

Salient fertility differences among different status groups of women on the verge of the new population policy in Turkey

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Extended Abstract

Context

Turkey has undergone significant social, economic and political shifts, and these changes have had a profound impact on people’s lives. This rapidly shifting social environment has also brought about substantial variation and change in institutionalized gender relationships. However, different sectors of the population have been affected by these social and cultural changes in different ways. On the margins of these changes, *traditionalism* and *religiosity* are still predominant in the country; especially, among the small towns or rural residents, in the country’s eastern and southeastern areas, and among people with less education.

On the other hand, the most notable characteristic of the contemporary Turkey, are low fertility and mortality rates and an ageing population. This final stage of Turkey’s demographic transition forms the basis of a new population policy. The exhortation for women to give birth to at least 3 children apiece, made by the most powerful representatives of the government (the prime minister himself), is seen as a message designed to help reach economic, social and political aims via demographic change.

In terms of the status of women three main sociological cultural groups can roughly be distinguished in Turkey. The first such group is made up of the urban, industrialized sectors of society in which more or less modern/Western values have been internalized as a new value system. In this group, both the family and the individual appear to have more autonomy, and hence women have achieved a more egalitarian status vis-a-vis men. New opportunities for vertical and lateral social mobility and progressively more rationally based decisions in behaviors are two key characteristics of this group. The second group is identified as traditional rural culture, in which the status of women and children has generally remained low so as to facilitate the strict control of individuals by social values based on the classic patriarchy. The third group comes at the intersection of the first two, namely the “new urban” cultural group. At first glance, this last group might be seen as a transitional one. However, in some cases, its dramatic value conflicts and contradictions can even exacerbate social and familial pressures on women (and children) compared to rural culture. For example, one qualitative study of “honor killings” in Turkey found that young urban male migrants from rural areas can more strongly emphasize the “necessity to control women” in the way women dress, their schooling, work, who they associate with, their friendships, etc.

In this context, a woman’s education attainment is a hallmark for determining her social group. This is because educational attainment, apart from determining socioeconomic standing of individuals, also indicates a particular cultural exposure to modernization and likely acculturation in Turkey. Low level of education augments the effect of a pervasively strong traditionalism and prevents women from exercising even their legal rights for either themselves or their children. Interaction with the “outside” world is more limited and controlled by these women’s families, by

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their husbands and their own families due to the strong influence of patriarchal cultural values which enforce gender disparity.

Research Questions

The impact of women’s status and empowerment on their fertility-related behavior is one of the major topics in population studies. In general it has been argued that with increasing status and empowerment, women are more likely to be involved in decision- making concerning the use of family planning methods and childbearing¹. In line with its multidimensional nature, the concept of women’s status has been indicated through combining several different metrics. Various studies have found education, workforce participation, participation in decision-making, freedom of movement, and attitudes towards gender relations to be the main determining factors of women’s status and empowerment.

This study has two major aims:

- First, we intend to distinguish different status groups of women in Turkey by using a range of indicators which influence women’s status and empowerment. Thereafter, we aim to investigate plausible differences in the knowledge and use of family planning methods and in fertility behavior (parity progressions) among women’s different status groups.
- Secondly, in light of the findings we aim to evaluate the possible impacts of Turkey’s new population policy on different status groups of women.

Data, Methodology, and Variables

The data we use for our analysis come from the 2008 Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (2008 TDHS). The sample of the 2008 TDHS is able to represent the country, including at the urban, rural, and regional levels. Interviews were conducted with 7,405 ever-married women of reproductive age (15-49) in 10,525 households. The survey data enable the calculation of several demographic and health indicators related to fertility. In addition, the 2008 TDHS also provides rich information on the background characteristics of women and their husbands, marriage history and information on marriage, women’s work history and status, and women’s attitudes towards gender relations.

In our study, in order to establish these women’s status groups, we use cluster analysis, a highly empirical statistical method that identifies groups of individuals or objects with similar characteristics. The main purpose of this analysis is to find natural groupings in the data.

We are interested in clustering married women (15-49) based on similarities with respect to the following individual-level characteristics:

A. Baseline (socio-economic) variables:

1. Women’s age at first marriage
2. Years of schooling of women (in single years)
3. Years of schooling of husbands (in single years)
4. Interspousal schooling difference (in years)
5. Interspousal age difference (in months)

¹ On the other hand, some country studies have not found any relationship between women’s status and fertility. For example, Amin and Lloyd (2002) argue that in Egypt and Bangladesh low levels of women’s autonomy have not posed any barrier to fertility declines.

B. Socio-cultural variables:

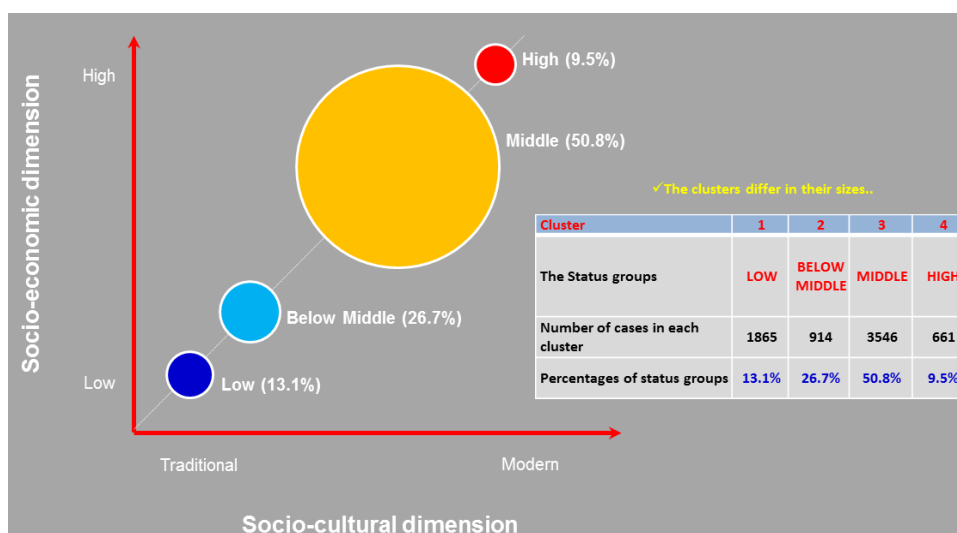
- 6. Not compliance to male roles and traditional values index
- 7. Degree of not justifying physical violence index
- 8. Degree of husband’s permissiveness index
- 9. Secularity index

After clustering women into status groups, we examined differences in family planning and fertility behavior among these groups. In particular:

- Differences in knowledge and current use of contraceptive methods among the status groups
- Fertility differences among the status groups (Hazard analysis of the parity progressions)

Findings

Results of cluster analysis: Status groups on a status axis



Results: Current contraceptive use among currently married women age 30-45 by status groups

Status groups	No method (%)	Traditional or modern method (%)
Low	33.7	66.3
Below middle	25.2	74.8
Middle	19.4	80.6
High	31.4	68.6
Total (women 30-45)	24.2	75.8

Results of hazard analysis:

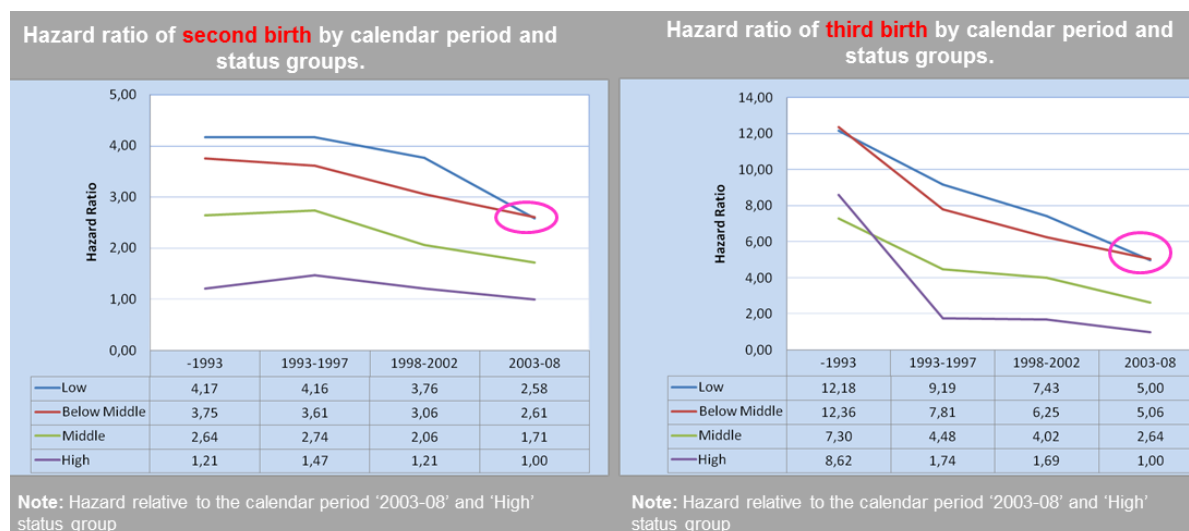
Fertility differences among the status groups: Hazard analysis of parity progressions

	Model 1 (1 st to 2 nd)	Model 2 (2 nd to 3 rd)
<i>Calendar Period</i>		
-1993	1.50***	2.60***
1993-1997	1.53***	1.68***
1998-2002	1.22***	1.41***
2003-2008	1.00	1.00
<i>Status Groups</i>		
Low	2.90***	3.85***
Below Middle	2.61***	3.63***
Middle	1.82***	2.10***
High	1.00	1.00

***p<0.001 Model is also controlled for mother tongue characteristics of women

Results of hazard analysis:

Hazard ratio of second and third birth by calendar period and status groups



Concluding Remarks

The study identifies 4 different status groups of women: Low (13.1%), Below Middle (26.7%), Middle (50.8%) and High (%9.5). We observed clear differences in contraceptive use and parity progressions among these status groups.

Considering the trend over the last two decades; pace of decline in the parity progressions differ among the status groups. The high status group of women has been at the leading edge of changing fertility behavior. This group of women can be seen “the pioneers in very low fertility” behavior in Turkey. The typical fertility pattern of the middle status group of women is seen to be an adaptation of the two-child family norm through a steep decline in the tendency to have third child. The below middle and low status women’s institutional setting are still dominated by strong patriarchal relationships. Though they are more likely to have a second or a third birth than the other groups, transition from the large to small families is seen to be underway since the mid-1990s for this group of women as well. Regarding persistent fertility decline trend of the low and below middle status groups further decline in overall fertility level in Turkey can be expected in the near future.