

Me, Myself and Loneliness...: Qualitative Approach to the Single Child Preference in Metropolitan areas of Turkey

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Abstract:

Aim of this ongoing study is to explore the reasons of single child preference among women within 25-35 age group who are single-childed and living in metropolitan areas of Turkey. Total Fertility Rate levels for metropolitan areas are significantly lower in contrast to Turkey as a whole. Age Specific Fertility Rates of women aged 25-29 in metropolitan areas for 1988 - 2003 periods are following a similar pattern with those aged 25-29 in overall Turkey for 1985 – 1989 periods. Couples in metropolitan areas probably prefer to have one child instead of having two children which is quite similar to the shift that Turkey had experienced between years of 1984 and 1989 from 3.0 births per woman to 2.2. Thus, women aged 25-36, living in metropolitan areas prefer to be single-childed are considered as forerunners. Preliminary results of ongoing in-depth interviews emphasize key words that are presented by the idea of second demographic transition.

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Introduction:

Turkey had experienced a continuous decline in fertility levels over the past 25 years, from level 4.3 to 2.2 birth per women. Fertility decline had an early start in Turkey in Istanbul and the larger cities, and the fertility transition is well under way before the founding of the republic in 1923. The Ottoman censuses of 1885 and 1907 give cross sectional TFRs of 3.5 and 3.8 respectively for Istanbul. These levels were only reached in the late 1980s for Turkey as a whole (Behar, 1995). Today, the most recent data reveals for 2000-2003 periods that TFR of five metropolitan area of Turkey is 1.73 while it is 2.23 in overall Turkey.

Comparison of trend lines for age specific fertility rates (ASFRs) of five metropolitan areas and overall Turkey imply that couples living in metropolitan areas prefer to have one child instead of having two children which is quite similar to the shift that Turkey had experienced between the years 1984 and 1989 from three births to about two births per woman. Consequently, the aim is to explore deep motives lying beneath the “single child preference”, by considering couples in metropolitan areas who prefer to have only one child as “forerunners”. The importance of this study is its reference to a new fertility trend for Turkey which is “single-childed families”.

In order explore reasons for single child preference among women in metropolitan areas of Turkey, in depth interviews have been conducted with women between ages 25-36² who are single-childed and living in metropolitans of Turkey.

Theoretical framework is mainly based on postmodernism in terms of new value orientation and changes in life styles of women after modernity with specific emphasis on “self-expression”, “self-image”, “self-fulfilment” and “well being”.

Methodology and Data Source:

One of the data source for this study is ever-married women roster of Turkey Demographic and Health Survey 2003 (TDHS-2003) which is used for displaying new fertility trends occurred in metropolitan areas. TDHS-2003 is a nationally representative sample survey designed to provide information on levels and trends of fertility, infant and child mortality, family planning and maternal and child health is used.

² This study started in the year of 2008 and stil going on. Therefore, lower age boundry is 25 and upper can be extended to 40.

Other source is in-depth interviews conducted with women between ages 25-36 and living in Ankara, Adana, Bursa, Istanbul and Izmir in order to explore main motives of single child preference in metropolitan areas. Reason for interviewing with women in this specific age group is the rapid decline from two births to single birth had actually occurred among women in 20-29 age groups for the 2000-2003 periods which are now between ages about 25-36. Snowball method, which is a non probability sampling method, is used in order to reach target population. Analysis of quantitative data is based on Grounded Theory (Glaser B. and Strauss A., 1967) which consists of five main stages: Reading the data to become familiar, organization of the finding according to theoretical framework, developing analytical categories and to code the data, examination of important categories and node connections, and finally identifying the patterns.

From Modern to Postmodern Period: Orientation to a New World

There are various explanations for fertility decline that have been experienced all around the world in demography literature. Most of those explanations are based on (linked with) “modernism”. For example; demographic transition theory, which is the most popular and well-known theory for explaining fertility and mortality decline that is started at the beginning of 19th century in Europe, is closely tied with modernization process. It extensively refers to various characteristics of modern times.

Van de Kaa wrote (2001: 293-294) the “modern period” witnessed the end of the feudal system the development of nation-states and national economies, of capitalism, of the process of industrialization, of mass production, of mass education, and of certain countries building up worldwide empires. Urbanization becomes a general process. In the late modern period secularization began to change the belief system. With the impact of scientific discoveries progress, enlightenment and rationality existed in belief system and in behaviour. The search for truth, for purity and timeless generalizations became as a central elements in research and scholarship. The necessity to achieve economic security through one’s own efforts generated an “industrious” revolution. Nearly everyone participated in the labour force. The need to stimulate economic growth dominated thinking about future. Some form of representational became the standard for civilized societies. Ultimately, the state largely assumed the responsibilities for the social security of individuals traditionally vested in the family. Moreover, demographically, modern period saw low levels of birth and death rates. The advancements in technology and medicine, availability and reliability of contraceptives had played an important role in fertility control of couples. Starting from Europe, fertility levels had declined to replacement level in most of the countries in the world.

However, today, the modern period have started to lose its universality: The value of the nation-state and its sovereignty have greatly diminished or disappeared. Economic globalization has reduced the direct influence of government and welfare of their populations. The development of the welfare state freed individuals in large measure from the social control exercised by families and communities. Decolonization has led to a new economic order in the world. The influx of migrants has made previously homogenous societies multicultural. At the same time American and European mass culture is spreading over the globe. Consumerism is rife. A tremendous de-formalization has taken place. A great variety of images, life styles and cultural symbols are produced by small groups and rapidly absorbed by others. The advent of the post industrial information society has had a generation specific impact: fragmentation, discontinuity and incongruity are standard. The population have become alienated from the political elites: yesterday's men are incapable of understanding the problems and desires of today's young people. Conflicts about ethical issues, the use of drugs, euthanasia and abortion appear impossible to resolve now that the self-evident truth and value of certain moral positions have been questioned. Authority in such matters has evaporated. Culture can no longer serve to maintain the existing social order (Van de Kaa 2001: 294).

Postmodernity in here is taken as a certain value orientation. As Van de Kaa suggested (2001), it is valuable to consider postmodernity as a way of looking at the world, can be helpful in explaining the remarkable changes that have been documented for industrialized societies in the last two decades. Postmodernity would thus denote a value orientation that patterns and constrains behaviour in a postmodern fashion. Used in this context, postmodernization would refer to a process of value change: the transformation from modern to postmodern value orientations. If it should prove possible to operationalize postmodernity as a general world view, as a specific value orientation or as the spirit of an age, it could be an important instrument in explaining the sudden and spectacular demographic changes observed in nearly all European societies after the mid 1960s.

When demographic trends of this new period are considered, it is possible to see that fertility levels are started to stabilize below the replacement level and can be referred as highly restricted fertility. Van de Kaa and Dirk (1987) called this new period of demographic trend as a "second demographic transition". The principle demographic feature of the second transition is the decline in fertility from somewhat above the replacement level of 2.1 births per women. The keyword that lies beneath the idea of second demographic transition is "individualism". It emphasizes the "rights" and "self-fulfilment" of individuals. Many researchers agreed that the second demographic transition is mostly related to the functioning of individuals in the fast-changing post-industrial societies. In these societies, one's standard of living is largely determined by one's

level and quality of education, degree of commitment to societal goals, and motivation to develop and use one's talents (Van de Kaa 1987).

Although second demographic transition is mainly started at Europe, today, metropolitan areas of Turkey are displaying similar fertility levels (1.73 births per women). Consequently, this study suggests evaluating fertility levels of metropolitan areas in Turkey from the view of postmodernism as regards to new value orientations of women.

A New Fertility Trend for Turkey: Single Childed Families

Turkey has been experiencing the last phase of its fertility transition during the last two decades. According to Turkey Demographic and Health Survey 2003, fertility levels have declined almost continuously over the past 25 years, from a level of 4.3 births per woman to 2.2 births per woman as presented in Figure 1. The decline in fertility was significantly rapid during the period between the 1970s and 1980s. After the TFR reached a level below 3 births per woman in 1993, the pace of fertility decline slowed somewhat and stabilized around 2.6 births on average in the 1990s. However after a stabilization period in fertility during the 1990s, TDHS 2003 puts forward a fertility level which is slightly over replacement level (HUIPS, 2004). Moreover, it is possible to observe significant decline in the age group 20-24 from the figure below.

Figure 1. Age specific fertility rates of ever-married women aged 15-49 in Turkey for the 1978-2003 periods, TDHS- 2003

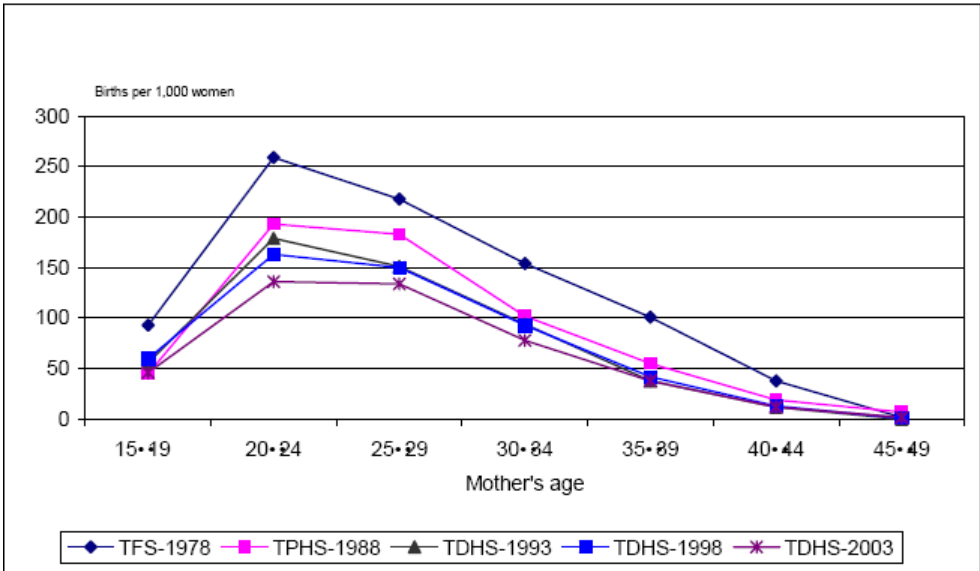
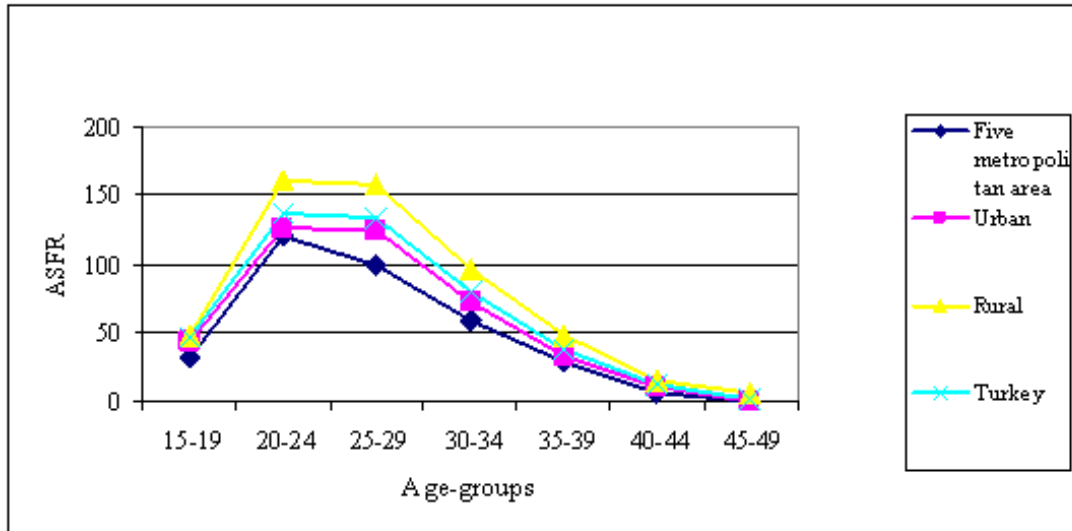


Figure 2. Age specific fertility rates of ever-married women aged 15-49 living in metropolitan areas of Turkey for the 2000-2003 periods, TDHS- 2003



Trend line of age specific fertility rates (ASFRs) of five metropolitan areas (Figure 2) reveals that sharp decline of fertility after the age group 20-24 is quite similar with the ASFR line of overall Turkey between the years of 1978 and 2003 (Figure 1). Consequently, when Figure 1 and Figure 2 are compared, the pattern of fertility decline in 2000-2003 periods is quite similar with the shift that Turkey had experienced between the years of 1994 and 2003 from about 3 births to 2.2 births per women. That is why, by considering couples in metropolitan areas who prefer to be single-childed as forerunners, the reasons for this single child preferences have been explored by conducting in-depth interview.

Preliminary Results:

The in-depth interview that have been conducting for this study aimed to explore the mechanisms lying under beneath the single-child preference of women between ages 25-39 and living in metropolitan areas of Turkey. Yet, it should be mentioned since this is an ongoing study, in-depth interviews are still underway.

Completed interviews had revealed several important preliminary results that can be presented in five categories:

“Desire for more children or desire for life”

Interviewed women were asked if they want more children or not. Each of them, -no matter which socio-economic group they are in- mentioned that they actually do not want another child since having a child is a very hard process but, at the same time they do not want their child to be alone.

“Well it is a very difficult decision... I can not answer this... Because when I think rationally, yes I want another child since I don't want Defne (her daughter) to be alone. But it is (to have another child) really very hard both financially and psychologically... I have a job and I love it; I love to work..But I am not able to spend enough time with my daughter. And unfortunately, I am missing the best part!. She is spending all the day with her grandma. And therefore her grandma witnessed all the amazing things she had done...When I came home, my mother started to tell me that “Defne did this today, Defne did that today” and I am devoid of all the actions she had made all the words she had said...My husband wants another child. He wants it so badly. But when I started to think about to have another... I remember the days that me and my husband had before Defne...We used to go shopping, go out in the evenings, watch movies, go for weekend trips...we spend time together, hang out with friends etc...But now...Nothing!! But when Defne gets older, we are able to turn back to that old life...You see, everything is a paradox... (She is laughing)” (Age 32, Ankara)

“Hmm well yes...perhaps if the conditions were as they are today in five years ago...I don't know but....hmmm even if they were as if they are today I would not have wanted another child... However, I do not want any other child today neither...Because, even if I get pregnant right now, my pregnancy will take a year. My parents will get older. They helped me with my daughter's care after my persistent request but a year after now they will get much older and ill therefore they could not help me at all! So how can I get pregnant and have another baby...maybe if I were rich... I cannot afford a baby-sitter, and I cannot trust a baby-sitter...” (She had mentioned that they hired a baby-sitter once, but they found out that she was hitting the baby with a TV remote controller) ...Actually, I don't want my child to grow alone...I had been through very hard times, especially in that first year (the year that her baby was born)..I did not go to work...stuck into house, I had depression. Ceren, (her daughter) was a very difficult

baby; she had cried all the time, cried in every single moment! I had never seen such a baby, no one had. She was hard... I had been in depression for that one and a half year. If you would have come to me at that time and asked me those questions, I would say "No! Never! I never ever again want a child!" The reason would only be "I do not want, I do not want to be through those difficulties again Because I could even go to market to buy bread, or cigarette even when she was sleeping...I was so lonely...It was so hard for me...I was thinking, all these pains caused by pregnancy and cesarean section are passing away but the difficulties that had experienced during the raising a child are not so easy to forget. I keep telling myself that I cannot live all those things again."(Age 37, Ankara)

"I thought about having another one several times..But in the end I didn't dare to have another child both because mental and financial reasons...I have to work and earn money for my child..So I did not have time for a new baby.. Now, my son is a teenager, and having another child is bit like to rewind everything..." (Age 39, Ankara)

Me, myself and my loneliness

Women were also asked if they have any difficulties about dealing with the baby. Majority of respondents stated that they were lonely at that period and these were really hard times for them:

"I cannot deny the fact that my husband had helped me and supported me a lot. He came home and cooked the meal at this period...Ceren was really a very strange baby; I cannot tell how strange she was. You have to see her! I could not leave her even for a second because she was crying continuously. My husband was so helpful, he was shopping, cleaning, cooking, waking up at nights with me for feeding or cleaning the baby...He did everything he can, he did everything... He tried as hard as me, may be even more because you know women are more talented and skilled than men are... They are able to do these works more easily. That is why I cannot say that "I raised my daughter alone, my husband did not help me" I cannot say that. I cannot deny his support...what I mean by as loneliness is...mm I don't know I wish my mother was with me during this period, had cooked for me as other's mothers did.. But instead, she preferred to have plastic surgery for her face...Family support is important...I

have been alone all my life...You can solve everything by yourself but when you have a child, things get different...Raising a child alone is so different..." (Age 37, Ankara)

"In fact, I expected support from my family...Because when you gave a birth, you feel lonely..Even if you are capable of handling with the baby or other stuff, you need an emotional support anyway. Those times were really hard. Any kind of support becomes essential and important to you. I felt lonely..those were hard times... I was disappointed. Because I did not know what to do, how to care and how to look after my son...My husband did not help me either.." (Age 39, Ankara)

"I want it all for my child"

Another common point that respondents were mentioned while they were asked about their desires about another child is about economic conditions they are in. Even if they in lower or upper socio economic status, they all said that if they would have another child they were not able to give all those opportunities to their second child that they provided to their first child.

That is why I want to do my best for my daughter and I will. But if I have two children my care, concern, effort and financial ability will be divided into two ... I believe that each child should be treated equally and I don't like anything which is average. For example Ceren is 2 years old now...I am searching for the best school, I am trying to buy the best clothes and best foods...I am trying to do my best for her...I prefer to send my single child to private school instead of having two children and sending them to public school... And this is it! Life is too harsh...I want so many beautiful things for her, I want her to be a brilliant architect..." (Age 37, Ankara)

"I want my son to be very successful. I want him to go to university..If I would have another child, I was not able to send my son to a private school... Actually he could not win the Anatolian high school examination (she is quite upset at this moment) . But I believe that Anatolian high school was the place that he belongs to..It was the school that Can (her son) deserves. But he could not make it. So I send him to a private school, which is a real financial burden for me. I thought to myself that he need to

learn foreign language, he need to have better education..If I had another child, I could not able to provide him all those opportunities” (Age 39, Ankara)

“You don’t have to wear yourself out for having children”

Very interesting point which needed to be mentioned here is the importance of physical appearance. Respondents from upper socio-economic status mentioned that they do not want to gain all those weights again among the reasons of their unwillingness of another child.

“That woman (her neighbour) has 4 children! She is 4-5 years younger than me however she looks as if she is my mother!! You don’t have to wear yourself out just for having children...Me, for example, when I gave birth to Ceren, my weights become a big issue for me. I was over- weighted and I had spend my whole year for loosing weight... If you would have interviewed with me at that time and asked me those questions I would say that I don’t want another child because I don’t want to gain weight again!”(Age 37, Ankara)

I had a very active social life..I like to dress fashionably, but when you get pregnant it is not possible to dress up like that! You cannot wear high heels..You become ugly and every time that I looked at mirror, I thought to myself that how fat and ugly I am..I don’t want to appear like that again...” (Age 32, Ankara)

What would you do if you get pregnant right now?

When respondents were also asked what they would do if they become pregnant right now, different answers were given by respondents to the question of “what they would you if they were pregnant right now?”

“I can not have an abortion. It is against my beliefs (... But I don’t want another child. Therefore we strictly use condoms in order to not to get pregnant...” (Age 32, Ankara)

“I would have an abortion without thinking a second! And I can not get pregnant because I am aware of fertility control methods” (Age 37, Ankara)

“If I get pregnant... I probably give a birth... But I don’t stop using family planning methods because I do not want to get pregnant again!” (Age 39, Ankara)

“Although the best part of the marriage is having children, I do not want another Child... My son is nine years old now...And it is to hard to take care a baby. But if I were pregnant I would not have an abortion because it is forbidden in my religion” (Age 29, Ankara)

Conclusion:

Changing fertility levels and trends in Turkey revealed that TFR in Turkey is about to reach replacement level (2.23). However, TFRs metropolitan areas of Turkey are far below the replacement level (1.73), which implies that women in metropolitan areas of Turkey are more likely to prefer one child instead of having to or more children

Van De Kaa’s conceptualization of Postmodernity as an orientation of new values is used in terms of second demographic transitions as regard to theoretical framework. Consequently, low fertility in metropolitan areas are examined from the view of second demographic transition. Moreover, women who have single child and living in metropolitan areas of Turkey are considered as forerunners.

In order to understand the main motives of this restricted fertility behaviour, in-depth interviews with those forerunners were conducted. Preliminary results showed that respondents make emphasis on their “well being”, “self expression”, and “self-fulfilment”. Moreover, having children may well form part of a postmodern idea of self-fulfilment (Van De Kaa, 2001).

Individualism appeared in respondents’ statements as their decisions, *their* life, *their* feelings, *their* loneliness, *their* hard times, difficulties that *they had experienced* by themselves, *their* desires, *their* expectations, *their* body and finally *their children*. Self-fulfilment, desire to realize more of one’s own potential, was significantly dominant in their statement. Strong emphasis on their life styles and their self images were also made. It is also observed from the interviews that respondents are creating their own self-reflexive truths (or reality) depending on how they perceive themselves, their body, their self image, their lives , their

partners and their families. As a result, I would like to conclude with a quotation from Van de Kaa:

“We have now entered a period without objective truths, in which people will continuously seek their identity in a self-reflexive way. They will give high priority to their well-being and self expression, to instant gratification and play (Van de Kaa, 2001: 294)”

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