

# **The impact of the religiosity on demographic behaviors in Turkey**

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## **Abstract**

All of the religious doctrines shape attitudes of people towards a number of issues concerning family life and reproduction, such as age at first marriage, partner choice, family formation, family size, fertility level and divorce. This paper investigates whether current differences in religiosity are also manifested in demographic behaviors in Islamic settings, in Turkey. The data comes from Turkey Family Structure Survey conducted in 2011 (TAYA-2011) by Ministry of Family and Social Policies. In the selection of TAYA-2011 sample, a weighted, multi-stage, stratified cluster approach was used. The sample design of the survey makes it possible to perform analysis for Turkey as a whole for urban and rural areas and for the 12 demographic regions. TAYA-2011 includes very rich information on degree of religiosity, age at first marriage, ideal age at marriage, family formation process, number of children, ideal number of children, age at divorce, marital status, and opinions on divorce and out of wedlock. We use Poisson regression analysis to distinguish the impact of the religiosity on demographic behaviors under the control of structural factors such as sex, education, working status, age, region, type of settlement of the respondents. The preliminary findings of the study show that religiosity serves, under the control of structural factors, as a strong, and in some cases the most important predictor of demographic behaviors. We observe that as the Muslim faith increases, age at first marriage and the probability of divorce decrease, and the number of children increases significantly in Turkey. These findings provide an invitation for further promising research, investigating the interaction between religiosity and demographic behavior over time from the life-course perspective.

## **Introduction**

Current demographic discourses mainly focus on how the structural factors such as education, urbanization, working status and ethnicity have an impact on demographic behaviors. There exists many evidence in the demographic literature on this linkages particularly based on the demographic surveys. However, during the last 20 years a group of demographers puts forward that non-structural factors such as perceptions, opinions, values and beliefs have a significant effect on demographic behaviors as well as the structural factors (Thornton, 2001; 2005; Thornton and others, 2012). Regulating individual and family life, sexuality and fertility is central in the teachings of most major religions, and religious beliefs are powerful determinants of marriage, childbearing, divorce rights and other events related to family formation and dissolution. The religions differ in their emphasis on marital obligations, divorce, fertility demands and individual self-determination. Islam is supportive of family formation, where marriage and childbearing represent central elements in the religion.

Prophet Muhammad strongly supported marriage, remarriage and fertility. Additionally, a *hadith* states, that on the day of resurrection, the Prophet would be proud of the number of his community compared with other communities and that he admonishes his followers to reproduce and increase in number (Bakar 1998). Implications of Islam for fertility patterns may be stronger than for Christians as mosque attendance seems to be relatively high, and the bond between the individual and the religious community relatively strong. Muslims have relatively high fertility in a number of societies and many Muslims attribute their high fertility to their religion (Borooah 2004; McQuillan 2004; Reynolds and Tanner 1995). Within this context, the paper focuses on the impact of religiosity on demographic behavior in an Islamic country, Turkey based on the developmental idealism framework formulated by Thornton (2001; 2005). The demographic literature in Turkey in line with the current demographic discourses mainly focuses on structural factors to explain the demographic developments and differences. That's why, this paper is the unique study considering the impact of one of the non-structural factors on the demographic behaviors.

### **Materials and methods**

In order to reach the main objective of the study, we use the data from "Turkey Family Structure Survey" conducted in 2011 (TAYA-2011) by Ministry of Family and Social Policies. In the selection of TAYA-2011 sample, a weighted, multi-stage, stratified cluster approach was used. The sample design of the survey makes it possible to perform analysis for Turkey as a whole for urban and rural areas and for the 12 demographic regions. TAYA-2011 includes very rich information on the structural and non-structural factors that have significant effects on the demographic behaviors. TAYA-2011 includes information on degree of religiosity, age at first marriage, ideal age at marriage, family formation process, number of children, ideal number of children, age at divorce, marital status, educational status, working status, region, type of settlements, family types, household welfare, and opinions on divorce and out of wedlock. In the interviewed 12,056 households, 23,379 individuals (10,799 of them are males and 13,848 of them are women) over age 17 were identified and interviewed individually with the Individual Questionnaire. The paper is based on the data sets derived from the individual questionnaire. The degree of religiosity in the TAYA-2011 was obtained from the question that "How do you define yourself in the sense of religious beliefs?". The answers of this question were classified under 4 sub-categories: "devoutly religious, perform all of the requisites"; "highly religious, perform some of the requisites"; "religious but not perform the requisites"; "not religious".

We use Poisson regression analysis to distinguish the impact of the religiosity on level of fertility and age at first marriage, under the control of structural factors such as sex, education, working status, age, region, type of settlement of the respondents. Additionally, we utilize the logistic regression analysis in order to understand whether the degree of religiosity have an impact on the probability of divorce in Turkey.

### Preliminary findings and conclusion

Table 1 provides the percentage distribution of individuals over 17 years old by degree of religiosity. Approximately 51 percent of the adult population defined themselves as “devoutly religious”; while less than 1 percent defines themselves as “not religious” in Turkey. These figures once more show how religious faith is strong in Turkey. When we look at the linkages between degree of religiosity and demographic behaviors in a descriptive manner (Table 2), we observe that as the degree of religiosity increases, the mean number of living children increases, and mean age at marriage decreases sharply. This again confirms that Muslim faith has a strong impact on the timing of the demographic events. In line with these findings, the ideal number of children and ideal age at first marriage also increase with increasing the degree of religiosity in Turkey.

Table 1. Percentage of distribution of individuals over 17 years old by degree of religiosity, TAYA-2011

Degree of religiosity	Percent	Number of cases
Devoutly religious, perform all of the requisites	50.8	11,833
Highly religious, perform some of the requisites	43.2	10,068
Religious but not perform the requisites	5.3	1,225
Not religious	0.7	168

Table 2. Mean number of living children and ideal number of children, mean age at marriage and ideal age at first marriage of individuals over 17 years old by degree of religiosity, TAYA-2011

Degree of religiosity	Mean number of living children	Mean number of ideal children	Mean age at first marriage for women	Mean ideal age at first marriage for women
Devoutly religious, perform all of the requisites	4.12	3.364	20.76	21.84
Highly religious, perform some of the requisites	3.49	2.952	22.08	22.78
Religious but not perform the requisites	2.93	2.695	23.32	23.64
Not religious	2.61	2.530	24.74	25.62
<b>Turkey</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>3.145</b>	<b>21.44</b>	<b>22.37</b>

The preliminary findings from multivariate analyses of the study show that religiosity serves, under the control of structural factors, as a strong, and in some cases the most important predictor of demographic behaviors. We observe that as the Muslim faith increases, age at first marriage and the probability of getting divorce decline, and the number of children increases significantly in Turkey (Table 3 and 4).

Table 3. The impact of degree of religiosity on the number of living children and age at first marriage, TAYA-2011\*

Degree of religiosity	Number of children		Age at first marriage	
	Ratio	Probability (P> t )	Ratio	Probability (P> t )
Devoutly religious, perform all of the requisites	2.23	0.000	2.46	0.000
Highly religious, perform some of the requisites	1.54	0.002	1.35	0.007
Religious but not perform the requisites	1.19	0.009	1.12	0.142
<i>Not religious (Reference category)</i>	<i>1.00</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>1.00</i>	<i>-</i>

\*We controlled age, education, working status, region and type of settlements (urban-rural), household welfare of the individual respondents.

Table 4. The impact of degree of religiosity on the probability of divorce, TAYA-2011\*

Degree of religiosity	Probability of divorce	
	Odds Ratio	Probability (P> t )
<i>Devoutly religious, perform all of the requisites (RC)</i>	<i>1.00</i>	<i>-</i>
Religious, perform some of the requisites	1.07	0.007
Religious but not perform the requisites	1.21	0.011
Not religious (Reference category)	1.42	0.000

\*We controlled age, education, working status, region and type of settlements (urban-rural), household welfare of the individual respondents.

These findings provide an invitation for further promising research, investigating the interaction between religiosity and demographic behavior over time from the life-course perspective.

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