the divorced and widow women who were interviewed mentioned some disadvantages. It was curious regarding any negative effects emanating from dependence on the family. The study encountered that the parents of the divorced and widow women involved themselves in their daughter's parenting styles. Many divorced and widow women mentioned the problem with respect to women's social and familial status. Many of the women stressed experiencing the conflict about their motherly authority and being overshadowed by their own mother in the eyes of their children. The mothers in this study stressed that they were afraid of losing both their roles as the head of family as well as control over their children. The main concern was sharing the authority with their mothers. Although divorced and widow mothers were pleased about their mother's help in sharing the care of the children, they also emphasized their concern of handing over their authority to their mothers. Nurdan (divorced, 39 years old, with one child) highlighted her fear of her own mother:

She is always nagging and grumbling. Sometimes swearwords come out of her mouth. And I, as a mother, didn't want my daughter to lose her self-confidence. I wanted her to know her mother as noble, strong and proud. When my mother swore at me, my daughter was devastated. You may be surprised but I was frightened of my mother. She was the authority at home. I did whatever she said about the home, about the kids.

Sibel (divorced, 34 years old, having two children) stated

My mom was more interfering, like... I am, as I said, stricter with this issue, since I have to have the authority over my children to make them more decent even if I'm not with them because of the environment and living conditions. And since I'm a strict person, sometimes I'm stricter than I should be, I know. My mother is more relaxed, she says she's looking after them, and tells me not to worry. "Why are you doing this? Don't get angry. When you get angry, just don't." And I say to my mother "okay, but I need to keep my authority." This is what happens. My mother is always on their side, not mine.

According to care and control paradigm of Joseph, women are subordinate not only to all men but also senior women in the family. This mechanism of control of women reveals gender contract of Moghadam (2000) where the husband is the sole breadwinner and the women is the caregiver. Therefore, when the loss of the husband occurs, because of his labor at home, becoming the head of the family is not given to mothers. However, the control is given to other men and the senior women in the house. Thus, this causes role ambiguity in the divorced women's newly formed families as Kavas and Hoşgör claimed (2012). When they lived with their families, they cannot be considered as empowered.

The absence of the father is another issue divorced and widow women had to deal with in order to keep the sense of family alive after marital dissolution. The absence of the father has had different results for the divorced and widow women with whom I conducted the interviews. Divorced women expressed that their male and senior female family members and relatives control their children. However, "*sahip çıkmak*"¹⁰ was the common expression used by widow women in this study.

For divorced women, the absence of the father creates pressure from the relatives and their own families on these women because it is believed that fatherless children will end up badly. Hence, relatives of

¹⁰ To attend to, to look after someone, to support, to help someone.

divorced women try to watch out for the children of divorced women, because they think the children will harm the family. Since the notion of single mothers is not common in Turkey, women who lived alone with their children are not welcomed in society. According to Kavas and Gündüz-Hoşgör (2012), women were considered to be responsible for a failing marriage. Because it is believed that women are the homemakers, upon divorce, women are considered guilty of not keeping up the marriage, and, therefore, damaging society. Hence, these negative attitudes toward divorce have an impact on the children of divorced women. Many participant divorced women experienced negative attitudes towards their children. Sibel (divorced, 34 years old, with two children), for instance,

All of the family, from my relatives, to my uncles and aunts, they all said to give them to their father, that I'm young and can get married. I said that as long as they are with me; I was willing to not get married. "Let the father take care of them. Children without a father will cause problems for you, you can't handle the boy, what if the girls are raised without a father?" They said things like this and asked me to give up the children.

Kerime (45 years old, having one child) said that

They always excluded us because I was divorced and my son is without a father, but they also always gossiped about the Abdulhalim's naughtiness. They gossiped that I wasn't able to take care of him, that he would become bad because he'd no father, that he would become a good-for-nothing. They always thought this way. All rumours then ended as a warning to me. "Be careful about your son, he is going to be a young man, he might follow someone, go and control him." As if I didn't know, as if I were ignorant.

For divorced and widow women, to compensate for the father, the grandfather was seen as a role model that the participants used frequently as a strategy. In many cases, when nonresident fathers did not function as an authority figure in the family, either the grandparents stepped in, or the big brother took over

the role of the father. The grandparents and the older son became substitute authority figures in the newly formed families of divorced women. Moreover, grandparents became both a major source of childcare and the grandfather became a male figure in the absence of the father. Elif (divorced, 30 years old, with one child), for instance, stated:

I, my mom and my sister remained here. She is married, too. She has got a kid. She'll be here, you'll meet her. God bless him, my father was never inadequate. We didn't lack anything. He was being a father to my daughter. My daughter took him as father. She was calling him father in the beginning. She fears him, she looks up to him. She's got no father, whom shall she call dad? Her father didn't care that he had a daughter, he never visits her.

Fatma (divorced, 43 years old, having three children) told me that

When the father didn't fulfill his fatherly duties, the duty was up to my elder son. He brought home money. He took care of the shop. He found a job for me. He took care of his siblings, claimed them, protected them, fretted over them at times. He got angry when it was necessary.

According to Kavas and Hoşgör (2012: 16), "grandparents in this specific context do not solely act as support for childcare, they also function as a substitute authority figure, acting as compensation for the absence of fathers in these newly formed families."

On the other hand, in the family of widow women, the father's absence was compensated by their relatives who considered the children to be a remembrance of the deceased father. Different from divorced women, widow women didn't feel pressure from their relatives, rather their relatives tried to care for the children of deceased loved one after marital dissolution. The widow women mentioned that their relatives economically compensated for the absence of the father by paying the fee of the private courses, buying the school equipment, or taking them on summer holidays. The widow women stated that their relatives try to help the children so that they don't feel loss of the father.

Meryem (widow, 45 years old, having two children), for instance, said that

They liked the deceased. He always kept his nose clean. He was very charitable. He used to try to help, and used to speak with anyone. When he passed away, everyone was very sad. God bless them, they also didn't let the children be alone. Their uncle helped them in the training center. When they are to go on a vacation or to picnic, they also ask me my permission for them to take the children. They give pocket money on Ramadan. Like this, well, I am thankful to them.

Ayşe (widow, 46 years old) stated

To be fair, they never think badly about my children. They knew how the deceased raised them. Nobody talked behind their backs, and I wouldn't let anybody anyway. When they want to do something with their children, they also come to us. Altogether, I mean. They don't make a distinction between them. When their cousins buy something for themselves, they also buy it for my children. We eat and drink together. We take care of each other. And after he passed away, they cared even more. They were like 'do you need anything?', 'we're with you.'

Different from divorced mothers, widow others are still kept within the family. Since they were the only parent, the relatives and the families were trying to keep close relationship with children to compensate the loss of the husbands. In other words, not only widow woman but also children are protected by the relatives or native family. However, like divorced women, compensating the parenting of the husbands deteriorate the authority a mother is supposed to have.

Consequently, by creating authority figures or pushing non-resident fathers to be more active in the family, these women were "performing families" (Sarkisian, 2006). By doing family, these women were trying to re-create the family form by providing cultural expectations about being a family in which single mothers' family is not considered to be a family (Nelson, 2006). In this way, the divorced and widow mothers whom I talked to didn't feel appropriate as a breadwinner because of appropriate behaviors for women and men

in society. Without the support of a partner, many divorced and widow women create and enhance limits about their families; who will be in, who will be out or who will perform which roles, since these women chose to behave differently by getting divorced. As Kavas (2010) claimed, they tried to rebuild their families based on traditional gender roles. Moreover, it was unexpected to see women's acceptance of cultural constructions of women. In terms of parenting, many of them accepted the traditional allocation of men and women into different duties in the family which is justified by biological differences and the division of labor.

CONCLUSION

“Do not get divorced; pray for will of God for your husband”¹¹

In this study, unlike the various researches which has studied more on the influences of marital dissolution on children, family, and society, experience of divorced and widow woman in Turkey was explored exclusively by taking the women into the center. Divorced and widow women’s experiences were examined by examining how they cope with their new marital status after marital dissolution, how they cope with social problems; how they rearrange their families between their newly statuses and new lives to explore changes and continuities in patriarchy in experiences of women. In this study, I have examined the key dimensions that determine the conditions and limitations the opportunities of divorced and widow women. The experiences of women in this study challenge the main approach used to describe the marital dissolution experience in Turkey. Those refer to the weakening tradition which is believed that marital dissolution is the reason of “family breakdown” in a society. In order to encourage family values with the belief that these values will keep marriages, divorce is labelled as a social problem. The accounts of women in this study led us to see important realities of how women experience after marital dissolution.

Women created some strategies to compensate the absence of the father. Firstly, because of the belief that a child should be raised with two parents, divorced women invite their ex-husbands into their lives. Friends, relatives, and their own families consider that without a father, children will get out of hand. These results indicate that in examining experiences of women after marital dissolution it is not taken factors related to father. Even if fathers leave the family, they may disturb family life. Many fathers use visitation as a way to harass their ex-wives. Findings to emerge from this research show that strict patriarchal relations and

¹¹ “Boşanmayın, kocanızın ölmesi için dua edin.” This is a statement of one of the divorced women in this study. I found it significant in terms of the outcomes of this study. This statement is like a summary for conclusions of the current study. It refers that being a widow woman is a more advantageous than being a divorced woman in Turkey.

control on women still continue after the divorce in a similar line with Joseph's study of care and control of men over women in Middle East societies.

Secondly, divorced and also widow women need grandfathers to provide a role model for children as substitute authority figures. However, this results in different situations for divorced and widow women. This study shows that male relatives, senior female family members control children of divorced women while children of widow women are looked after since their fathers died. Relatives of divorced women try to watch out for the children of divorced women, because they think the children will harm the family. This also shows us while the divorced mothers were trying to construct a new family; they reconstruct the traditional family approach by letting grandfathers to be authority figure in the family. The findings of this study is line with the studies (Cherlin, 2006; Sarkisian, 2006) in which alternative families such as divorced and widow women families are defined by the family ideal. Moreover, the substitute authority shows us that the male breadwinner model still exists even though the marriage ends with divorce and women construct female headed households.

Therefore, although, divorced and widow women could find jobs and have income, since the house chores do not change but increase upon being the head of the family, they have difficulties. The findings of research shows there is not significant change in patriarchal expectations of grand-mothers in the child care. The findings of the research are in a similar line with Ecevit's (2012) study which expresses grandmothers are a major source of childcare. Additionally, the findings of the research show the grandfather became a male figure in the absence of the father. Women who get childcare support from their mothers experience patriarchal control. Moreover, this study indicates that there is ambivalence in maternal authority after marital dissolution if the grandmothers take care of children. While grandmothers are taking care of the children, they also control mothering of divorced women. Divorced women have difficulties in conceding their authority to their mothers. In other words, divorced women feel obliged to "justify their decision about parenting." This issue is not much studied in Turkey. Thus, this study contributes the literature in Turkey.

In short, the idea of the “traditional” family is a powerful one for these women, even though that family form has failed them in the past. Women, whose nuclear “family” ties have been fractured, have sought to “include” members of their families of origin in the place of the absent “father.” It is because the traditional family orders life force those women to seek to do family. Finally, as the “doing” family itself suggests, women undergo constant change to be defined as a family because they have conflicting notions of what family they are.

Limitations of the Study:

This research has so far some limitations. Because a qualitative methodology was used, it was not possible fully to explore issues that may have impacted on all the divorced and widow women in Turkey. For example, it has been shown that cultural, educational and socioeconomic factors are likely to have influenced the divorced and widow women. However, this study did not examine the highly educated and upper class divorced and widow women. The number of the units of analysis in the study is dictated by the type of research problem. In the case of the upper class women, these influences may have been compounded by participants’ economic welfare. However, this study did not include those women. Similarly, interviews with remarried women may highlight new ideas about the relationship between ideal family type and marital dissolution. But, again this study did not examine the situations of remarried women. For further investigation, this will be good starting point. Another limitation for this study may be this study did not include or compare the situations of fathers after marital dissolutions. Again, for further studies, examining fathers after marital dissolution may help deepen the literature in Turkey.

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada evlilikleri boşanma ya da eşin vefatı ile sonlanmış çocuklu kadınların bekar anne olarak bu süreci nasıl yaşadıklarını ve kültürel önyargılara, tek ebeveynliğe, eski eş ile ilişkilere, kocanın yokluğu gibi sorunlara yönelik oluşturdukları baş etme stratejilerini “doing family” kavramı çerçevesinde anlamaya çalıştım. Temel argümanım, dul ve boşanmış kadınların aile, piyasa ve devlet arasında sıkışmış olması; cinsiyete dayalı iş bölümü, ataerkil toplum algısı üzerine kurulmuş sosyal politikaların, bu kadınların yaşamlarını istedikleri şekilde yaşamalarına ve kendi ayakları üzerinde durmalarına izin vermiyor olması. Bu çalışmamda, boşanmış ve dul kadının, bekar anne olarak yaşadığı zorluklarla başa çıkabilmek için Türkiye’deki geleneksel aile kalıplarını yeniden inşa ettikleri göstermeyi amaçlamaktayım. Kadınların ataerkilliğe ilişkin deneyimlerini anlamak için, Ankara’da yaşayan boşanmış on dokuz anne ve on altı eşi vefat etmiş anne ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yaptım.

Bu çalışmada kadınların yaşadığı deneyimler, Türkiye’de evliliğin sonlandırılmasına yönelik temel yaklaşımı sorgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye toplumunda evliliğin sonlandırılmasını "aile çöküşü" olarak yorumlayan geleneksel düşünceleri yeniden ele almaktadır. Bu düşünceler evliliklerin süreceği düşüncesiyle aile değerlerini cesaretlendirmek için boşanmayı toplumsal bir sorun olarak nitelendirilir. Bu çalışmada kadınların anlatıları, evlilik sonlandıktan sonra kadınların nasıl yaşadığı konusunda önemli gerçekleri görmemizi sağlamıştır. Nelson’ın (2006) iddia ettiği gibi toplum, bekar annelerin ailesinin oluşturduğu aile tanımını yok sayar. Bu nedenle, bekar anneler evlilikleri sonlandıktan sonra ailelerinde geleneksel aile normlarını benimseyerek geleneksel aileyi yeniden gerçekleştirmeye çalışırlar. Boşanmış kadınlar ve dul kadınlar, ailelerin çelişkiliğini ve otorite sorunlarını ortaya koymaktadır; çünkü bekar anneler geleneksel aile modeline uymamaktadır.

"Geleneksel" aile fikri, bu aile biçimi geçmişte başarısız olmasına rağmen, bu kadınlar için güçlü bir düşüncedir. Çekirdek "aile" bağları dışında kalan bu kadınlar, "baba"nın yokluğunu telefi etmek için ailelerinin erkek üyelerini yeni ailelerine dahil etmeye çalışıyorlar, çünkü geleneksel aile, bu kadınların

ayakta kalabilmeleri için çözüm yollarını aramaya zorlamaktadır. “Doing family” kavramının da belirttiği gibi, kadınlar bekar anne hayatlarını bir aile olarak tanımlanmak için sürekli çabalyorlar; çünkü onlar ve toplum, bekar annelerin nasıl bir aile oldukları konusunda çelişkili görüşlere sahipler.

Sonuç olarak, konuştuğum boşanmış ve dul anneler, toplumda kadınlar için uygun davranışlar nedeniyle kendilerini eve ekmek getiren/evin reisi olma konumuna uygun hissetmiyorlar. Yeni ailelerinde otorite figürleri yaratarak ya da birlikte yaşamadıkları eski eşlerini ailede daha aktif baba olmaya iterek, bu kadınlar "aileleri yerine getiriyor" (Sarkisian, 2006). Bu kadınlar bu yöntemlerle, bekar annelerin ailelerinin bir aile olmadığını düşünen topluma karşı bir aile olmanın kültürel beklentilerini karşılayarak aile formunu yeniden yaratmaya çalışıyorlar (Nelson, 2006). Bir partnerin desteği olmadan, birçok boşanmış ve dul kadın, aileleri için sınırlar yaratır ve sınırlarını arttırır; kimin aile içinde olacağını, kimin çıkacağını ya da hangi rolleri yerine getireceğini yeniden belirler, çünkü bu kadınlar artık kocasız kadınlardır. Kavas'ın (2010) iddia ettiği gibi, geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine dayalı olarak ailelerini yeniden inşa etmeye çalışıyorlar.

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