

EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY MARRIAGE IN TURKEY



Kingdom of the Netherlands



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Writers:

Burcu Kalpaklıođlu
Rümeysa amdereli

Graphic Design:

Büşra Yurtseven

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SUMMARY

Havle Women's Association, with the support of the Human Rights Program affiliated to the Netherlands Embassy and with the contributions of the YADA Foundation, conducted a field study consisting of a sample survey and in-depth interviews that are specific to and that will represent Turkey, aiming to understand the perception of early age marriages and with an emphasis on understanding the factors that set ground for early marriages.

The analysis of the research was conducted around the following titles:

- » The experience and perception of marriage
- » The experience and perception of early marriage
- » The perception of religion and the relation of discourses on early marriage with religious interpretations
- » Social norms

We can summarize the analysis of the thorough interviews and the survey study as follows:

» Based on both the detailed interviews and the surveys, we can clearly state that the people living in Turkey are against marriages under the age of 18 to a great extent. We asked the participants of the survey, "If you have a daughter or if you were to have one, would you consider marrying them off before the age of 18?" We got a 91.8% 'No' as an answer to this question. While men and women who oppose the idea are in similar proportions, this opposition decreases among participants over the age of 50. For the women and men that we interviewed in detail, we see that early marriages are conceptually regarded in relation with childhood, a childhood that is un-lived, ignorance, inadequate mental growth, cruelty, violence, fear and deprivation.

» In the survey study, the overriding age of ideal marriage for women on average is seen as 23, while we observe that it is 25 for men. While the age ranges expressed in the in-depth interviews were also close to the findings of the survey study, the interviewees opposed early marriage and stated that both women and men should get married after they reach a certain level of "maturity". While in order to reach this level of maturity for women, it was frequently mentioned that they should "complete their education", have "financial freedom", "be able to provide for themselves" and "fully develop into their personality and character", it was mentioned that boys must be able to financially provide for the household and have emotional maturity in order to marry. A frequently mentioned detail was that men reach a level of emotional maturity and accountability much later than women do. One of the findings that stood out to us was that in the in-depth interviews, most of the interviewees set a limit for the oldest age for when a woman can get married, and fertility and motherhood were the leading basis of these limits. To summarize, it is thought that a woman should have the physical strength and emotional

maturity needed to be a “good mother”, the appropriate age of marriage for a woman is an age when they are not too physically or mentally exhausted to raise kids and an age when they will not be selective in the decision of marriage.

» In the survey study, we found that the fact that girls and boys have sexual intercourse outside of marriage or that they want to get married, is a factor that reduces the opposition to early marriages. In qualitative interviews conducted with women who married at an early age, they stated that the fact that girls have flirtatious relationships, boyfriends, the possibility of any these happening, and the possibility of their daughters’ reputation or honor being ruined were reasons to get them married at an early age or to encourage them to marry. Therefore, sexuality has been described as a crucial deal breaker that prevents opposition to early marriages. Based on this, we can say that our research shows the most prominent motivation for early marriage as the perception of morality and social norms that are structured and based around the sexuality of girls.

» In the in-depth interviews that were made, none of the women who married at an early age mentioned that they or their families had any religious motivation for their early marriages. None of the interviewees made a religious reference in the context of early marriages until we came to the section where we asked about their religious approach to early marriages in the questionnaire. Based on these findings, we can observe that religion is not expressed as a source of motivation for early marriages. However, when we raised the question, many of the interviewees stated that Islam allows early marriages out, leaving room for possibility. Therefore, given the visible and invisible effects of religion in shaping people’s decisions in their daily lives, we anticipate that the legitimacy that arises from it may reduce the question marks in people’s heads regarding early marriages. In other words, we think that religion could have a preventive effect on early marriages, if the current interpretations of Islam had not been leaving room for possibility on this issue.

» In our in-depth interviews, almost all of the interviewees stated that they believed early marriages were religiously permitted, while some of them, mostly women, expressed the problems caused by early marriages in women’s lives, and questioned it despite the religious legitimacy. Only two women among the interviewees stated that early marriages were not religiously permitted either. Based on these, we can say that there is a noticeable difference between men and women in approaches to early marriages. Women are distancing themselves from religious permission thought to be given to early marriages, both because of their own experiences and because of their openness to the experiences of other women around them. Another important point here is that many of the participants think of the religion of Islam as a holistic set of rules that are made up of norms and do not change historically according to the needs of people. In addition to this, there is a huge discrepancy between these sets of rules and day-to-day practices. In other words, women’s singular experiences do not conform to these norms, forcing these norms to change and transform. The violence and difficulties in the stories of girls who marry at an early age cause them to distance themselves from these norms despite their belief that Islamic interpretations of early marriage are not open to change.

1 | INTRODUCTION

As Havle Women's Association, we aim to produce feminist interpretations that can serve as an alternative to the patriarchal interpretations of Islam and to spread these interpretations. We oppose the understanding that regards Islamic interpretations on gender issues as being immanent, sacred and unquestionable, and we argue that these interpretations may be open to change according to the needs of individuals, social changes and legal structures.

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Setting off from this background, we tried to understand the motivations for and perceptions of early marriage, and the relationship between religious interpretations and early age marriages. In the research, on the one hand, we tried to understand how early age marriage is experienced and perceived by women and men of different ages, social classes, education levels and from different geographic locations in Turkey and on the other hand, how the religious issues related to marriage and gender are interpreted by people who feel engaged religion and by people who do not, and how the religion of Islam works in shaping people's daily lives and their imaginations.

In this study, supported by the Human Rights Program of the Netherlands Embassy, we tried to understand the role of religious interpretations and gender-based norms in approaches to early age marriages while keeping an extensive framework for the research. We asked a wide range of questions to the women and men whom we interviewed, and these can be categorized as: Marital life, the meanings and experiences attributed to motherhood and fatherhood, participation in decision-making in the household, attitude towards early marriage, perceptions of Islam and early marriage experiences. While the acquired quantitative data provided us with results that represent the whole of Turkey and that will contribute to our advocacy activities, especially in the political space, the data we received in the qualitative interviews about the daily lives, the mechanisms of meaning-making, the desires and expectations of participants from very different backgrounds and who relate to Islam in very different ways, enabled us to deepen our discussions.

As Havle, we hope that this research which has taught us a lot, will be a qualified contribution to the feminist literature and movement.

1.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

UNICEF's 2020 data shows that 21% of women living around the world were married before the age of 18, which means that currently there are 650 million women around the world who have experienced being married as children. Every year, 12 million underage girls get married around the world. But on the other hand, the number of marriages made before the age of 18 is noticeably decreasing in some parts of the world as a result of the worldwide movement. For example, especially in South Asia, the legal minimum age for marriage has been raised in some countries as a result of the protests of women. With the law passed in Indonesia in 2019, the minimum age for marriage was changed to 21 for both women and men. While the law allows for this age to be 19 with the permission of the family, there was no age limit for marriages made with the permission of the judge. In Bangladesh, although the law adopted in 2017 brings the minimum age of marriage to 18 for women and 21 for men, because the law also states that there may be exceptional circumstances, for example, regarding the well-being of the child, and because there is no age limit for marriages made with the consent of the family and the judge, the law was met with serious backlash.

When we look at Turkey, we see that during the 20th century, changes were made numerous times, regarding the legal minimum age of marriage. According to the Decree of the Family Law dated 1917, although the lower limit in marriage was 17 for girls, a girl who reached puberty could be married at any age within the permission of her family. In the Civil Code of 1926, the age of marriage was accepted as 18 for men and 17 for girls, and in “extraordinary” cases, this age limit could be reduced to 15 for both boys and girls. In 1938, the age of marriage was reduced to 17 for boys 15 for girls. With the changes made in the Civil Code in 2001, the minimum age of marriage was increased to 18 for both girls and boys, but this age was reduced to 17 for marriages made within the permission of the family, and to 16 for those made by the decision of the judge in case of extraordinary situations.

Although some of the people who got married before the age of 18 in Turkey were officially married with the permission of the family or the judge, it is important for us to state that it is very difficult to reach statistical data on the number of girls who got married before the age of 18, due to the fact that most of the marriages are not a legal marriage, but a ‘religious marriage’. In its July 2020 bulletin prepared for the World Population Day, TÜİK stated that the official rate of legal marriages in childhood and adolescent pregnancies have decreased. According to the data, the marriage rate for girls aged 16-17 was 7.8 percent in 2010, and 3.1 percent in 2019. Since the marriage rate here only takes into account the officiated marriages, the data reflects only a part of the actual figures, but it is still possible to interpret the decline in officiated figures over the past decade as an improvement. However, in order to understand the actual state in which we are at, we need more research on marriages that are made solely by religious marriage.

1.2 THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EARLY MARRIAGE

Different words are used in the literature to refer to “marriages” occurring under the age of 18. It is possible to say that the most common ones are early/child/ forced marriages. However, there is some criticism raised against this usage, arguing that partnerships occurring under the age of 18 cannot be called a ‘marriage’, and that wording of these kinds work to legitimize the marriages. At the same time, with a similar approach, the usage of the phrase ‘child bride’ has been abandoned by the feminist movement in Turkey for many years. Instead, the proposed wording is “child abuse” and although this phrase politically points to the right direction, it has not yet become a part of society’s collective memory, so it is a wording that we cannot directly refer to within the scope of this study in which we aim to measure perception. Therefore, we used the phrase ‘early marriage’ in the analysis of the research, as it is socially the most commonly used phrase, while also acknowledging the non-specificity of the phrase. So, in all the questions asked to the participants, the phrase “Marriages under 18” was used in order to avoid confusion. In other words, the participants answered the questions with the knowledge that we meant ‘marriages under the age of 18’. In the analysis phase, we analyzed their answers under the phrasing of early marriage. We ask you to read the entire study in this light.

1.3 METHOD

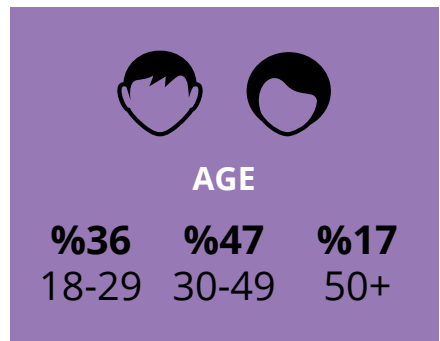
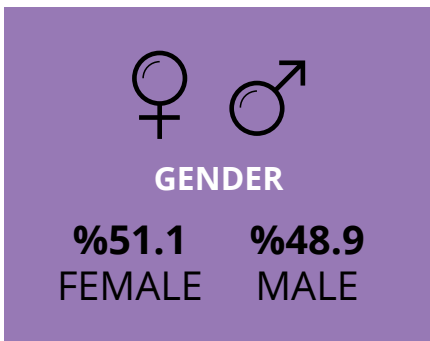
1.3.1 Method of the Quantitative Research

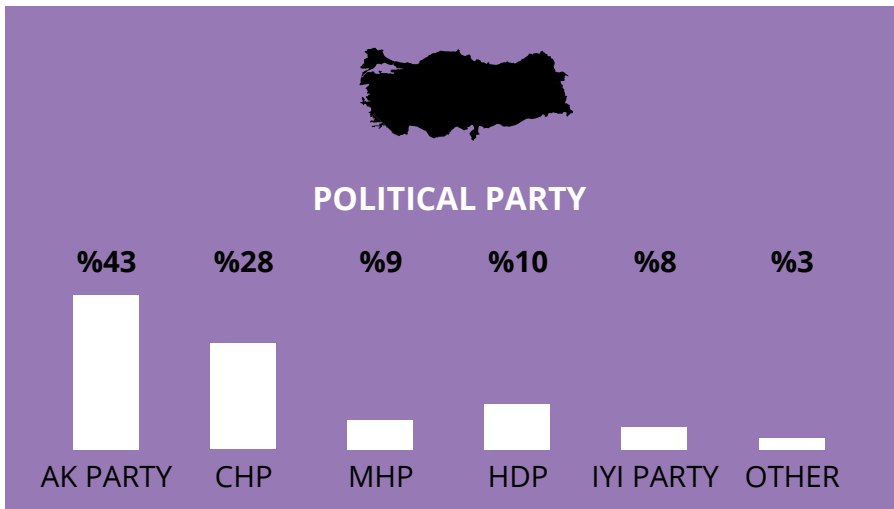
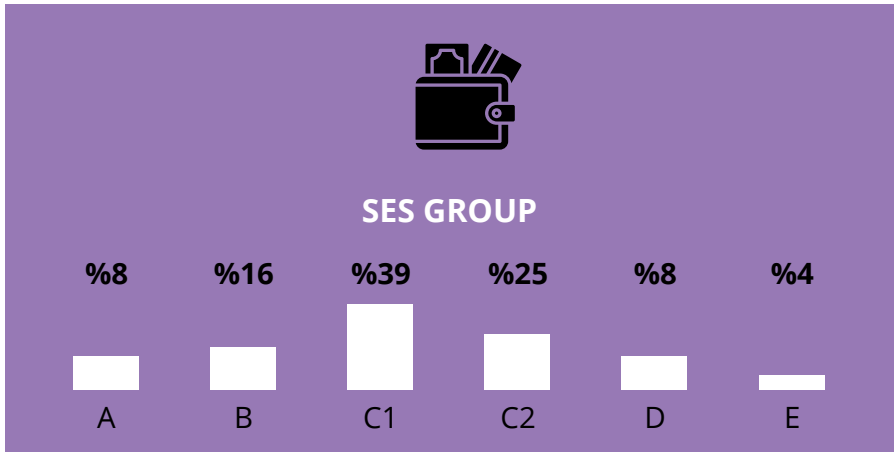
We aimed to measure the perception towards early marriages in Turkey within the scope of the quantitative research. This research was carried out by a quantitative face-to-face questionnaire process.

Using the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) method, regions in Level 1 of the Classification of Statistical Regions Units (CSRU) were taken as the basis that will represent Turkey. The distribution was made according to the voting rates of the regions in CSRU Level 2 (NUTS2), which was held Turkey that is represented in the 12 exemplary cities. The selected 12 cities and their affiliated regions are as follows: Istanbul (Istanbul), Çanakkale (West Marmara), İzmir (Aegean), Bursa (East Marmara), Ankara (Western Anatolia), Adana (Mediterranean), Kayseri (Central Anatolia), Samsun (Western Black Sea), Trabzon (Eastern Black Sea), Erzurum (Northeast Anatolia), Van (Eastern Anatolia) and Diyarbakir (Southeastern Anatolia).

We used the following quotas in sample selection:

- » Turkey Statistical Region Classification (NUTS2)
- » Gender (Female, Male)
- » Age (18-29, 30-49, 50-64)
- » Political Party (AK Party, CHP, MHP, HDP, İYİ Party and Other)
- » SES (Socio-Economic Status - A, B, C1, C2, D, E)





In the quantitative research, a comprehensive structured questionnaire was prepared, the different responses obtained from in-depth interviews and the relevant topics and questions raised in the related literary works were reflected in the form of questions. The interviews were conducted using tablet computers (Computer Assisted Face-to-Face Interviews) and lasted for about an hour. The data obtained from the questionnaire was coded and included in the database. SPSS, Microsoft Excel and basic software programs were used for data analysis and management.

1.3.2. The Method of the Qualitative Research

In addition to the quantitative data that we obtained from the survey that we conducted throughout Turkey, we also carried out a series of in-depth interviews with 54 interviewees consisting of both men and women, in order to look at early marriage in a micro-scale and in depth for our research.

With the qualitative research, we wanted to observe how early marriage is experienced in everyday life in different contexts, and understand how it is perceived by people who have experienced it and by people who have not, what meanings are attributed to it, with what wording and emotions it is expressed, and how Islamic discourses work in narratives of early marriage. Considering that perceptions of early marriage are not unrelated to perceptions of marriage, femininity and masculinity in a broader framework, we tried to understand the meanings people attribute to marriage, their expectations and desires from marriage, and their gender-based experiences within marriage. Likewise, in order to understand how early marriage is interpreted by people within the framework of Islamic discourses, we have also tried to understand how they relate to Islam and how they reinterpret Islamic interpretations based on marriage and gender.

In order to render our research stronger, we chose to interview men and women of different ages, educational levels, professions, and people who associated themselves with the religion of Islam in very different ways. While the majority of the interviews took place in Istanbul, we visited Afyon, Niğde, Yozgat, Ağrı and Erzurum provinces, which are the top 10 cities where early marriage is the most intense, and which differ from each other in terms of sociocultural and geographic terms, giving us the opportunity to reach and meet with different women in these provinces who married early.

City	Gender	Married before 18	Married after 18
Istanbul	Women	16	13
	Men		16
Other Provinces (Afyon, Niğde, Yozgat, Ağrı, Erzurum)	Women	9	

2 | RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

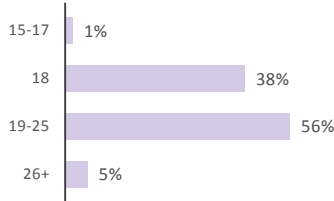
Another discussion about the age of marriage, as we have mentioned in the conceptual background section, is shaped around the question of the age in which a person is no longer considered a 'child'. Based on the answers given, it is possible to say that the political campaigns based on the statement "Everyone is a child until the age of 18" do not conflict with the existing perception.

2.1 THE AGE OF MARRIAGE

Quantitative Interviews:

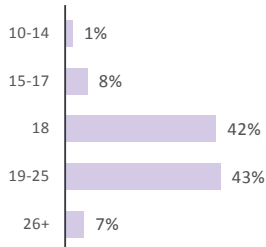
The starting point of our research which focuses on the perceptions of early marriage was the age of marriage and the perceptions and arguments forming around the age of marriage. When we asked the question "What do you think should be the legal age limit for marriage?" to the participants, we found that the minimum age stated for the legal age limit is 15 and the ratio of those who stated that there should be a legal age limit between 15-17 years is only 1%. Conversely, those who stated that the age of marriage should be in the range between 19-25 constitute the largest percentage (56%). The main average of the stated ages is 21.

What do you think the age limit should be for legal marriage?

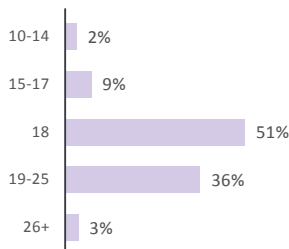


Another discussion about the age of marriage, as we have mentioned in the conceptual background section, is shaped around the question of the age in which a person is no longer considered a ‘child’. Based on the answers given, it is possible to say that the political campaigns based on the statement “Everyone is a child until the age of 18” do not conflict with the existing perception.

What do you think is the age a man can be considered still a child?

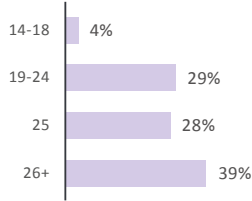


What do you think is the age a woman can be considered still a child?

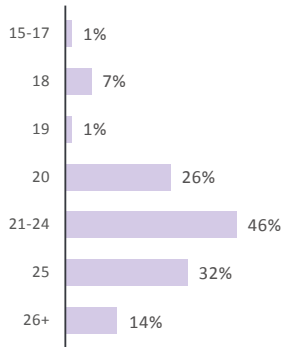


The age of 18 is seen as an important breaking point for leaving childhood. The rate of those who state that people can be considered an adult under the age of 18 is only 9% for both girls and boys. It is stated that men stop being a child later than women do. Under the age of 15, this rate decreases to 2%. While the main average of the numbers expressed for the age of leaving childhood for men is 20, this number for women is 19.

What do you think is the ideal age of marriage for men?

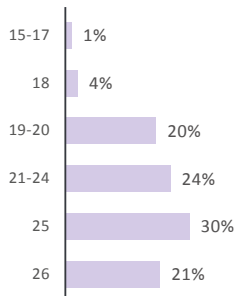


What do you think is the ideal age of marriage for women?

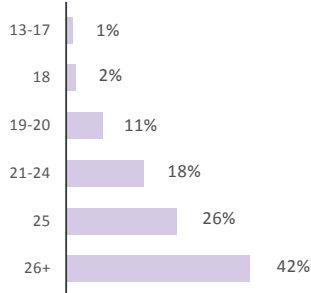


The ideal ages for marriage differ clearly between men and women. The 20-25 age range stands out for women. For men, there is a significant accumulation at the age of 25 and older. While the main average of the ideal marriage ages stated for women is 23, this value is 25 for men. These numbers are consistent with the actual conditions. While the average age of marriage for first marriages of women in 2020 is 25.1, the same age for men is 27.9 (TÜİK, 2021 ADNKS).

What do you think is the age for a woman to be able to take care of a house?



What do you think is the age for a man to be able to provide for a house?



While the rate of those who state that a woman can run a household by the age of 19 is 20%, it is stated that women can largely fulfill this responsibility starting from the age of 25. However, according to the participants, taking the responsibility of supplying for the house for men can only start from the age of 25. While the age to run a household is stated as 24 for women, it is 26 for men. These values are only one year above the age expressed for ideal marriage.

Qualitative Interviews:

Regarding the ideal age of marriage in detailed interviews, “If you had the knowledge that you have today, at what age would you get married?” or “At what age would you like your daughter to get married (if you have/had one)?” Answers to questions vary widely, between the age range of 18 to 35. From the answers given, we can say that the age considered to be ideal for marriage for women and men with different experiences and social backgrounds is directly proportional with their critical attitude towards early marriage. The majority of the interviewees claimed that the earliest age of marriage should be 23-25 for women and a few years older for men. Participants who got married at an early age, stated based on their own experiences, that women and men should reach a certain level of maturity for marriage. For girls, the conditions cited as necessary for marriage are to have “completed their education”, to have “financial freedom”, to “be able to provide for themselves”, “to have a settled character and personality”.

However, after counting these conditions, many interviewees stated that marriage should not be made too late, because after a certain age it will be more difficult to get married and make the choice, and expectations will become higher. It is worth noting that even if marriages made before the age of 18 are met with opposition and a certain and mental and physical maturity is said to be required for marriage, still there are upper limits that are placed on the age of marriage. Except for two people, the rest of the interviewees approached marriage as a mandatory institution for both men and women. In other words, although there is a “decision” at hand about who to marry, marriage itself is not a practice that comes about as a result of a “decision” in people’s lives. This is in parallel with the fact that marriage stood out in our research as the only institution that makes it possible to practice sexuality in the eyes

of the society. At the same time, marriage is perceived to be in an essential relationship with having children, and motherhood is seen as a desirable phenomenon for especially for women, considered as the greatest achievement in their turbulent marriage life. Therefore, the age that is deemed appropriate for women to marry is the age when they are mature enough to be a “good” mother and cope with the physical and emotional responsibilities of marriage, but at the same time an age when they will not be too selective in their decision to get married and will not be physically and mentally too exhausted to have children.

What age do you think is too early for marriage in women?

- For women, it can go up to 25, 26, and 30, maximum is 30. Because those are the most beautiful ages. It must be after 25, but if it is after 30, they become too picky and start asking for the man to have a house, a car etc. *(Female, 53, 15)*
- First, the girl should acquire a sense of self-confidence and be of a certain age. She should have a profession. She should be able to support her children even when she is alone. She should be confident. *(Female, 60, 17)*
- When you say 25, people mature mentally, you look at life a little more aware because you see the pain, you see the joy, you see the good, you see the bad, you see the gain, you see the loss, you can recognize the people you are dealing with. The important thing is to know the other person, trust, there must be trust and I don't want anything else. This is what I want from people; to trust, respect and love. *(Female, 51, 17)*

If you had the knowledge that you have today, at what age would you get married?

- I would like to get married again at the same age, not earlier nor later. Because the ideal age is 28 for women, because earlier than that is a bit too risky. Because you're just a kid. In your ages between 27 and 28, slowly you start to settle down and if you consider having a child, you should not exceed 30, psychologically, I think. *(Female, 28, 28).*
- I would have waited for 28. I cannot express to you the state of ignorance I was in back then. *(Female, 26, 18)*
- I would want to be at least 30 years old. *(Female, 36, 17, Yozgat, See 1)*

(If you have/ had) a daughter, how old would you like them to get married, and why?

I want my daughter to get married after graduating from university without waiting. I want her to start building a family and a home early on because I think the older she gets, the colder she will feel towards the idea of marriage. The young people this fear, so I will ask my daughter to get married immediately after university. *(Female, 40, 17)*

I think at about 25 years old. I think it should not be too late. Marriage does not happen after it is too late. Because people get tired. Both men and women, experience different things. They have lovers, they break up, and the things that come out of this are not so good things. I think early marriage is better. I'm not saying too early, but a little early is fine. *(Female, 56, 17)*

After 25 is a little too late. If you ask why, I mean, humanly, what is the purpose of marriage, to be able to have a child. If you have a child at an early age, you will be able to raise them and grow with them better. If you are older, the child will grow up and ask 'Why is my mother old'? For example, my youngest son, 15 years old, says mom, everyone's mother is young, why are you old. But the age I gave birth to him was 34 years old. Her sister is 26 years old, there is a difference. It is good to be a mother at an early age. *(Female, 49, 25).*

It is also possible to say that women, especially women who marry at an early age, can count the violence and difficulties they have experienced in the institution of marriage, so marriage for them is not a concept that is associated with happiness or sacredness, but rather a concept that they express is full of difficulties and responsibilities. However, they still form their imaginations of life as being in a marriage that is "good" and filled with better feelings, a marriage into which they will step in at the ideal age and therefore be more mature and stronger. But this is not always the case. For example, in the following narrative, "living your life" is described outside of the responsibilities of marriage and being a mother:

I would never have married before the age of 35. Because I would enjoy my youth and live my life. When you get married, you have children, you give up on yourself, you cannot take care of yourself. *(Female, 60, 19).*

4 interviewees, consisting of only 2 women and 2 men, stated that they do not see marriage as a necessity. We can give one of these as an example:

If you had the knowledge that you have today, at what age would you get married?

I wouldn't get married, considering I didn't have children right now.

Why?

Nowadays, for example, we see those around us who get married and 3 months, 5 months or 6 months into the marriage, people really regret their decision to get married. I think marriage is not necessary (Female, 39, 4 interviewees, consisting of only 2 women and 2 men, stated that they do not see marriage as a necessity. We can give one of these as an example:16).

Only a few of the interviewees idealized marriage between the ages between 17 and 20 years old. One of them is a woman who thinks she it was late that she got married at the age of 30, the other is our only interviewer who got married at an early age and spoke about her marriage experience in a positive light and the other is a male interviewer who got married at the age of 20. In the narratives of women, their desires are again associated with being an early mother:

If you had the knowledge that you have today, at what age would you get married, and why?

18. You are much more vigorous, livelier, I think you handle everything better. You can be and do better for the child, in terms of your attention and energy. At that age, you have something to give to your child like this. In time, people get tired after a certain phase. If we want to raise a good generation, I think early marriage is the way. (Female, 38, 30)

I suppose I would get married at the same age. It is very nice to be a mother at an early age. For my kids, and for my husband too. I would have liked to marry my husband again. (Female, 40, 17)

At 20 years old. I mean, the ideal age to marry for a girl is 20 years old. Whether physically or mentally, I think that at the age of 20, she can comprehend everything for what is and speaks her mind and express herself. (Male, 27, 20)

In the answers, the ideal age of marriage for men is often expressed as a few years older than it is for women. For men, maturity was a frequently mentioned as a requirement for marriage and it was stated in many of the interviews that men matured and gained a sense of responsibility later than

women did. This maturity was expressed as both a mental and emotional acquired maturity, as well as a material maturity that stems from earning money and being able to support the house, and sometimes as an experience-based satisfaction of having sufficiently “lived his life” before he got married. In the narratives, motherhood is idealized and the responsibility of raising children is given to women, although it is frequently emphasized that women should be “educated and have a profession” before marriage, but the responsibility of providing a home is nevertheless attributed to men. However, a common opinion that came up in the interviews was that men should “live their youth” before they get married, and this clearly shows that marriage is considered to restrict the freedom, especially the freedom of men more so than women. It also underhandedly reiterates the assumption that men inherently have more sexual desire than women, and points out that unlike the case for women, it is acceptable for men to be able to experience their sexuality outside the institution of marriage.

After they fulfill their military obligations. May be 25-26 years old. Until then, the children do not stay, they want marriage immediately after the military. *(Female, 29, 19)*

Should wait until 26. Should be sure of themselves. Be able to say that they can support their house *(Female, 26, 18)*

For men, the ideal age should be 30, I say 30-35. Let them live, children already spend so much of their time with school, maybe they go into business life after school. Just like that, when he says he finally found himself, this time when he enters the marriage thing, things change. They should not be unhappy, if they should only get married if they will be happy anyway. *(Female, 53, 15)*

I think men should mature a bit, learn how to take a little responsibility. Also, in his youth, for example, let him live whatever he wants to live. He should not try to live that free life after marriage. *(Female, 47, 17)*

The story of a male interviewee who got married at the age of 25 is the only one that is of the opinion that men should marry before women. Here, it can be seen again, that there is the assumption that men have more sexual desire than women, while the idea that men should marry early is based on the idea that extra-marital sex is prohibited and “haram”. The marriage of women at an older age, on the other hand, is seen in association with gaining the maturity to take on and fulfill the traditional and patriarchal responsibilities and behavior patterns that are imposed on them within the family:

I would have gotten married earlier. I got married at 25, maybe I would have preferred for it to be at 20, maybe when I completed my service at the military. Now it seems to me that the sooner you get a man married, the better. Because then, he has nothing to do with the outside, at least he comes to his own home, he comes home to his own family, he becomes one with them, at least he has no interest in the haram things outside, that is, he does not have an eye out there. Oh, if you ask for the lady, the age should be a little older, not 16, 18 or 20, but 25, maybe more, in my opinion, for the ladies. In my opinion, a man should marry early. But the woman can marry later, because she needs to know herself, she needs to know how to handle a family, she needs to know how to treat a man. *(Male, 45, 25)*

2.2 ISLAMIC APPROACHES TO THE AGE OF MARRIAGE

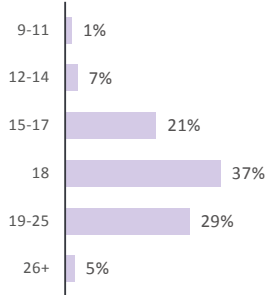
We asked the participants at what age marriage is religiously permissible for men and women, wondering how the age of marriage is interpreted in a religious context. When we consider the answers of the participants, we see that although there are those who say that the age of marriage is 8 or 9 for women according to the religion of Islam, the age that is most commonly expressed is 18.

39% of our participants think that marriage is religiously permissible in Islam starting from the age of 18 for women. Similarly, for men, 37% of our participants stated that the age of marriage is at least 18 years old. The rate of those who stated that marriage is permissible for women under the age of 18 is 32% in total. The rate for men is correspondingly 30%. While the main average of the values expressed for women is 18, this value is 19 for men. The stated values are significantly below the values expressed for the age of legal marriage (20-21). It can be seen from the answers that the ages of 8 and 9 have an imaginative equivalent.

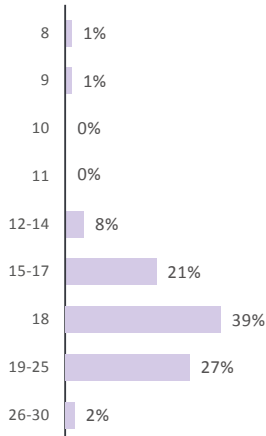
When we asked the ideal age for marriage, we saw that the stated average age increased significantly. For women, the 20-25 age range stands out as the ideal age for marriage.

When we look at the qualitative interviews, the answers we received to the question of how to interpret the issue of the age of marriage according to Islam show how the interviewees relate to religion, how they interpret it, and how they interpret women and men differently. It should be stated at the start that a significant majority of the interviewees state that Islam allows marriages at an early age. The most outstanding finding for us here was that the interviewees saw the religion of Islam as a unity that constitutes of normative and unchanging rules. A significant majority of the interviewees stated the reaching a level of mental maturity, meaning experiencing the physical changes that came with the

What age do you think is Islamically acceptable for a man to marry?



What age do you think is Islamically acceptable for a woman to marry?



entry into puberty, was a necessary but also sufficient precondition for marriage in the Islamic religion. What this means precisely is that the interpretation from classical fiqh traditions that has been passed on to this time has been adopted in our times, and is being seen as an unchanging rule of the religion of Islam. In other words, in the vast majority of the narratives, the learnings of fiqh, which are built historically and socially and with human interpretation, are regarded as a rule that cannot be changed and are equated with religion itself, which is regarded as an unquestionable unity/whole.

How do you think early marriages can be interpreted according to the religion of Islam? Do you think religion puts a limit on the age of marriage? If so, from what age onwards do you think religion allows for marriage?

Islam looks at it in a positive light. It says when they go into puberty, girls should be married off so that they are not encouraged to do haram things. Entry into puberty means the start of menstruation. How can you expect a marriage from a thirteen-year-old? *(Female, 26, 18)*

It is normally seen as a positive. As far as I have heard from grown-ups and stuff, they normally see it as a good thing. They say that when you get married early, you will be more attached to the family you marry. It's like you get more used to it, and that family raises you. *(Female, 36, 17)*

According to the religion of Islam, marriage at an early age is a good thing. 18-17 is an early age, that's my opinion. In Islam, early marriage has good interpretations, they see early marriage as being better, they see it as more appropriate. Now, when you get married at an early age, you stay away from some religiously prohibited things, that is, you stay away from sins. *(Male, 27, 20)*

Islam says to get married after entering puberty. *(Female, 49, 25)*

The most suitable age is after 20 years. I think after 18. Our religion does not allow marriages to be delayed. As it gets more delayed, people can steer into bad directions. Lovers, lose one, find another one. God forbid there are those who even go as far as adultery. The influence is very bad. *(Female, 56, 17)*

As it can be seen, the interviewees stated that the religion of Islam permits early marriage and they associated this with the fact that marriage is the institution in which sexuality can be performed legitimately and related it to the possibility of choosing “haram”, “adultery”, “sin” if not married. This situation is in accordance to the social norms and concerns, which are also labeled as “honor” or “reputation”, which is at the forefront in the marriage stories of early married women, but it must be said that only when we asked, did these interviewees express what the religion of Islam says about the age of marriage, they did not take Islamic interpretations as a ground for legitimacy when talking about their views on marriage at an early age, and did not refer to Islamic terminology or concepts such as “adultery” or “haram. In other words, we saw in our research that the religion of Islam was not expressed as a

source of motivation for marriages at early ages, but nevertheless, speculatively speaking, the consensus among most of the interviewees was that Islam leaves an “open door” on this issue. Therefore, we think that if new interpretations are made that clearly forbid early marriages, it will have a deterrent effect considering the authority of Islam in people’s perceptions. In this context, the expressions of a woman interviewee, who implies that although the “open door” in Islamic interpretations of early marriages are not the reason for early marriages, they hold a sense of authority to legitimize these marriages, is worth noting:

If such a thing did not exist in our religion, is it to say that these people are nonreligious, marrying off their children? So, there must be something in the fatwa, a detail given, that makes them think they can marry off a child at a young age. If they did not find such a hole, then if there is no such thing in religion, then what all these parents are doing to their children, like atheists, at a young age, is not nice. There is always a gaping door. I don’t know, I do have enough religious knowledge, but if they had not found anything there, they would not be able to make it a trade of their children so easily. *(Female, 53, 15)*

The comments made by those who define and those who do not define themselves as religious may also differ in this regard. We can add here that the comments of some of the interviewees who roughly describe themselves as more “secular” are much clearer and full of biased expressions.

How do you think early marriages can be interpreted according to the religion of Islam?

Nowadays, everything is considered normal according to the religion of Islam. They would even marry off a baby in the crib, so I don’t think it says anything positive about this topic. For now, I do not think that the religion of Islam says anything like ‘get married at 27’. *(Female, 28, 28)*

(In the religion of Islam) It is interpreted as follows: You can buy them at any age you want, as the woman is the property of the man after all. The man decides when to use the woman. You take them at the age of eight. The time to use them comes at the age of thirteen for him, then he uses it. It comes at fifteen years old, then that is when he uses it. He can also use her at eight years old. It is left to that man’s initiative. You can have a wedding, and you decide to use it. Something decided upon your pleasure. When to use it is up to your fantasies. *(Male, 53, 29)*

Some of the interviewees - all of the women with the exception of one - also stated that early marriages are allowed in Islam while, also stating that this should not be the case in the changing social circumstances. Here again, although there is an understanding of Islam based on rules expressed in sentences such as "This is the ruling in Islam ...", women enquire the norms in question based on their own experiences and the experiences of women around them and distance themselves from these norms. Thus, they indirectly show that there are capacities for change in these norms.

If you look at the religion of Islam, it says to get married early, but I am against it *(Female, 60, 15)*

(Islamic religion) marries off at a young age and accepts mistresses. But it's wrong. I will not say all of them, but there are those who do this. Second wife, third wife. These should happen. *(Female, 60, 17)*

I do not know very well how it is interpreted in Islam, but as I said, even if it says so in Islam, the physical state of a person is not suitable for it neither mentally nor physically. For example, our religion says that one can marry even at the age of 9, but this is very wrong, that is to say that, there are things that a person can deal with both mentally and physically and there are things that they cannot. A woman should marry at such an age, an age after 18, so that there should not be any traumas or hindrances on her life when she experiences negativities. *(Female, 45, 17)*

If we ask religion, our religion says they should marry after they reach the age of puberty. For example, 18-year olds nowadays, I say my husband's son, are still children. He is 18 years old, but what kind of responsibility can he even take when he gets married, the child still comes and lies on my lap. *(Female, 47, 17)*

Finally, several woman interviewees stated that early marriages are not permitted in Islam:

Early marriage is if you look at the religion of Islam, it says to get married early, but I am against it sin, that is also a sin, and is wrong *(Female, 35, 23)*

Wrong. 19-18 ages are wrong in Islam. Islam does not accept it either. To marry at an age when you are a child. Our master the Prophet PBUH, He was 14 years old when he married Aÿşe. They waited for 4 years, then they became a family. Religion is also against it. It would not be good from neither a religious nor a legal perspective. *(Female, 46, 17)*

Not at an early age, but this is still difficult. It does not give an age, it says in the Quran, let them learn. I don't know, it was told as, let him finish his military duty, let him marry, work and be able to financially provide. (*Female, 48, 17*)

Early marriage is not interpreted well according to the religion of Islam, it is interpreted as ignorance, it is interpreted as juvenile, it is not approved. (*Female, 60, 19*)

It is noteworthy that all those who do not embrace the Islamic interpretations that legitimize early age marriages and who distance themselves from them, are women. It is possible to say the following: There is a big gap between the normative and the experiences, that is, while early age marriages are allowed in traditional fiqh, the experiences reveal the violence and difficulties experienced by women who marry at an early age. And this is why women question these norms or conclude that they are not in accordance with Islam, based on their own experiences and the experiences they have witnessed from their surroundings. It is possible to say that personal experiences and shared experiences with other women make women more open to making new commentaries than men.

2.3 FAMILY APPROVAL

While all of the interviewees participating in our qualitative research stated that the decision of marriage should be made by the women themselves; almost all of them, except a few people, stated that they should not marry without the approval of the family. In the interviews, while it is widely agreed upon that girls can marry any man they want to nowadays, and that the freedom in question is supported, on the other hand it is also frequently mentioned that their families must be persuaded and must be approving the marriage. In other words, while people are clearly opposed to girls marrying someone they do not want to marry, it is thought that they should marry the desired spouse only if they can get the approval of the family. In these statements, it is seen as ideal that there be no conflict between the desires, expectations, or morals of girls and those of their families, we do not know what kind of negotiation is going on between the freedom of girls and their family ties in a situation of conflict.

Let me tell you something, we all lived our youth at the time, we did not like what our family told us, we were reacting adversely, but I still think that there should be the approval of the family in marriage. Because if something were to happen one day, the problems that I faced, for example, maybe if my family had given me approval, if they wanted it first, if I did not force it. (*Female, 42, 17*)

The narrative above belongs to a woman who wanted to get married in order to get away from her home and village; even though her family did not allow it at first, she persisted, and then suffered severe physical and psychological violence in her marriage. And although his father knows the hardships she went through in her marriage, he definitely won't let her return home. Although the mentality of "If you enter a house in a wedding dress, you can only leave in a shroud" is not only valid for women who marry voluntarily, it has been expressed in some of the narratives that women who have made marriages without the approval of their families are less protected by their families later on. Women whose families do not protect them often find themselves in an even more vulnerable and unsupported position within their marriages. While some interviewees stated that family approval should be obtained, they expressed that they said this based on their own experiences or the experiences taking place in their environment.

However, although it is often thought that those who will get married should obtain the approval of their families, the interviewees also stated that the families should respect the young people's decisions or a balance should be found between the wishes of the family and the desires of young people.

I think the people who will get married should decide, they know better. But family is also important, because they are a little more experienced, sometimes we young people can see everything a little naively. Because they are experienced, they know a little better. Of course, the marrying person will decide first, parents or family elders will also evaluate it and now is it a yes or no? (Female, 38, 30)

Families should not push this, they should investigate. You cannot say to their daughter, I do not like this, I do not like that, it has to be this way necessarily and so on. They should talk to the family, talk to the other party. They will speak about the future, their circumstances. If this happens, this is the future that awaits you and the future is yours to live. I won't marry you off by force, do whatever you want yourself, but this time the girl is hurting herself. Who is upset? Again, the families are upset. The person she chooses may not be of the same age, or not be older in age. Of course, no parents accept it. They say he must be her equal. You should respect her decision; and you should generally do what she says. (Female, 60, 17)

Young people matter but so do their fathers. They should be equal. Of course, young people should make the decision at first. But families are also very important, of course. After all, there is not a single relationship. There is also a relationship between the families. (Female, 46, 17).

Family, of course, it is important what the family's views on the choice of the daughter are, so the validity of the arguments they put forward is important. Good intentions are the important thing there. (Male, 55, 29)

They decide themselves; nowadays young people make their own decisions. It seems like the only remaining option for parents is to approve right now. (*Female, 40, 17*)

Of course, they should get (approval). So, you are a branch of a tree. What should the branch do without asking the root? (*Female, 42, 17*)

2.4 ISLAMIC APPROACHES TO FAMILY APPROVAL

When we asked about how the issue of family approval should be interpreted in Islam, the responses were diverse and consistent with interviewees' own views on family approval. We should state that there is controversy on this subject among fiqh traditions: while girls can marry without the approval of their families according to Hanafi school, approval of their legal guardians is necessary for them to get married according to other schools of thought. One of the interesting things in the interviews was that different from the unchanging normative perception about the subject of marriage age that is built on reaching puberty, participants interpreted the issue of family approval in accordance with their own ideas and supported their stances via various principles of ethical understanding in Islam. For example, a participant who thinks that girls should marry someone they choose said that this is also true in Islam and establishes the Islamicity in her view with the expression "lovers should get to marry". On the other hand, participants who think that family approval is important interpret the issue on the basis of an ethical norm in Islam about the importance of respect to parents.

Can a girl within your social environment can marry without the approval of her family?

She can't. Of course, she might run away for her lover and get married, but this is not right and good. As I said earlier, families should listen to everyone's opinion from the youngest to the oldest, they must understand each other. If someone loved another, she should get every chance to get married to that person and to live with him. Otherwise, she won't forget him until her death. This is very wrong. She should experience him and live with him. If she is going to get a divorce, she may do that as well. Because even if she marries the most handsome man in the world, she won't be able to get him out of her mind. We've seen this. We have seen lovers who married someone else, but then got divorced and run away for her lover. That is to say, it is not forgotten. This is wrong, either.

What does Islam say on this issue in your opinion?

In my opinion, Islam says the same, lovers should get married. (*Female, 56, 17*)

Can a girl within your social environment can marry without the approval of her family?

Approval is obligatory, it must be obligatory. No one should get married without family approval.

What does Islam say on this issue in your opinion?

I don't want to give incorrect information, I know that consent of the girl must be ensured but she cannot marry without informing her parents. In my opinion, she should not get married without approval according to Islam. Because parents should not be left heartbroken. Because of that, marriage should not happen without family approval. (Female, 49, 25)

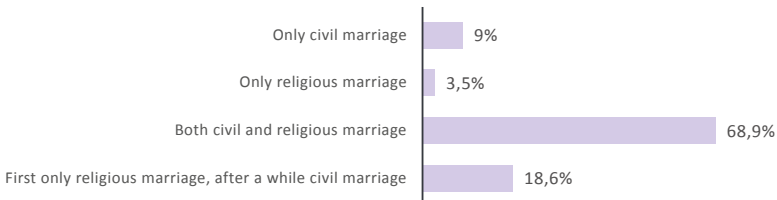
Islam does not consider this (marriage without family approval) good. For example, Islam says you may face challenges in the future because you did not take the opinions of your elders into account. It may turn out good or bad. However, the family, the elders are very crucial. Their support. Besides, she will feel secure since her family will be there to support her. She will feel calm. She won't feel failed before her husband, before her family. (Female, 46, 17)

If I say on this subject that Islam says this or that, this will be a calumny, but as far as I know family approval is very important in Islam. Likewise, I guess Islam will not look favorably on parents who oppose the good will of their children or a good marriage for them. (Male, 44, 41)

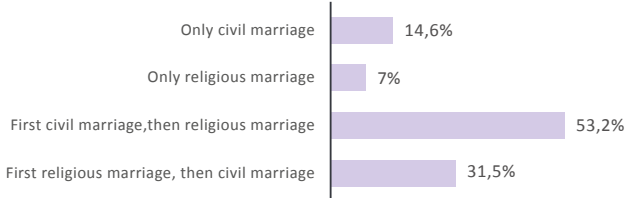
2.5 PREFERENCES ON MARRIAGE CONTRACT

According to the survey results, we see that the participants prefer both religious and civil contracts for their marriages.

Which type of marriage contract did you get married with?



With which type of marriage would you choose to marry?



Participants who are married stated that they got married via both religious and civil marriage contracts. Participants who want to get married prefer to get married in the same way. However, the rate of people who want to have a religious marriage first and then civil marriage is higher than people who got married this way in the present.

	Civil	Religious	Both civil and religious	No marriage contract
18-24	8,2	7,4	83,1	1,2
25-34	9,9	3,6	85,9	0,6
35-44	9,8	2,7	86,8	0,7
45-54	9,9	2,9	86,7	0,5
55-64	10,8	4,5	84,2	0,5
65+	8,6	4,8	86	0,7

Our data are consistent with TÜİK's data on preferences about both religious and civil marriage (TÜİK, 2006 Research on family structure). There is a clear decline in marriage with only religious marriage contracts.

2.6 PERCEPTIONS OF RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE

Because girls who get married at an early age mostly get married via religious marriage contract, interviewees' attitude towards religious marriage -an issue overlapping with their attitudes towards both marriage at an early age and religious subjects- is important for us. Almost all the participants, except one, with whom we conducted in-depth interviews stated that they will not allow their daughters to get married only via religious marriage contract without civil marriage contract. The participants

stated that rights of women are not ensured with a religious marriage and it has no compatibility in state affairs, hence they were opposed to marriages via only religious contract. While some interviewees told that despite this, it is not a sin to get married via religious contract, others stated that the fact that rights of women are not ensured with religious marriage makes it problematic in terms of religion as well. Secondly, this can be seen as the biggest exception to the view that Islam is a body of unchanging principles. One reason is that the rights within marriage that are recognized in the fiqh tradition are not recognized without civil marriage. In other words, religious marriage without civil contract causes victimization of women and the children that are born within marriage. Another reason that is more effective is the fact that religious marriage is not included in the discourse of the state and of the religion defined by the state.

How do you view religious marriage without civil marriage?

It has no guarantee. Ok, it is not a sin in terms of religion, but the times we live in are so corrupt that it has no guarantee. So, there should not be such a lifestyle. He may leave whenever he wants, you will not be able to prove anything, spiritual or material, nothing.

Would you allow your daughter to marry in this way, under certain conditions? If yes, under what conditions would you allow this?

No, I would not.

Would you allow your son to marry in this way?

No, because today it is not proof of anything, you cannot claim any right. *(Female, 49, 25)*

In your opinion, how would you interpret religious marriage without civil marriage in today's circumstances from a religious perspective?

I think it is deficient in terms of religion as well because you have to establish justice. You may get a divorce because you could not establish justice within marriage, and you are counted as married in terms of the religion. There are some legal responsibilities that religious marriage entails. However, these do not accord with state jurisprudence. There is dichotomy, a distinction between the two, hence I think religious marriage is not adequate in terms of the religion, either, since it cannot establish justice. I wish for example, let's say there is no separate thing called religious marriage, the marriage contracts that regular imams or mayors officiate become the one and the same thing, I think the two must be united, but I don't know if that's possible, it does not seem possible in today's circumstances. *(Female, 28, 24)*

How do you view religious marriage without civil marriage?

In this period? You cannot live like that in this period. You cannot trust anyone. Sometimes you cannot even trust your spouse or sibling. That is to say, you cannot live like that. *(Female, 49, 17, Yozgat)*

The only person who thinks that her daughter can marry via religious marriage without civil marriage actually thinks that no marriage contract is necessary for togetherness. She evaluates her own approval for her daughter's marriage via a religious contract on the basis of her daughter's freedom and states that she cannot interfere with her daughter's decision:

She may marry via religious marriage; I cannot interfere with her life. Yes, if she going to have a baby, she should have a civil marriage, but I cannot meddle in her marriage. She may want to live apart, I mean, she can do anything, this is possible. She may even do something wrong, at the end of the day, she is my daughter, she may have an affair with someone, she may become pregnant, anything can happen. I cannot interfere in her life, yes, I would protect her until a certain age, I would tell and show everything. However, if anything bad happens to her, I cannot throw her away, she is my daughter. (Female, 39, 16)

2.7 PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY AGE MARRIAGES

One of the most important outcomes of the research was that most of the participants had a negative stance against early marriages. "Everyone" is against early marriages; the young are even more so. The rate of those who say that they would marry off their daughters earlier than 18 years of age, if they have or had one, is only 1.1% while the rate of those who state that they would not do that is 91.8%.

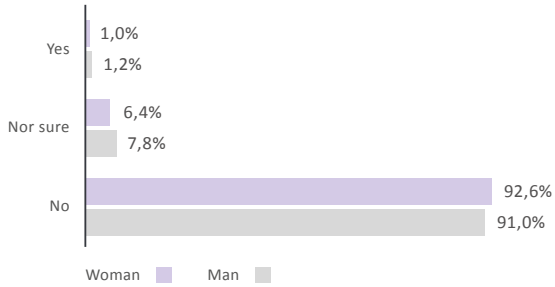
If you have a daughter or had one, would you marry her off before 18?



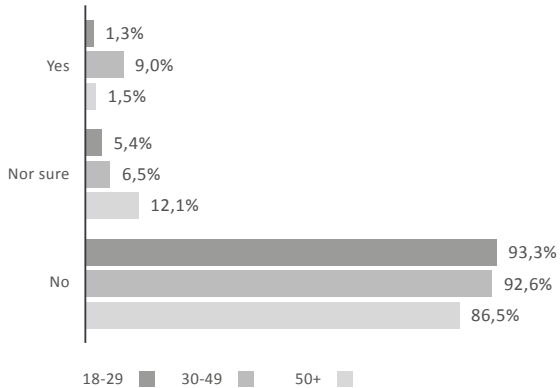
Both women and men alike are opposed to marrying off their children at an early age. There is a clear difference between 18-29 age group and 50 and above with regard to the opposition (93.3% in contrast to 86.5%).

People who were single and people who had trouble in their marriages were opposed to early marriages more clearly. The rate of opposition to marrying off their children at an early age increases as education level increases.

If you have a daughter or had one, would marry her off before 18?

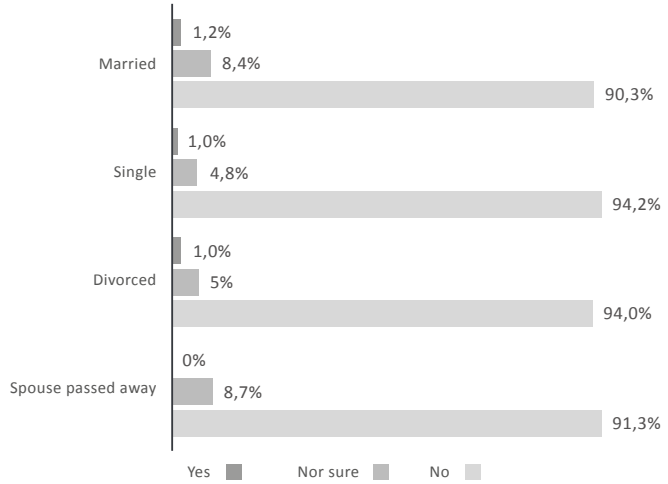


If you have a daughter or had one, would marry her off before 18?

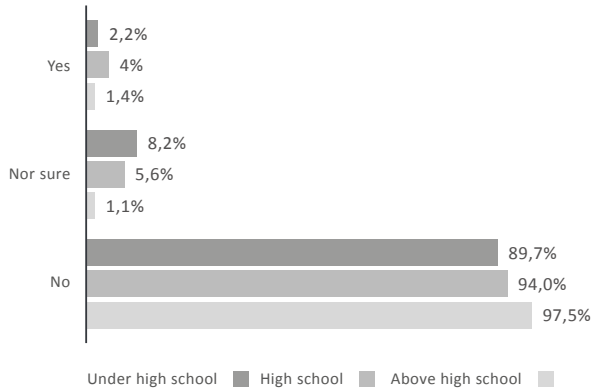


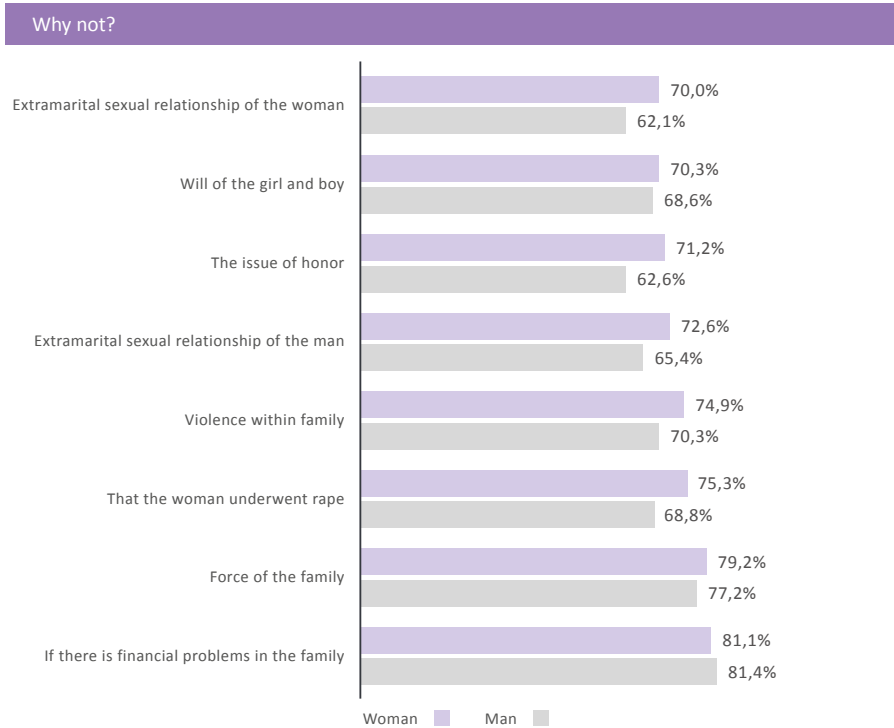
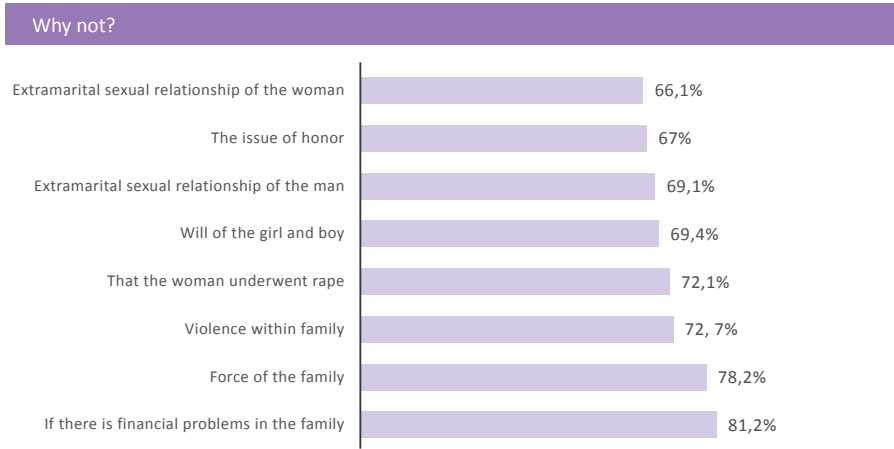
The “double-crosser” about early marriages is the issue of sexuality. Contrary to what is often stated, beyond financial factors, having a sexual relationship or being thought/heard of having a sexual relationship may become a reason for an early marriage; in such a case, the opposition visibly declines. As a response to the question “Now I am going to count some cases that may be seen as reasons for marrying at an earlier age, before 18 years of age. Would the cases I am going to count cause you to acknowledge an early marriage?”, the option with the lowest rate of people who responded the question as “No, it would not” was that the woman had an extramarital sexual relationship (66.1%). The highest rate, on the other hand, was financial difficulties.

If you have a daughter or had one, would marry her off before 18?



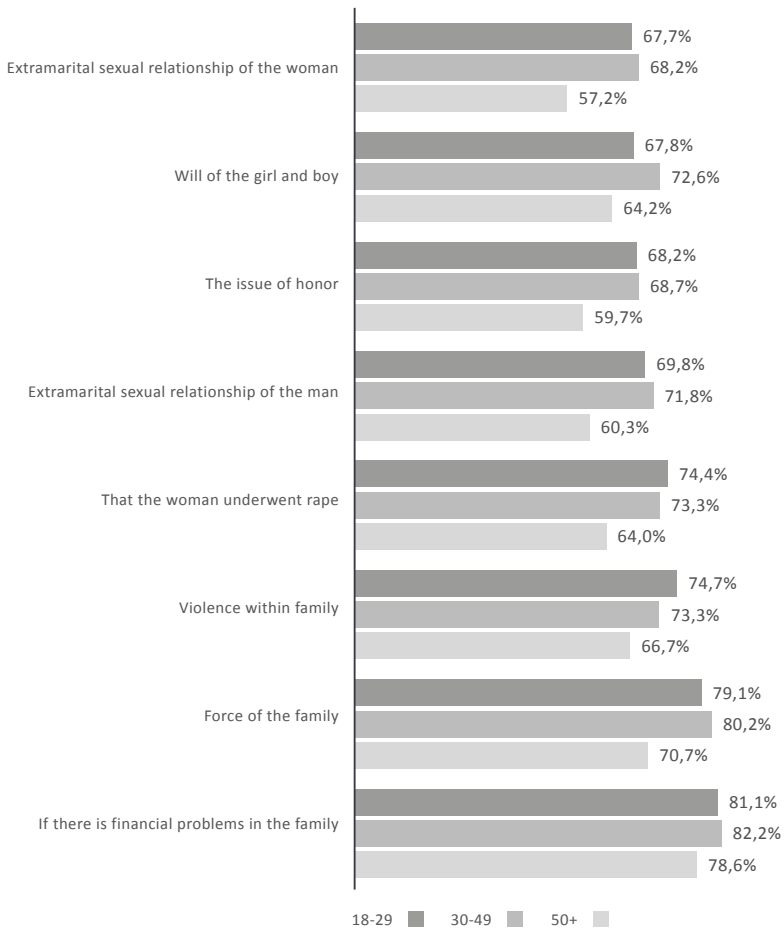
If you have a daughter or had one, would marry her off before 18?





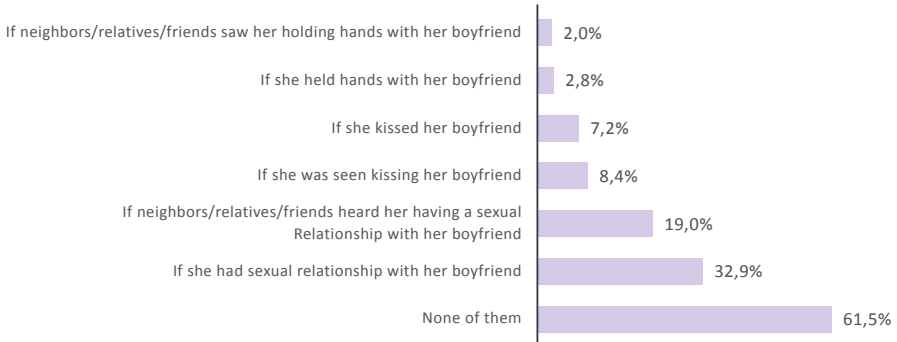
It is possible to say that there are notable differences between men and women, and between age groups. Women are more dedicated not to marry off their children at an earlier age under any circumstance. The middle-aged and the young similarly state that they would not consent an early marriage before 18 years of age under any circumstance.

Why not?

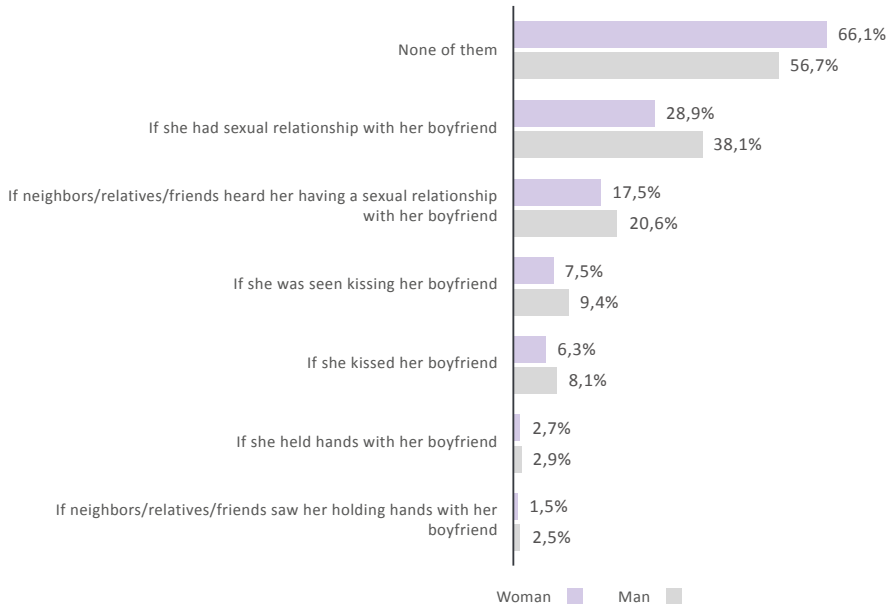


When we asked the question in a different way, the point of focus does not change. Sexual experiences is the most prominent ground for justification of early marriages.

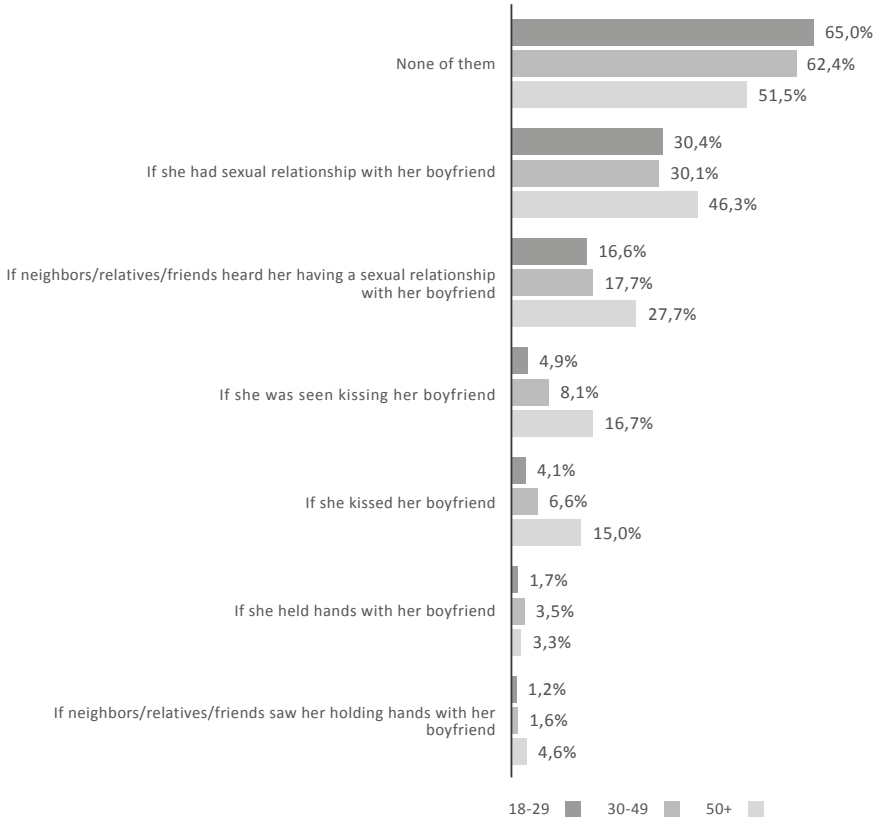
In your opinion, which one of these make it legitimate for your daughter to marry before 18?



In your opinion, which one of these make it legitimate for your daughter to marry before 18?



In your opinion, which one of these make it legitimate for your daughter to marry before 18?



The point of conviction for early marriages is sexual experience. While the rate of participants who stated that they would not marry off their children early in any of these circumstances is 61.5%, 25% of the participants articulated that they would marry off their children at an earlier age if they had sexual experiences. This estimate rises as far as 37.1% among men. Likewise, as the age of the participant increases, the rate of those who would marry off their kids increases.

As socio-economic status decreases, the rate of being permissive about early marriages similarly increases. On the other hand, there is no notable difference between rural and urban regions.

EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY MARRIAGE IN TURKEY

	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
None of them	81,3%	74,0%	62,8%	49,7%	53,5%	47,1%
If she had sexual relationship with her boyfriend	13,9%	21,4%	30,6%	45,1%	41,3%	49,0%
If neighbors/relatives/friends heard her having a sexual relationship with her boyfriend	8,3%	11,9%	18,5%	26,8%	20,9%	22,1%
If she was seen kissing her boyfriend	1,7%	2,2%	8,5%	12,0%	2,6%	3,8%
If she kissed her boyfriend	1,7%	3,5%	9,8%	13,5%	3,5%	6,7%
If she held hands with her boyfriend	1,3%	2,0%	3,8%	3,0%	1,7%	1,0%
If neighbors/relatives/friends saw her holding hands with her boyfriend	4%	1,3%	1,5%	3,8%	1,3%	1,9%

	Urban	Rural
None of them	63,1%	59,6%
If she had sexual relationship with her boyfriend	30,3%	35,9%
If neighbors/relatives/friends heard her having a sexual relationship with her boyfriend	18,0%	20,1%
If she was seen kissing her boyfriend	8,5%	8,3%
If she kissed her boyfriend	7,5%	6,7%
If she held hands with her boyfriend	3,3%	2,2%
If neighbors/relatives/friends saw her holding hands with her boyfriend	1,6%	2,4%

	Mediterranean	Central Anatolia	Marmara region	South and east Anatolia	Aegean region	Blacksea region
None of them	69,1%	57,6%	58,7%	55,0%	80,3%	50,2%
If she had sexual relationship with her boyfriend	17,2%	32,0%	37,8%	40,6%	17,9%	43,8%
If neighbors/relatives/friends heard her Having a sexual relationship with her boyfriend	16,2%	20,9%	25,3%	17,0%	9,4%	17,9%
If she was seen kissing her boyfriend	7,2%	14,3%	13,3%	1,9%	2,5%	8,8%
If she kissed her boyfriend	4,5%	14,0%	12,7%	1,2%	1,6%	3,6%
If she held hands with her boyfriend	2,7%	8,5%	1,8%	7%	1,6%	5,2%
If neighbors/relatives/friends saw her Holding hands with her boyfriend	2,7%	2,2%	1,8%	7%	2,1%	4,0%

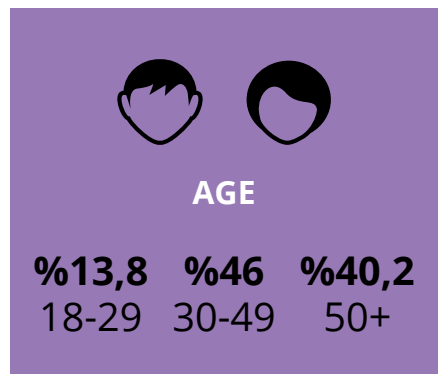
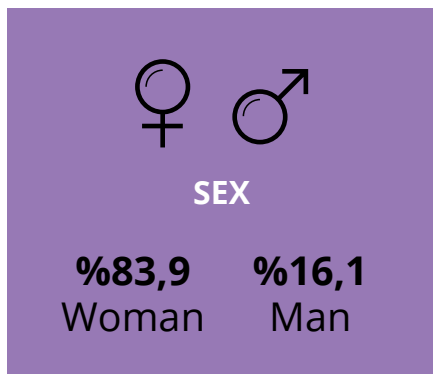
The highest rate of people who state that they would never marry off their children at an earlier age under no circumstance was from Aegean district, and then Mediterranean district. The lowest rate was from Blacksea region.

2.8 EXPERIENCE IN AN EARLY MARRIAGE

9.4% of the participants got married at an early age. Data regarding early marriages in Turkey (data from 2016 is 5.6%) are calculated as a ratio based on existing marriages. This ratio becomes higher when all types of marriages are considered.

TÜİK, 2016, Aile Yapısı Araştırması			
Age fo first marriage (%)	Age group fort he first marriage: 18-	2016	17,9
	Age group fort he first marriage: 18-19	2016	16,9
	Age group fort he first marriage: 20-24	2016	37,5
	Age group fort he first marriage: 25-29	2016	21,2
	Age group fort he first marriage: 30-34	2016	5,1
	Age group fort he first marriage: 35+	2016	1,4

The rate of early marriage is lower in the younger generation.

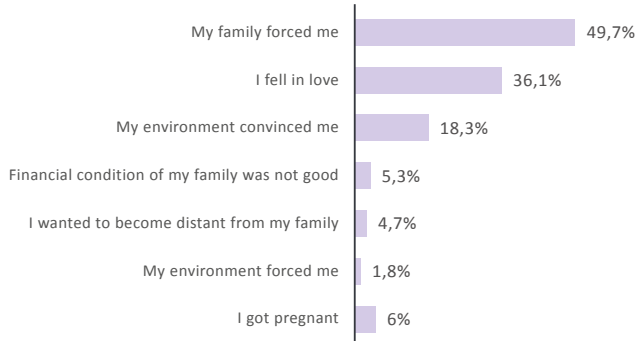


Compared to men, women are much more likely to end up in an early marriage. There is not a linear increase in the rate of early marriages between age groups. The rate of early marriages is higher in middle-aged group than 50 years of age and above.

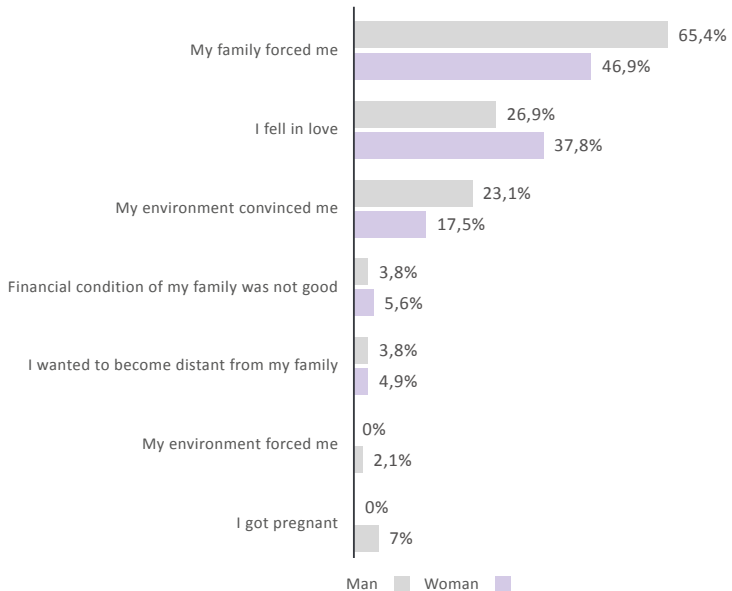
2.8.1 Overcoming the Dichotomy between Falling in Love vs. Family Coercion

In the quantitative part of the study, family coercion stands out as the most prominent cause of early marriages. Those who got married earlier than 18 years of age stated that family coercion was the biggest cause for their marriages. It is followed by falling in love.

What was your reason for marrying before 18?

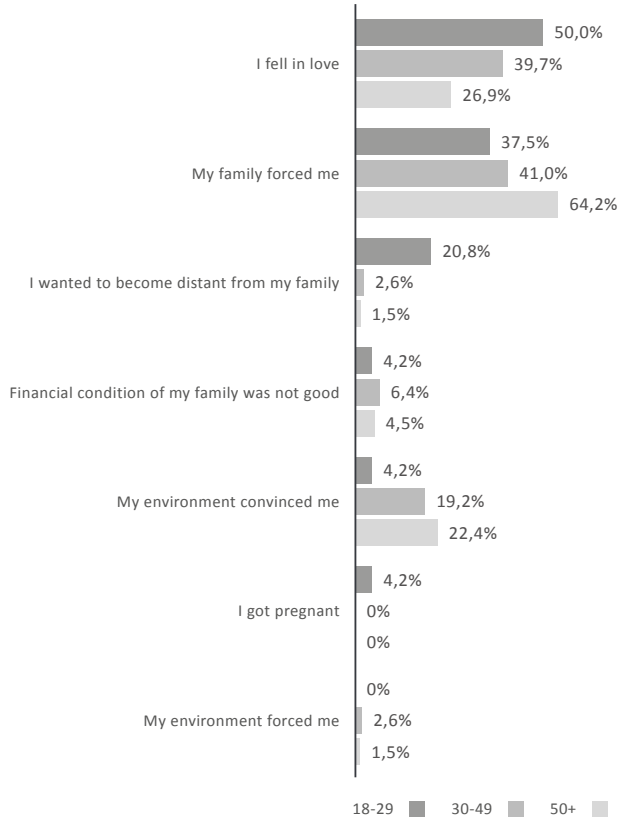


What was your reason for marrying before 18?

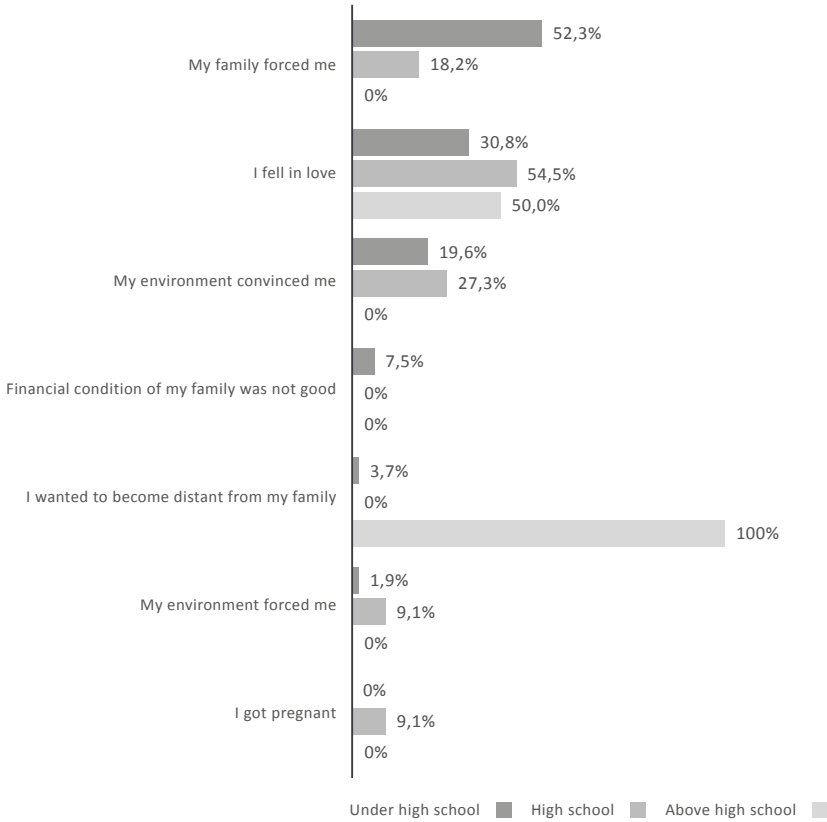


As the age decreases, the rate of people who state that they got married as a result of falling in love increases.

What was your reason for marrying before 18?



What was your reason for marrying before 18?



As the age decreases, the rate of people who got married as a result of falling in love clearly increases. Marriage is seen as an escape among the younger age group. The prominent reason varies depending on each education level. Those who are in the low education group and got married at an early age state that it was family coercion why they got married early while those who have education at the level of high school say that they got married because they fell in love. Those who received education above high school level and got married early stated that they got married in order to escape from their families.

When we inspect the marital narratives in in-depth interviews, it is possible to say that marriage decision for women who got married at an early age is a complex compound that includes more than one factor. While the number of women who say that they married a man whom they did not like because of their families’ coercion is quite high, sometimes women state that they were encouraged or coerced to

marry the man they flirted with or liked. On the other hand, women sometimes say that they preferred marriage because they see marriage as an escape from their families. During our visits to five of the cities in which incidents of early marriage are high at present, we frequently heard stories about girls who have boyfriends in high schools, that their teachers complain about them to their families about this, and they are encouraged to drop out of school and marry. Thus, the dichotomies of love marriage/prearranged marriage and free will/others' decision do not work in women's stories as in many marriage stories. Firstly, the fact that girls are under 18 makes it hard to call it a "decision". Secondly, desires and dreams of women who are older than 18 are similarly shaped by other people's desires and dreams and by options that are presented or not presented to these women within certain relationships, especially within family nexus. This is more so for those under 18. Hence, especially nowadays in which the rate of peer marriage has increased among different types of early marriage, it is problematic that girls' "decisions" are encouraged by the society through concepts like free will, love, and freedom because the "decision" in question cannot be conceived independent from lack of safe places for girls, gender norms in the society, violence, and their lack of possibility to imagine another life.

I had a boyfriend. My mother finds out. I did not have a phone. My boyfriend secretly bought a phone for me. I was using it secretly. Of course, my mother finds out. I broke up with my boyfriend and all that. My mother took the phone and broke it. Next summer after this incident, my husband saw me two years ago, my mother sent a message to him.... After that, my husband asked my family for my hand in marriage. I remained indecisive and said that I don't have an opinion. What do you say, I said to my mother. My mother said, you will bring trouble on me. I am gonna marry you off, she said, when my husband asks for me. My father opposed it. He said no. I have no daughter to marry off yet, he said. My mother suppressed him. My husband's family is good. My husband is also a good person. The boy is good and has no bad habits, my mother said. How can you not consent for your daughter to marry when someone like him asks for her, my mother said.... My daughter is still studying, my father said, she is still young. My mother said, she is about to be 18, she is not young at all. They asked me whether I want it or not. I will do what you wish, I said. I guess it was kismet or something like that. If I knew then what I know now, I mean, I must have been crazy. Without knowing, I did not meet him even once. I saw him but I did not have any conversation with him. I used to see him on occasions like wedding ceremonies and things like that. He did not ask to see me, and did not invited me to his family's house, either; this did not happen. So I said okay. (*Female, 26, 18*)

My father married me off. Since we are a small community, because it is just people from our region, everyone knows each other very well. It was just about 15-20 days that I met my husband. Our neighbor apparently saw us talking, our neighbor in my village, then apparently told my father about this, by saying that "we saw your daughter talking to that man's son". After that, my father made me say who he was until dawn by force, and beating, and by fighting, telling me that "confess who that boy was, I know him, you tell me, I want to hear it from you". Around dawn at that night, after being beaten with strap all night, I had to confess. The day after that, I told a boy whom I met to come and ask my father for my hand 15 days later. I mean my father told me to say so. My father decided it. (*Female, 42, 17*)

Did you cry, did not you protest and reject it?

I did not do any to reject it; there was some hustle about it. You don't even understand what was happening. I was just a child, how would I know. *(Female, 53, 15)*

Who made the decision for the marriage during this process? How did you and your husband's family get involved in the process?

Marriage decision, let me put it this way, I am someone who does not like light-minded relationships at all. You know, if you want to establish a relationship, have a love affair with someone, be serious about it, I mean, I want it to be this way. I always thought with the purpose, well you know, there is still some time to get married, I should be older than this. However, because it happened so fast, both of us did not really have a decision, well you know, before marriage, you know, if we at least have had an arrangement ceremony within family, at least to wait a little longer, you know, we could have been arranged only for the two families to know, we could have waited 5-6 months more, the period of arrangement would have been what it was supposed to be, the period of arrangement is usually about 1-2 years in our tradition. During that time, we would have been more mature.

What was the reason that it happened with such a rush?

The reason for the rush was that normally my older brother did not approve my boyfriends. He only approved my husband when he was my boyfriend. Around that time, for some reason, but I don't remember what it was, the two had a disagreement. I remember now, for example the two were at odds because I started coming home late. In another instance, my brother wanted to visit our aunt as a family. I said I can't come because I have some work to do tomorrow. I was thinking of sleeping early so that I could wake up early. I said like that. Then, we had a fight, a quarrel. Then, my husband stepped in. Once my husband stepped in, my brother said "take this girl and never bring her back". When he said that, my husband said "I can take care of her better than you do", which is what really happened to be the case. He really takes care of me and protects me better than my own brothers. When he said "take her and never bring her back", what would the boy do, we were compelled to get married, that's the story. Otherwise, we had a lot of dreams. *(Female, 20, 17)*.

2.8.2 Early Marriage as a Strategy of Moral Safety

One of the common assumption about early marriages is that girls get married because of financial reasons. Nonetheless, both quantitative part of our study and many other studies show that early marriage is related to numerous factors entangled with each other. Thus, although financial factors are obviously operative in early marriages, discussing the issue only on the basis of this prevents us to see gender norms and power relations that shape women's life experiences..

According to the in-depth interviews we conducted in our research, we can say that the reason that was mentioned the most was an ethical concern built upon girls' sexuality. One of the strategies to eliminate this

fear of “safety”, expressed sometimes through the concept of honor, and sometimes through some other expressions, is to marry off girls at an early age. Both in the in-depth interviews and during our city visits, we observed that the fact that girls have emotional relationships with boys or sheer possibility of such a relationship may constitute a factor that legitimizes their marriage. At this point, we should emphasize that none of the women who got married early made any religious, specifically Islamic, reference while talking about their families’ concerns about honor and safety as the motivation for their marriage. Here, while honor is a social phenomenon, independent from religion, that controls not just the female body, but also desires, actions, and positions of all individuals within society and within the order of relatives; today, in its form that is conceptualized mostly based on the female body, it constitutes one of the ethical bases of the order of relatives. In an order in which “honor” of women seen as the honor of family, its “safety” is seen as an issue related to the integrity of family and pertaining to whole of the family. So, marrying girls is seen by families as a secure ground on which sexuality is performed legitimately and that is hoped to eliminate threats towards their daughters’, and hence their honor.

Why did your mother want to marry off her children that early?

As soon as possible, it is a girl, you know, you don’t study without getting a bad name, without disgracing yourself, for example you don’t go to the school, there is uneasiness even if you go. There were issues of left and right back then. Waiting at night for kids, for girls, if I have had a brother, I did not have that either, escorting, there were no minibuses or cars, you come late at night go out early in the morning. It was hard, I mean, studying was hard as well as affording it, I mean, it was hard for a mother to wait for her daughter. Because of that, if she does not study, if she is a house-girl, purpose was to marry her off as soon as possible before her name gets a bad reputation, I mean, that was the aim. Because of this, it was done so early, I used to grieve over that. I mean, my older sisters had babies before they turned 15. (Female, 49, 17, Yozgat)

The reason my mother married us off early was that she wanted us not to have any problem, any trouble, she wanted to marry us off with our purity, our honor. I mean, this was the reason why she married us off so early. (Female, 51, 17)

2.8.3 Lack of Safe Places and of Possibility of Other Dreams for Girls

We addressed that the path to early marriage is interwoven with diverse variables; and norms, dependent on gender hierarchy and creeping into the depths of our lives, are extremely effective on this path. Apart from girls who are forced by their families to marry, as we mentioned earlier, when it comes to girls who also want to marry, legitimizing early marriages by saying that it is “their consent/decision” and holding these girls responsible for it is a serious problem that results from not thinking the

issue thoroughly. Homes and schools turn into unsafe places or areas that are undesired/to-be-saved-from for girls through factors like making them drop out of school, being subjected to violence at home, taking the responsibility of taking care of the family, being under surveillance on “ethics of sexuality” by teachers at schools and by families at homes, and many more. In many interviews, it was emphasized in many ways that people resorted to early marriage as an escape, regarded marriage as an alternative to school after dropping out, and thought there would not be a better life without marriage.

How to put it, if I have continued my study, I would have continued as much as I could. Since I was not studying, it seemed natural to me at that age. I was not able to live up my childhood on the other side either. There was no difference. However, now I tell the young not to get married under 22-23 years of age.... (When you get married early) you don't get to enjoy your youth, but you cannot enjoy it on the other side either. There, I used to take care of my siblings while here, I took care of my own family. It turned out better. I happened to raise my own children. I did not have to deal with some other people either, I started my own family. It has been better because of this. *(Female, 56, 17)*

In your opinion, what age is early for women to get married?

For once, they should be at 23-24, how to say, she should become aware of herself, and of her environment, in my opinion, she should examine, use her logic first. She should use her logic, whether I can make it work with this person, whether I feel like I am ready to marry, she should do these. We jumped into it as an escape. Those who grow up in villages are all like this, they see it as an escape.

Was it an escape from financial troubles, or from troubles related to family as well?

Financial aspect, family aspect, from both, as I have been telling you, you work in fields and stuff, you work day and night, you know, it was poverty.

How was your relationship with your family before marriage?

Before getting married, my father and I were like friends. My mother was like, how to put it, like a detective, I beg your pardon, but she was like herding poultry, my mother, so that people do not gossip about us and things like that. Someone would have told something to her, even if it was not real, she would come to us and yell at us, tell us unspeakable words, beat us. Mother, listen to us first, whether it has any reality in it or not. You know gossip is abundant in villages, they exaggerate things, they disseminate words that are not true. My own cousin (my aunt's daughter) came to me and said she would have run away. I was about 14 or 15 something like that, as I told you there was someone I used to meet. My cousin came to me and implied to help me for me to run away. *(Female, 47, 17).*

I got married actually as a child, yes, under 18 is counted as a child. However, when I was single, I was like in a marriage without a husband. I still was the one who cleaned, one who washed the dishes, one who cooked. I was like a married woman, but I think it was wrong. *(Female, 20, 17)*

I have two siblings. One of them is a girl and the other is a boy. My sister is two years old younger than me. She works now. Single. She studied. My mother did not say to her to marry. My mother did everything to me whatever she did. When I went somewhere, there was no possibility that I could be late. She would tell my father. He would not beat me, but it was hard for me to hear his bitter words. My father has never beaten me to this day. However, I had a lot of my mother's slippers on my back. *(Female, 26, 18)*

2.8.4 Susceptibility to Violence

I was not of course able to study. It is a long story. I was not able to enjoy my youth because I got married, because I immediately became a mother. I always say that, I was my father's daughter. There is a saying: I got married and became my husband's wife, gave birth and became the mother of my children, when am I going to be me? *(Female, 42, 17)*

According to Hacettepe Population Research Institute's report in 2014, almost half of the women who got married under 18 were subjected to physical violence, and one in five were subjected to sexual violence (TSNA, 2014). In our own qualitative research, we also observed that women experienced various types of violence like physical, sexual, emotional, and financial violence after an early marriage. In their stories, women expressed that violence in different stages of their lives followed each other. The women we interviewed pointed out that they considered marriage as an escape because they were subjected to violence in their family homes, and at the same time their state of physical, spiritual, and mental immaturity was a factor that made them vulnerable and defenseless against violence in the houses they got "married into". In addition to this, most of the women we interviewed who got married at an early age stated that they were not protected and supported by their own families after they got married, and because of the understanding that "If you enter a house in a wedding dress, you can only leave in a shroud", their divorce was frowned upon.

Were there any challenges to getting married early? What were they?

Yes, there were a lot of them for me, especially because I married into a crowded family. Even though it was a crowded family, I have never missed my old life since it was kind of an escape because there was always violence at our home. I mean, it was good despite everything. *(Female, 40, 17)*

If I knew what I know now, I would have got married at 25. I get more mature, more aware. You get to know how things are. I would have studied, had a job, then faced my husband. Then, I would not have been destitute. *(Female, 60, 15)*

We see in the stories of a 42-year-old participant that marriage meant escape from family, she was subjected to severe violence in her marriage, and her family never supported her during that process.

Because in every aspect, as you get older, as you become more experienced, if I had my assertiveness, my strength to defend myself back then, I would not have suffered this much. You become scared, there is no one, unsupported, you have little strength, what are you gonna do, you weigh only 48 kilograms, you keep quiet, no one guards you either.

Then, I made a phone call to my father in the village, I told my mom so and so, I asked whether they would have taken care of me if I have returned, my father said that, there is mosque in the village, she should never pass the mosque to this side. After that, I told to myself what can I do, this is my fate, I will suffer as I brought this upon myself. *(Female, 42, 18)*

However, every woman who got married early we interviewed told that they lived with their husband's family during the early years of their marriage, that they got married into a crowded house that was comprised of a mother in-law, father in-law, and sometimes, in addition to them, of other in-laws and their wives. In the stories, we observed that the women were subjected to different types of violence by the husband's extended family, especially by the mother in-law. As response to our question whether the women have a saying in household, if so, since when this has been the case, they stated that this became possible only after they left their mother in-law and moved to their own houses. Thus, it means a lot for them to live at their own homes. Additionally, in interviews, it was frequently expressed that the reason why mother in-laws marry off their sons to younger girls stems from the conviction that girls are "educable" at younger ages and men who get married at an early age obey their mothers after they get married. In other words, extended families greatly interfere with the marriages of young men and women, and this brings along with it a type of emotional violence.

Do you think you have a saying in the household? Why do you think the way you think?

Now I have, back then I did not.

Since when have you had a saying?

In the past, the house was theirs, family elders were there. We used to live with them. Whatever my mother in-law, father in-law said was obeyed. If I wanted to go somewhere, I ask for permission not from my husband but from my father in-law. *(Female, 36, 17, Yozgat)*

My mother in-law would not permit going to my mother's house. No, my husband never banned me from going there, she would never disobey his mother, my mother in-law had not had a son for about 7-8 years. My husband had nothing, how to put it, he did not have financial independence, I mean, he did not have a salary, so he was dependent on them. He would receive his allowance from her, he had nothing. I mean, his mother would say such and such, he was influenced by them. *(Female, 58, 15, Yozgat)*

Because she is a child... There really was such a mentality, if you take a child for a bride, you can educate as you wish but some can't do that. However, my mother in-law educated me and my brother in-law's wife very well. *(Female, 58, 15, Yozgat)*

Were there any challenges to getting married early? What were they?

There were many of them. I had suffered from living with the elderly.

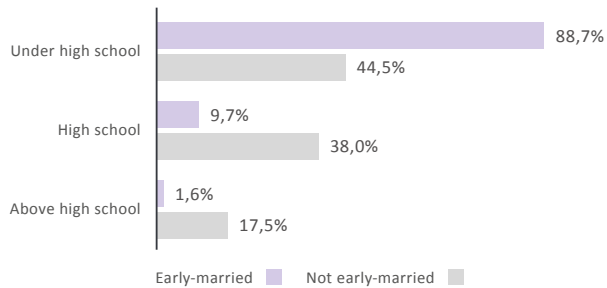
Why did not you live apart?

That would have been better. (Would then marrying early cease to be a problem?) I mean, I don't know that but because we used to live with the extended family, and because my husband would never disobey his father and mother, I experienced many problems. *(Female, 48, 17)*

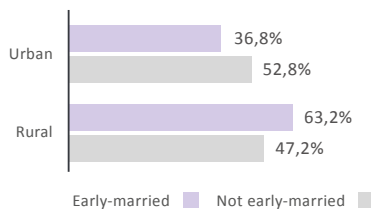
2.8.5 Disconnection from Education and Employment

Compared to those who did not get married early, those who got married early are more likely to be disconnected from education and workplace.

Education level



Residency



88.7% of those who got married early were not able to finish their high school education. 63.2% of those who got married early live in rural areas; those who live in urban areas also make up a great portion.

In in-depth interviews as well, we observe that marriage is an alternative to “not being able to study” for women, or conversely, it was the reason why they left school. In any way, all of the early-married women in our study reported that they ended their studies at a younger age, and they frequently mentioned that “not being able to study” means not being able to work, not being able to participate in society, restriction of freedom, not being able to break out of an unhappy marriage, and impossibility to have a life outside marriage. Thus, they believe that education of their own kids will have a lifesaving function. It is noteworthy that all the women who got married under 18 pay special attention to the education of their daughters and tell us about their great effort to support their daughters to continue the education that they could not finish. Women’s desire for their children “to be self-reliant” stands out in their stories as their biggest dream. The fact that they were not able to complete their studies has been a great wound for all the women. The women regard their children’s education as one of their most important life goals partly to recover from that wound to a degree, and partly to act with the consideration that “I suffered enough, my children shall not live the same”.

After that, I never attended school. It is the greatest wound in my heart. Maybe, the reason I want my child to finish their study is this, so that they save themselves. Nonetheless, I put my effort, but I could have been in a better place. (*Female, 53, 15*)

If your daughter wanted to marry around 15-18, what would you think?

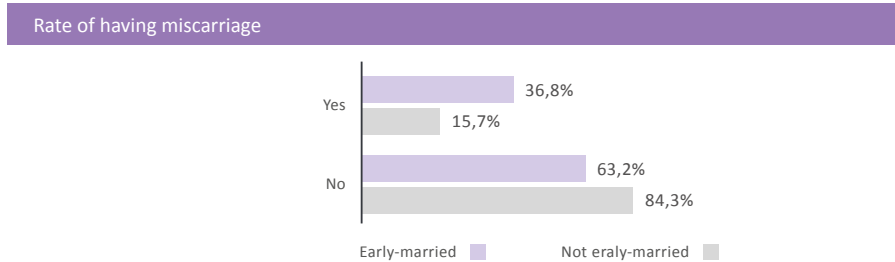
Never. My biggest ideal is that she becomes a successful student. Sometimes, she brings her notebook. I see an incorrect answer, I say I wish this were not incorrect, do not make a mistake tomorrow I say. I won’t, mommy she says. (*Female, 26, 18*)

What comes to mind when you think about marriage?

I don’t know how to put it. I mean, I wanted to finish my studies, this did not happen. You know, then marriage came. I had a lot of trouble until I got used to another house. If it were me, I would never marry off my children early, never ever. Believe me, I send the money for my medication even though I am ill. So that they can continue studying. I mean, if I have not got married, I would have studied, I think about this all the time. Of course, it is good for a woman to be self reliant. This is why I make my children study. Now, I prefer my daughter over my sons. I have a daughter and three sons. Whatever my daughter says is done. Her brothers say so as well, priority is for Nesrin. (*Female, 45, 17, Ağrı*)

2.8.6 Rates of Having a Miscarriage

According to our survey study, the rate of having a miscarriage among women who got married early is noticeably higher than women who got married at a later age.



While percentage of women who got married early and had a miscarriage is 36.8%, it is 15.7% among women who did not get married early.

2.8.7 Sexuality within Marriage

In the interviews, extramarital sexual intercourse stands out as a threat to women by indirectly calling it words like honor, or a “disturbance” to tackle, without saying the word sexuality. However, marital sexuality is also addressed, just like motherhood, as something that early-married women mostly do “not understand”. While this is mostly expressed in stories of women who got married according to their families’ will, it should also be added that issue of sexuality was not discussed unless we brought it up.

With someone you don’t like, sexual intercourse does not happen. I mean, you do not enjoy it. Nowadays, it is only for the sake of Allah, back then it was only a forced thing. It is like a duty, that’s it. I mean, you regard it as a duty. To put it better, I did not enjoy marriage. There was no romanticism, never. It did not happen. (*Yozgat, 58, 15*)

I wish he had talked to me when we were single. If we could have at least built a rapport beforehand. If we could have remained engaged for about a few months, seen each other more often before marriage. My husband and I got married, I did not touch him for weeks. I shied away from him.

How was your sex life after marriage?

I have always been afraid. When people said that they enjoyed it, I wondered how they enjoyed this. Maybe it was because I was young. I have not been able to overcome this later, not really. (Female, 56, 17).

2.8.8 Early Motherhood

Most of the early-married women we interviewed stated that they became pregnant soon after marriage and they were not ready for maternity when they gave birth. While ignorance about birth control methods was stated as one of the reasons why they became pregnant so soon, extended family's expectation of a baby was expressed as another important reason. Most women said that they were just a child when they gave birth, thus they were not ready for it, that they raised their children with the help of their mother-in-law and other women in the extended family.

I immediately got married, there was no protection and stuff, we were going with the flow. I got married and 9 months later I had a baby in my arms.

In your opinion, were you ready for motherhood when you first got a baby? Why do you think the way you think?

No, nevertheless Allah prepared me even though I was not really ready. Of course, I was not ready, what did I know about motherhood. I did not know how to take care of a baby, I never raised a child, saw someone raise one, nothing, I did not even know how to change diaper. I did not know what baby food is. In short, I knew nothing about raising a kid. (*Female, 49,17, Yozgat*)

In the narrative below, how having a baby made it impossible for a woman, who forcibly had a baby as a result of being subjected to emotional and physical violence, to get away from this spiral of violence:

When I had my baby, I was 17, not even 18 yet, I was just a child.

Was it a planned pregnancy?

No, the baby, I did not want a baby. They beat me because I did not want to give birth. It was just one month after the marriage when they beat me because of that.

Was it your husband?

No, I was beaten by both my mother-in-law and my husband.

In your opinion, were you ready for motherhood when you first had a baby? Why do you think the way you think?

No, I was not.

Why not?

Because I always wanted to have a boy when I was pregnant, I always imagined that way. Because I was planning to run away after I gave birth. If it had been a girl, I had had to live with those, with that man. When I gave birth to a girl, I cried a lot because it was a girl, because it was girl, I mean, I was going to run away if it had been a boy. I was going to leave everything behind. However, to whom would I leave a girl and leave? There was no one in the family who were mentally healthy, one was no better than the other. Whom would I trust and leave that child? Since I was obliged to live with them, that life, I cried a lot because of that. (*Female, 42, 17*)

It is noteworthy that the only answer that almost all the women gave as a response to our question, whether there were any advantages to being married early, was that they were able to raise their children earlier. Even though the women were not ready for maternity and had trouble when they gave birth early, when they look back, they see raising their children early as a benefit among the negative experiences they went through. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that while most women frequently talked about the challenges of early marriage, almost no woman talked about any of its benefits until we asked this question. However, it is possible to say that in their narratives, women ascribe great meanings to having children and being a mother. Raising children sooner than expected is consistent with these meanings; it is seen as a reward in response to what they lost or missed in their lives. Children who got older, especially girls, become friends with the women, and form a relationship of solidarity. On the other hand, as the women become mother-in-laws, they change the power balance, have more voice within the family and this might be the reason why they think this way.

Were there any benefits of marrying earlier for you? What were they?

I grew up with my children at the same time. You know, being a younger mother is better than being an older mother. That turned out to be an advantage. *(Female, 49, 17, Yozgat)*

My children's age, that's it. *(Female, 65, 16, Afyon)*

My kids grew up sooner. That's the only benefit, nothing else. *(Female, 45, 17, Ağrı)*

There were a lot of problems, and no benefits. I mean, one thing that turned out to be a benefit was that I became a mother earlier, married off my children earlier, and became a grandmother earlier. Now, my oldest grandchild is 14 years old. I mean, that was the benefit.

2.9 PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE AND GENDER

In the most general sense, perception about marriage and gender shape views about premature marriage. In other words, experiences about early marriage and approaches to it cannot be contemplated independent from patriarchal view about marriage and women. Therefore, we think that looking into participants' perception of marriage and gender will help us see social norms, power relations, and emotions intermixed and interwoven around the issue of early marriage.

2.9.1 Marriage Narratives

In the survey, we asked our participants about what comes to their mind when they think about marriage. When marriage is asked, they thought of having child the most, this is followed by family, happiness, and peace. It was noteworthy for us that marriage was associated with positive emotions and in the list of concepts that they thought of, troubles and challenges fill in the fifteenth place.



In the qualitative interviews, we asked the interviewees about what comes to their mind when they think about marriage in general and good or bad marriages, their expectations about marriage, and how they describe their relationships with their spouses. Although the answers were diverse, certain commonalities stand out. For example, it grabs our attention that for women, marriage was identified

with certain emotions like love, respect, compassion, and trust as well as a feeling of great responsibility and phenomenon of motherhood; and this is greatly in parallel with comments about what the marriage should be. In other words, for women, marriage neither means uncontaminated happiness, nor contains sacredness, nor is regarded as an institution that restricts their freedom. According to the participants, there are factors that can make a marriage good or bad; and emotions two people foster and show for each other like understanding, trust, love, and respect are factors that guide marriage. Here, it is valuable that equality and harmony in marriage are not built upon objective categories like class or ethics, but upon individual emotions. Also, it is important for some participants to make joint decisions while sharing a life together, and in the meantime, while forming connection with each other, to have autonomous places within marriage as individuals. In other words, we can say that while those women who express that they want to connect with their husbands via the institution of marriage and with certain emotions like romance, love, and trust, at the same time, they desire for autonomy and distance via demand for respect and concern about being in balance.

What does come to your mind when you think about marriage?

Making a home of course, immediately kids come to my mind, you would want to have kids after marriage. You would think about raising them. At first, it is just plain, good days, and enjoyable. However, after a while you forget about yourself, you live for your kids. Marriage is a responsibility.

What does come to your mind when you think about a good marriage? In your opinion, what are the factors that make a marriage good?

Respect for each other, love, trust, understanding. Because it does not work otherwise. Because marriage does not remain light-minded. You will have financial troubles, troubles coming from your environment. I mean, you will face those together and with understanding. You will not say whatever I say will be done, you will talk to each other, will be tolerant towards each other, respect one another. There will be disputes, that's indispensable, I mean, there is no such family that does not have any disagreement. However, you discuss it without crossing the line. *(Female, 49, 25)*

What does come to your mind when you think about marriage?

It is hard, it requires great responsibility.

Can you elaborate more?

I mean, actually your life is at stake, I mean, you reach a certain age, parents cover your expenses, comfortable, rosy, but things change after marriage. You have to understand the other party, I mean, it is hard, there will be kids, you will raise children, that is also quite hard. We have just begun the journey.

What does come to your mind when you think about a good marriage? In your opinion, what are the factors that make a marriage good?

As I told you, sincerity, loyalty, honesty, belief. *(Female, 38, 30)*

What comes to mind when you think about marriage?

Sharing a burden, shouldering the burden of life together...

(Doing everything together?)

Not really, no, it is not doing everything together. Marriage is a situation where you protect your personal space, or at least that's what I think healthy if you do. If both parties protect their own personal spaces but at the same time solve each other's problem by supporting one another, and maintain the relationship that way, I think this is healthy. Otherwise, when one party gives in too much, sacrifices too much and the other party always receives, this kind of relationship does not sound healthy to me. Both parties should give some, you have to be able to sacrifice when the time comes, but at the same time, you should protect your own personal space. If both parties allow that, I think the relationship works healthier. I mean, it is not doing everything together, it is doing many things together, taking on responsibilities together... Other than that, it is having the potential to lift the other party when one of them falls etc., a type of mutual living. *(Female, 28, 24)*

Men's narratives are diverse as well, and their narratives have a lot in common with women's narratives because they also think that equality and a happy marriage should be built upon individual emotions. What is missing in women's narratives but prominently present in men's narratives is that marriage is understood as "establishing an order". For most of the men we interviewed, marriage indicates having a routine, an order, and having a recognized status for men in social life.

Marriage has this advantage, maybe it has an expectation, an expectation like this: good thing is you have a certain discipline, a certain order. For example, if you want a kid, if having a baby is valuable for you, you can have a baby here in marriage. It has such good aspects. You start having an ordered life, a home. The home has some needs, you raise your children and so on, it is an occupation, an activity. You at least do something, all in all this is its good aspect. Of course, it has a lot of difficult aspects as well, but I guess its positive aspect is having such a routine, having a certain place to go, I mean, its status within society is comfortable, too. You know, you are married, you have relationships, you have friends, otherwise, when you are single, you cannot easily visit someone's house who is married. Within that social life, you have a tailor-made place, you minimally become happy in one way or another, you try to be happy. *(Male, 53, 29)*

When thinking about marriage, what comes to my mind is peace, happiness. Also order, in short you have an order. Before marriage, you do not have order, you may work or study, that is another thing. You have an order after marriage. You have at least a spouse, a home. You have a warm meeting when you come home in the evening. Parents also do that, but one's spouse is something very different. *(Male, 26, 21)*

Marriage is a sort of institution resulted from one man and one woman being in harmony in terms of their thoughts, their ideas, their tastes... I think there cannot be a material expectation from marriage anyway. Spiritual expectation, on the other hand, is tranquility between wife and husband, nothing more, trust, honesty. (*Male, 27, 27*)

Yet for another male interviewee, marriage is regarded as an institution that enables the continuation of the generation, and sexual intercourse.

Someone with whom you share life comes to you, and at the same time, it is for the sake of continuation of the generation. Because if I want the continuation of the generation, if I think that, because of my view, I think that can be maintained via marriage. (*Male, 54, 29*)

2.9.2 Responsibilities within Marriage

We asked the participants in our study about what responsibilities do women and men have in marriage. Except a few of them, most people we interviewed, without much difference between men and women, pointed to women's responsibilities at home and men's responsibilities outside home. Women's responsibilities at home were expressed mostly in terms of maternity and establishing the peace at home as in the metaphor man makes houses, woman makes homes. Only one woman mentioned that men and women should be equal in terms responsibilities. Even though a few more participants mentioned that men and women should be equal, they resorted back to pointing to differences between male and female gender roles. We should also add that a few participants expressed a perception within traditional fiqh interpretations, and independent from these, as a social norm that women have a responsibility to satisfy men's sexual needs. Man's responsibility, on the other hand, according to all interviewees except one, was to maintain the family. Nonetheless, "helping" women in household, raising and "disciplining" the children were referred to as men's responsibility by both most of the women and men.

Woman's responsibility is to have the thing at bed. And man's responsibility is to do it. And not to lean towards his parents. To prioritize his spouse a bit more. (*Female, 36, 17*)

I think he should be equal to his wife. They should have the same ideas spiritually and materially. They should be able get along perfectly. Both should listen to one another attentively. They should listen equally, I mean. He should not dominate all the time. The man always tries to dominate. I think this is true everywhere. Of course, the man should be dominant. He is the only father of the family. The mother also should be almost at his level. However, it is not like that. (*Female, 56, 17*)

What should a woman do, a spouse do? I think she should be inside the house more so than outside of it. Because a child, children are educated at home. If there is no education at home, a child cannot get any education from a daycare service. Other than that, the mother should be the material and spiritual supporter of her child, the mother should be responsible more. Likewise, if the man is at home, I think we can call him a helper. When the time comes, he should help. There are responsibilities for him outside the house, like the maintenance of the house. If there are spiritual responsibilities, he should fulfill those as well. *(Male, 31, 28)*

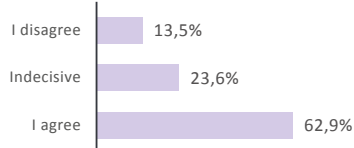
I have a lot of responsibilities, even the washing machine is in your responsibility. Of course, the kids are prior, when you got married, your whole life goes upside down. After having a baby, it changes even more..... Within household, shopping is husband's job, it is his responsibility. Sometimes, he helps with the child, sometimes with the dishes and so on. In other words, he helps me in everything, God bless him..... (Women's) duties are, I think, first of all, to maintain the peace of the family because this a bit like what a mother can provide. If the mother makes sure that the family is peaceful, the spouse will lean towards her, I mean, her responsibility is the child, that's her responsibility. Maintaining the family's peace is a responsibility for both, but the woman has a bigger share in this responsibility. In a marriage, the man's responsibility, as I told before, is in terms of material maintenance, like imbuing the child with a good moral compass, with discipline, as I told, if he is good to her wife, that's all what's needed. He be respectful, honest, I think everything follows these. *(Female, 38, 30)*

Of course, think of it like this, the man will work, OK, the woman also works, doing the dishes, cleaning the house. However, it is the man who will work, he is in charge, everything is on him. He will come home after work, if he leaves dominance to the wife, there is a problem in this. In my opinion, the man should work, never leave dominance, this is my opinion. *(Male, 45, 25)*

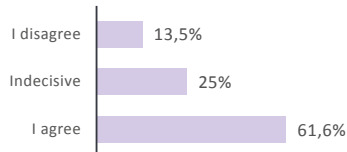
I think I should help my spouse in household, but I am terrible in the kitchen, and I never want to enter the kitchen. Unfortunately, I cannot change myself on this subject, but I should enter the kitchen because I think my wife takes on too much responsibility. Materially, I think the man should be able to earn more and I support making shared decision on a common ground. *(Male, 28, 27)*

Among the participants who participated in the survey study, 62.9 % stated that men and women have different responsibilities within the family while 61.6% of them stated that men and women should have different responsibilities within society. The percentage of those who did not agree was 13.5%.

Men and women have different responsibilities within family



Men and women have different responsibilities within society



2.9.3 Responsibilities and Rights within Marriage According to Islam

How people we interviewed interpreted men's and women's responsibilities and rights in terms of Islam was among the issues we were curious about. Again, we see that historical interpretations that were articulated within traditional fiqh were included into the narratives. However, what is interesting here is that especially most women know that according to fiqh tradition they have the right to ask for a helper for housework or the right not to take care of their children and they remark that this is quite different from what they and other women experience on a daily basis. In other words, according to most women participants, thinking about it Islamically, women have almost no responsibility at home and actually Islam "protects" women and grants them many rights, but nowadays men or Islamic authorities ignore women's rights in Islam. In other words, the women emphasize that nowadays Islamic commentaries are imbued patriarchally with respect to responsibilities. On the other hand, that men are one step ahead from women in Islam is a frequently expressed assumption. In other words, for most of the participants, "according to Islam", men both have more responsibility than women and are superior.

If it was according to Islam, then the woman would do nothing, she may require helper, where is the helper? If we had lived according to Islam, the women would have been held in high esteem. However, which woman lives according to Islam, no one..... Men's right, I do not know, they say four women, and that is crazy. I mean, I cannot make sense of it much, I don't know what to say. Nothing comes to my mind. (*Female, 42, 17*)

Towards women, our prophet was like, women are the trust of Allah, love, respect. It a big sin to interfere with women. (Female, 65, 17, Afyon)

They are not equal in everything. The man seems to be a bit superior. Superiority is in terms of strength and power. In other issues, if it is a sin, it is a sin for him as well. Our religion does not say he can commit adultery, he cannot do it. You can commit haram, but actually you cannot. Our religion sees superiority in terms of strength and power. (Female, 26, 18)

Islam always, in my opinion, in Islam, I guess, men have more weight, Islam generally grants more weight to men. After that, but I also think joint decision is always better.

I do not know much about this subject in Islam, but I think there are good things in Islam when we read the book, it is the preachers that weaken women. In fact, when you read the book, our religion gives great rights. However, when we listen to the preachers and imams, the woman is always dependent on the man, imams tell it as if women are always dependent on something. (Female, 45, 17).

Our religion is the best, really. Now they talk about women's rights and so on, but our prophet already granted that to women, but no one really knows that. Islam of course tells the truest, holds women in higher esteem, grants them more rights. That is for those who really live it and know, Islam really protects women. It gives them rights in every aspect. Because it says women do not even have to take care of their children. You know this as well, it says her spouse has to hire a helper for her. Our religion really values women. (Female, 49, 25)

I mean, In Islam, women are one step behind men, Islam gives prominence to men. Women are again in the backseat. According to Islam, men have the upper hand. Of course, we try to obey this as much as we can. (Female, 40, 17)

Besides, we observed that the interviewees who state that they do not have much faith, especially the men, have very strong prejudices and assumptions about gender hierarchy in Islam.

It says the man is superior. Your wife, what kind of saying is this, I guess there was a hadith or something about this, that your spouse is the leader of the house, whatever he says is done, if something happens, the man can beat the woman, there was such a discourse, but I find these wrong. (Male, 24, 24)

Islam, unfortunately, I will give an example, says that the woman is created from the rib of the man, and pardon me, says that she has no use, and sees the woman as the possession of the man. For me, this is unbelievably wrong, the woman is not like that, she is the other 50%, has the same rights as an individual, the woman just has different sex, we are all the same in fact, except our physical structure. Because of that, I find it wrong that Islam is such a backward religion about women. It has been 1488 years since it emerged, but there is always update by the scholars, I find these incredibly wrong. (*Male, 28, 27*)

Nevertheless, some women stated that women are equal to men, or even superior to them. It is noteworthy that most of those women who said that, referred to the hadith “the heaven is under the feet of mothers” thinking about womanhood and motherhood together. When we asked about which verse of Quran or hadith they know about women, they mostly responded with this hadith. This indicates how much they endorse this hadith in which interviewees’ perception of maternity resonates with religious discourse.

Rights for everybody, it considers both women and men as equals. It does not discriminate against a group at all. Even more so, in my opinion, it holds women in higher esteem than men. (*Female, 49, 17, Yozgat*)

It tells very beautiful things. Equal rights. Especially, women have more. Because women are trusted to men. Men should pay attention to them. Men to women. About everything. (*Female, 46, 17*)

It mentions about equality there, too. What does it say? It says that the heaven is under the feet of mothers. This shows that it values women a bit more. However, despite knowing this, our people never see women superior, they always see them inferior. (*Female, 39, 16*)

When I look back, judging from what is told, it does not give prominence to women that much. Today’s generation, women try to be on the forefront. In our religion, our prophet in fact said that the heaven is under the feet of mothers, women should never be harassed, but women face violence today, there is also harassment. The same is true at home. If you wanted to do it another way, I have friends who pray 5 times a day, even their husbands drink all night and maltreat their wives because they may have extramarital sexual relationships. Maybe what gave me such strength, what made me persevere was these.

What do you mean when you say these, is it related to not having experienced them?

Not having experienced them. In our religion, our prophet said the most beautiful thing, what else should a woman give birth to, he says the heaven, the heaven, Is there anything beyond that? Actually, it is very beautiful. (*Female, 53, 15*)

Maybe women are equal, but I do not believe that they are created equal in terms of strength. Because I believe that the man should protect and shelter her. Also, the man should be able to protect the woman, I think he is responsible in his nature since he is stronger. *(Male, 24, 24)*

As we see in the narratives above, even though that there should be equality between men and women is mentioned, in most of the interviews, the idea that women are trusted to men may follow this idea of equality. The idea of equality is shaken by pointing that women are trusted to men because they are fragile and should be protected as well as by pointing men's authoritative and protective position. In addition to that, interviewees' responses to our question about men and women's nature are consistent with gender norms that emerge in other narratives: while women are naïve, tactful, peaceful, altruistic, and emotional, men are strong, rude, and tough.

It is not a good thing, all in all, she is a trust from the prophet to you, a woman is trusted to the man, it is bad thing, very bad. *(Female, 45, 17, Ağrı)*

Women are more fragile, men are tougher.

Do you think men and women's nature are different from each other?

Of course. My Rab created the men stronger as a protector. For example, he created women fragile, elegant, like jewelry, my Lord, inasmuch as our prophet says the same, see your wives as jewelry. Especially, I guess they were going to a sea war with a convoy or something like that, when the camel got stuck in sand, he told to the man who holds the camel that "be careful, those are crystals, do not break them" *(Female, 26, 18)*.

Women's nature is a bit more peaceful, submissive. Men's nature, on the other hand, is authoritative, I mean, as a responsibility. It comes to mind this way. *(Female, 58, 15, Yozgat)*

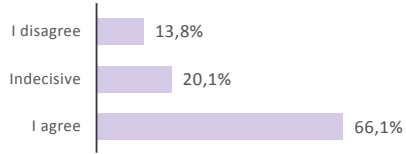
However, it is possible to come across to narratives that go beyond these assumptions:

You know that they say that men are stronger, maybe they are stronger in terms of strength, but you know what, women are stronger. Physically, men are stronger, but from another respect, women are stronger. They are resistant to everything. *(Female, 49, 25)*

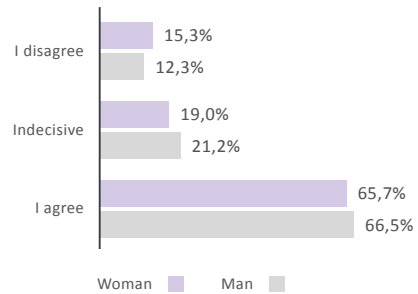
Also, in the survey study, the rate of those who agree with the statement that women and men have different natures is 66.1%. This is quite close to the rate of those who state that men and women have different responsibilities in the family and the state. While it is noteworthy that the rates of women and

men who responded to the question about men and women’s natures as “I agree” are quite close to each other, the fact that women who did not agree was 15.3% and men who did not agree was 12.3% indicates that the rate of women who disagree with this statement is different from the rate of men although slightly.

Men and women have different natures (innate features)



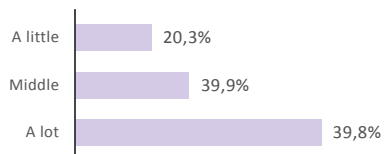
men and women have different natures (innate features)



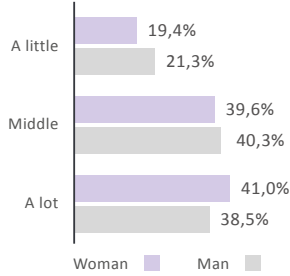
2.10 WAYS OF KNOWING RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE IN DAILY LIFE

We observed that among the participants in the survey study, the number of those who say that religion is influential in their decisions in daily life is noticeably higher.

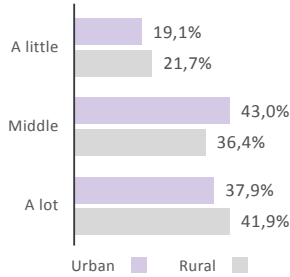
How much do you think religion is influential in your decisions in your daily life?



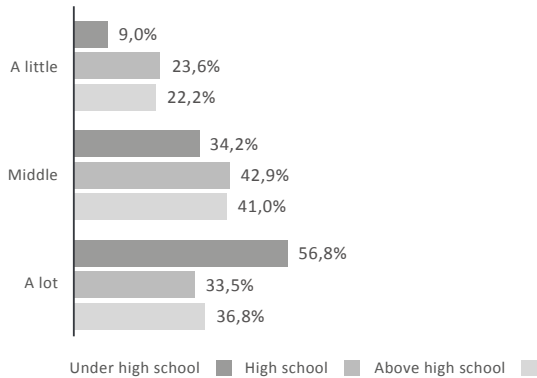
How much do you think religion is influential in your decisions in your daily life?



How much do you think religion is influential in your decisions in your daily life?

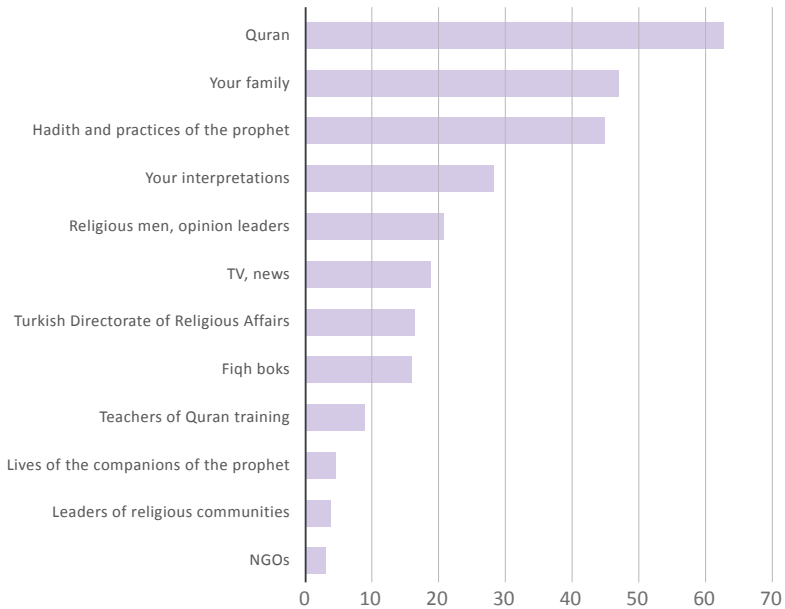


How much do you think religion is influential in your decisions in your daily life?

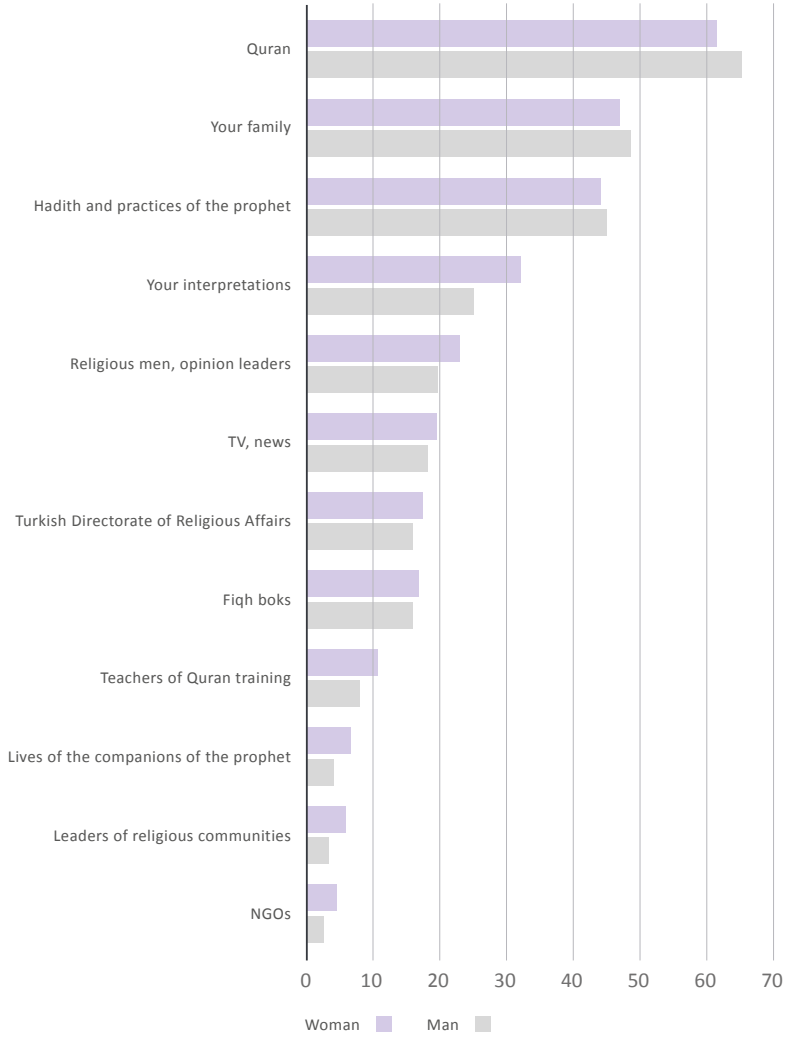


The participants think that religion is influential in making decisions in daily life. As education level increases, the rate of those who state that religion is influential increases. Parallel to that, it is possible to say that in a few various subjects, people have more “sectarian” religious interpretations that is separated from their daily practices.

Where do you get religious knowledge?

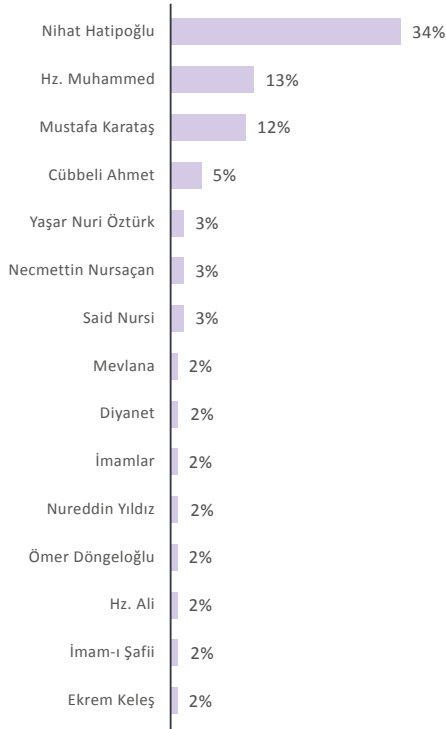


Where do you get religious knowledge?





Dini bilginizi nereden ediniyorsunuz?

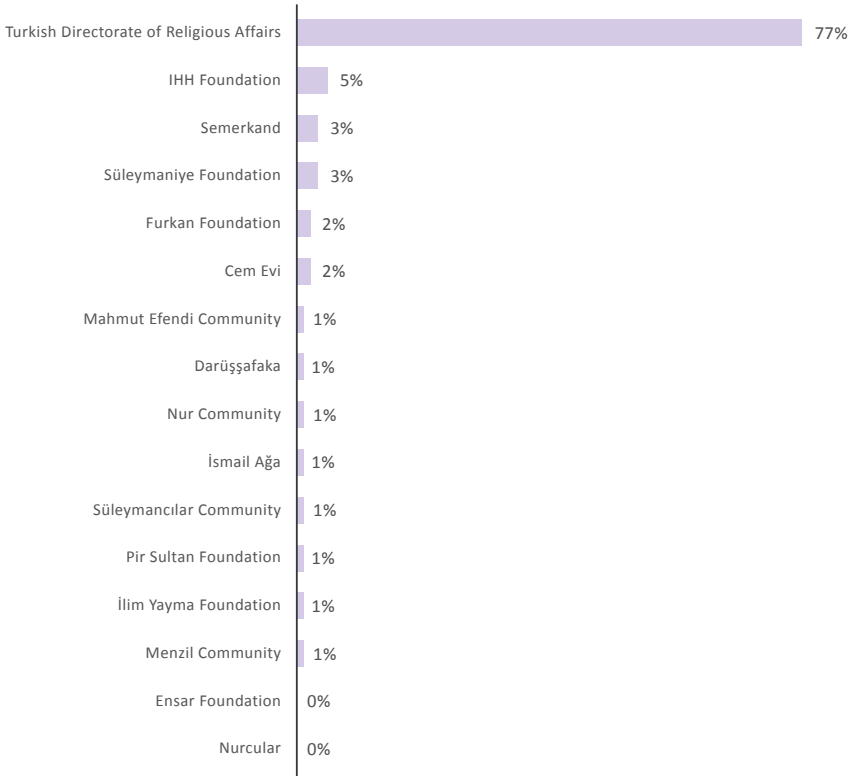


Nihat Hatipoğlu stands out as the name whose opinions on religious subjects are valued the most. Mustafa Karataş and Cübbeli Ahmet follow him. Yaşar Nuri Öztürk is also in the list through his past works.

On the other hand, Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs is the institution that the participants trust the most about religious subjects.



Which institution do you relate the most?



The rate of mentioning Directorate of Religious Affairs is noticeably higher than other institutions.

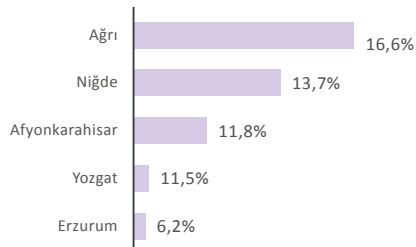
The rate of those who say that they depend on their own interpretations in the way to acquire religious knowledge is 28.1%.

3 | FINDINGS FROM CITIES

Especially, since marriages under the age of 18 are illegal and the data were collected based on declarations and pregnancies before 18 years of age, it is possible to say that much less than actual cases of early marriages are officially registered.

As we stated in the background section, it is not possible to say that TÜİK data on the number/percentage of early marriage in Turkey are reliable. Especially, since marriages under the age of 18 are illegal and the data were collected based on declarations and pregnancies before 18 years of age, it is possible to say that much less than actual cases of early marriages are officially registered. Despite all these negative circumstances, starting with the assumption that the same will be experienced in every region, during the time period we started the research project, we conducted in-depth interviews in five cities¹ in which the highest number of cases of early marriages were attested.

The rate of those who got married under 18 for the last year



1. TÜİK, Statistics of Marriage and Divorce, 2020

In every city, people and institutions listed below were interviewed:

- » Province Directorships of Family and Social Services
- » Centers of Violence Prevention and Monitoring
- » Department of Women's Studies at Universities (If there is one)
- » Province Legal Associations and if there is, Women Commissions of Bar Associations
- » NGOs that are active in the region on the subject
- » Pertinent workers who work in state institutions or in the private sector
- » People who got married early

Findings from the cities share these commonalities:

- » Not registering the children on mothers makes tracking hard. As we stated at the beginning, detection of early marriages is usually possible through early pregnancies. Because of that, we observed that registering the child as belonging to the grandmother, stating the grandmother of the baby as the mother is a very common method that is practiced.
- » Covering early marriages become possible only with the involvement of private hospitals and retired midwives: Again, certain institutions and people said that private hospitals and retired midwives mediate the process of childbirth and blocking of official registration of pregnancies in early marriages; and this becomes an obstacle to compile the information, and to initiate the necessary mechanisms.
- » Execution of 4+4+4 in the education system is a factor that increases the number of early marriages: the option of studying in a distance high school removes the deterring effect of education against marrying off girls. Especially, because ministry of national education does not track the continuation to high schools, this results in a group of "lost" girls, and this sets the ground for early marriages.

It is possible to summarize other factors that we encountered in the field as the following:

Each city has a different experience about premature marriages, early marriage is not a problem of the "east"

When early marriage is mentioned, what symbolically comes to mind is the marriage of a little girl and a middle-aged man. This situation happens as such in eastern cities in the cases of early marriage.

However, marriages under question are observed as “peer” marriages when we come closer to central Anatolia. We observe that with such marriages that are mostly identified with abduction of girls and escape cases, girls, who have limited expectations from life, want to distance themselves from their present lives via marriage. Differences are not limited to this. Each city and region experiences and views early marriages in a different way. All these differences show that different activities should be conducted in each city on early marriages. In addition to raising awareness of parents in regions where marriages happen forced by the parents, some activities can be planned especially to raise awareness of children to decrease the cases of marriages that happen with the “consent of the child”.

There are salient weaknesses about data collection and data sharing in public

In every city where we conducted field work, different projects and courses of actions are in effect to fight against early marriages by Province Directorships of Family, Labor and Social Services. ŞÖNİMs also carry out some work on the subject. However, works are either short-term or unfinished or are not turned into a complete database, and this makes them unsustainable.

In central Anatolia, works by NGO works on early marriage are almost nonexistent.

In the cities of Ağrı and Erzurum where we conducted the field work, KAMER stands out as an institution. KAMER, using its regional experiences with the consideration of local needs, plans different projects in the region, or lead existing projects. However, in central Anatolia, it is hard even to find an NGO working on the issue. There is a serious gap there in terms of NGO projects.

4 | CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Most of the interviewees consider religion as a body of unchanging norms and rules and see traditional religious interpretations as identical to religion itself. However, despite this, trust in religious interpretations is in decline and a fair number of participants state their own interpretations, distancing themselves from traditional interpretations.

» In our research, we observed that the youth, especially girls, have clearer stance and attitude towards early marriages. As education level decreases, this stance and attitude loses strength.

» Sexuality is the most important “double-crosser” that legitimizes early marriage. Even though participants are clearly against early marriage, physical proximity, or possibility of that may become a factor that prepares the ground for early marriage and legitimizes it.

» In the interviews we conducted, we observed that Islamic religion and belief in Turkey is not in itself a factor that causes early marriage. In other words, none of the interviewees got married or married off with religious motivations. However, it is thought that there is open door in Islam that legitimizes early marriage. Even though interviewees were opposed to early marriage, most of them thought that it is religiously permitted or necessary.

» Most of the interviewees consider religion as a body of unchanging norms and rules and see traditional religious interpretations as identical to religion itself. However, despite this, trust in religious interpretations is in decline and a fair number of participants state their own interpretations, distancing themselves from traditional interpretations.

» On the one hand, today the way of interpreting religion is seriously criticized, on the other hand, opinion leaders and institutions preserve their value in the minds of people.

» If the “open doors” in religious interpretations about early marriage are opened for discussion, it will be a crucial step in the fight against early marriage. Indeed, even though religious attachments are not a source of motivation for early marriages, considering the influence and the discouraging effect of religion in people’s daily practices, we think that discussing the religious interpretations that legitimize early marriage will have a big effect.

» During city visits, we realized that it is hard to make generalizations about the context of early marriages in Turkey. Since cities differ in terms of socio-economic situation, traditions, and norms, they also differ from each other in terms of motivations and experiences about early marriage. Thus, it is necessary to conduct detailed research on each city, and to develop forms of fight and suggestions fitting their unique, particular situations.



Kingdom of the Netherlands

