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Dynamics of Child Marriages among Syrian and Afghan Refugees in Turkey

Aslıhan Burcu ÖZTÜRK (*)
Hande ALBAYRAK (**)
Kasım KARATAŞ (***)
Harun ASLAN (****)

Abstract: *In this research, dynamics of child marriages among Syrian refugees who are in temporary protection status in Turkey, and the refugee communities who immigrated from Afghanistan were analyzed from the viewpoint of professionals working in the fields related with child welfare. Qualitative research design was applied, focus group interviews with 47 professionals and in-depth interviews with six professionals were conducted. The dynamics of child marriages were analyzed with themes of marriage as being wide traditional and religious practice in the source countries, poverty and financial gain, considering marriage as a means of protection from security problems and protection of "honour", problems of attending education, covering up sexual abuse and lastly the aim of increase in population to compensate war losses. Finally, recommendations to improve child welfare with the focus on child rights to prevent child marriages within the refugee communities are provided drawing on the results.*

Keywords: *Child marriage, refugee children, refugees, migration, refugees in Turkey.*

Türkiye'deki Suriyeli ve Afgan "Mülteciler" Arasında Çocuk Evliliklerinin Dinamikleri

Öz: *Bu araştırmada, Türkiye'de geçici koruma statüsünde olan Suriyeli mülteciler ile Afganistan'dan göç eden mülteci bireyler arasındaki çocuk evliliklerinin dinamikleri, çocuk refahı ile ilgili alanlarda çalışan profesyonellerin bakış açısıyla incelenmiştir. Araştırma kapsamında nitel araştırma tasarımı uygulanmış, 47 profesyonel ile odak grup görüşmeleri ve altı profesyonel ile derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çocuk evliliklerinin dinamikleri; kaynak ülkelerde geleneksel ve dini uygulamalar, yoksulluk ve finansal kazanç, güvenlik sorunlarından korunma ve "namusun korunması" düşüncesi, eğitime katılım sorunları, cinsel istismarı örtmek ve savaş kayıplarını telafi etmek için nüfus artışını hedeflemek olarak analiz edilmiştir. Son olarak, mülteci topluluklarında çocuk evliliklerinin önlenmesi için çocuk haklarına odaklanarak çocuk refahının artırılmasına yönelik öneriler sonuçlardan yararlanılmaktadır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Çocuk evlilikleri, mülteci çocuklar, mülteciler, göç, Türkiye'deki mülteciler.*
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(*) Dr. Hacettepe Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Sosyal Hizmet Bölümü (e-posta: aslihanburcu@gmail.com ORCID ID.https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8702-3288
(**) Dr. Kocaeli Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Sosyal Hizmet Bölümü (e-posta: hndalbayrak@gmail.com) ORCID ID.https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2972-9490
(***) Prof.Dr., Hacettepe Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Sosyal Hizmet Bölümü (e-posta: kkaratas@hacettepe.edu.tr) ORCID ID.https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4817-9981
(****) Arş.Gör, Hacettepe Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Sosyal Hizmet Bölümü (e-posta: hrnaslan1@gmail.com) ORCID ID.https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9830-1765

I. Introduction

This study explores the dynamics of child marriages in refugee communities from Syria and Afghanistan living in Turkey from the perspectives of professionals working in related fields with child welfare. We examine why refugee families prefer to marry their children and how severe problems of refugees motivate them in their decisions. Learning about experiences and perspectives of professionals about the dynamics gives necessary to information which would frame the implementation of programs to tackle with the problem. The article argues that child marriages in refugee communities rely on severe social and economic threats in addition to traditional forms of child marriages. Few studies examined the issue in Turkey however there has been lack of information about the dynamics of child marriages among refugees.

The narratives of professionals were focused on experiences on Syrian and Afghan refugee children due to having more experience consistent with their high population. Throughout the article we refer to refugee children to reflect all children in conditional refugee communities from Afghanistan moreover from Syria who are under temporary protection status. The reason that participants' narratives mainly were about Syrians refugees might be due to their vast population and also their wide access to organizations owing to temporary protection status. In this study, it is suggested that the refugee children have shared experiences due to similar cultural background, religious beliefs and living conditions.

A. Refugee children and child marriages in Turkey

In recent years, there have been a large number of refugees around the world who immigrated to different countries due to wars and conflicts in their own regions and political pressure. According to UNHCR's report, 67% of all refugees in the world come from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia (UNHCR, 2019a). Because of the war in Syria, as Turkey has 911 km of border with, Turkey has the largest registered refugee population in the world. Besides Syria, because of economic and security problems in Afghanistan, many people have immigrated to Turkey.

As Turkey signed the 1951 Geneva Convention with "geographical limitation", for those outside the Council of Europe member states are not given refugee status. Therefore, Syrian refugees have been granted temporary protection status under the International Protection Act. For refugees coming from countries outside Europe, mainly Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran, requesting international protection from Turkey to seek asylum in a third country, “conditional refugee” status is defined.

The number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey is about four million including over 3.6 million Syrians who are under temporary protection and approximately 400,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers of other nationalities (primarily from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran) and these numbers in total constitute 4.4% of Turkey’s

population. Over 98% of refugees live in urban, semi-urban and rural areas, the rest of refugees (2%) live in residential camps. Close to 1.4 million refugees are under 15 years old, and over 800,000 are aged between 15 and 24 (UNHCR, 2019b). Referring to the number of the refugee population, approximately half of that is composed of children. Although many social support programs have been done many of them still live in challenging social and economic conditions. For instance, refugee children remain out of school and continue to face difficulties such as a lack of awareness of available services, language barriers, socio-economic obstacles and dropout at the secondary school level. Another problem is child marriage especially for girl children, which reflects gender inequality, reinforces stereotypical roles for girls and curtails their education, compromises their health, and exposes them to the risk of violence and poverty (UNICEF, 2019).

Regarding the studies on child marriage in Turkey, a study revealed that 14% of Syrian girls between 15-18 ages were married, polygamous marriages were widely seen, the age difference between spouses was very high, children were forced to marry and many pregnant girls were 13-14 years old (AFAD, 2014). According to a representative research (UN Women, 2018) the proportion of Syrian women/girls married at the age of 15 and under was 23% and at the age of 16-17 it was 27%. Child marriages were also widespread especially among Afghan refugee girl children (Koç & Eryurt, 2017).

Refugee child marriages take place under conditions which were likely to disempower girls irreversibly such as children being the second or even the third wife (Mazlum-Der, 2014; Suleymanov, Sonmez, Unver, & Akbaba, 2017; TTB, 2014), decline in the age (Mourtada, Schlecht, & DeJong, 2017), growing tendency to marry with older men (UNICEF, 2014). Moreover, human trafficking and sex trade under the cover of marriage were reported in Lebanon, Jordan (Anani, 2013; Bartels & Hamill, 2014; FXB Center, 2014; Save the Children, 2014) and in Turkey (ICC, 2015; Mazlum-Der, 2014; Türkay, 2016). So called marriages were reported to last for few months and some of the girls, whose average age was 12, forced to prostitution (Bartels et al., 2018; FXB Center, 2014; ICC, 2015; Mazlum-Der, 2014; Save the Children, 2014).

B. The dynamics of child marriages among refugee children

Child marriage is considered a socially accepted form of child abuse in traditional societies which sustains cultural practices based on strict patriarchal norms attributing high value to virginity before marriage, marriage itself and reproduction of lineage. It is assumed as forced marriage while children cannot show free will and full consent in traditional societies. Especially due to natural disasters, wars, conflict and post-conflict situations and migration, it raises as it is considered to prove protection against economic and social threats of extreme poverty and security problems such as rape, kidnap and risk of "losing honour" (Anani, 2013; S. A. Bartels et al., 2018; FXB Center, 2014; Mourtada et al., 2017; Puttick, 2015; UNICEF, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2018; Women's Refugee Commission, 2016; Wringe et al., 2019). Some child marriages happened after sexual harassment or due to high risks of rape and kidnap (Bartels et al., 2018). It was reported

that some Syrian refugees were raped to force them to marry in Lebanon and Jordan (Acosta & Thomas, 2014).

Although there are laws to prevent child marriage in Syria and Afghanistan (FIDH, 2012; UNICEF, 2018) it is still common. It was an acceptable social practice in Syrian culture especially in rural areas before the war however, with the war and migration it has grown up as it is perceived as a social contract keeping girls safe. In Syria, the prevalence of child marriage was 13% among girls under the age of 18, however, with the war and forced displacement it increased to 35% (Mourtada et al., 2017; UNFPA, 2017) although the refugee population did not represent Syrian home population before conflict as shown and marriage age decreased significantly (Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, & Keo, 2019). As wars and security threats have been common in Afghanistan since the Soviet occupation in 1979, it was not possible to compare the pre and post-war/conflict situation. According to research, 46.4% of women married before 18 and 15.2% of them before 15 (The Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2011, cited by UNICEF, 2018).

Child marriage is a way of guaranteeing the future of the child, to get bride price and to decrease refugee families' expenses for refugee families (Anani, 2013; Bartels et al., 2018; Orhan & Gündoğar, 2015; UNICEF, 2017). The prevalence of poverty among the refugee community in Turkey is a real risk factor for child marriages. Indeed, according to a survey among conditional refugees from Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, and Iran living in Turkey, 42% of the households had income equal to 35-59% of minimum wage, while 57% them had under 35% minimum wage (Adalı & Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, 2017). The exploitation of domestic labour of girls for future household (Al-Kloub, Al-Zein, Abdalrahim, & Abed, 2019) is also an indirect way of getting economic advantage (UNICEF, 2018). One of the indicators that may show the economic face of child marriage is the observed decline of cousin marriages which becomes less advantageous in economic terms (Cankurtaran & Albayrak, 2019; Mourtada et al., 2017; Women's Refugee Commission, 2016).

Education, which gives partly independence to girl, is seen as risky for honour. Families invest less for girls' education because the idea that they will be under protection of groom's family and be doing housework (Cankurtaran & Albayrak, 2019). Inability of children to benefit from educational opportunities is an important factor for marriage (Bartels et al., 2018; Karakaya, Margirit Coşkun, Özerdoğan, & Yakıt, 2017). Indeed, 62% of the refugee girls are between the ages of 6-11. Only 60% of those in 12-14 age group and 23% of those in 15-17 age group were shown to continue their education (UN Women, 2018). About 645.000 Syrian children were enrolled in school and about 400.000 did not enroll (UNICEF, 2019). While the percentage of boys who cannot attend school between the ages of 5-13 is 35.1% in Afghan refugees, 33% in Iranian refugees, 33.3% in other countries; percentage of girls is 40.1% in Afghans, 35.6% in Iranians, 24.3% in others (Eryurt & Yayla, 2017). Refugee children had

problems in attending education due to lack of knowledge of Turkish, not being able to register to school or pay schooling expenses, families having no knowledge of educational opportunities, differences in education system, age difference due to interruptions in education, difficulties in transportation, discrimination, low education level of families, peer violence and war trauma (Aydın & Kaya, 2017; Eryurt & Yayla, 2017; Kılıç & Toker Gokce, 2018).

Early pregnancy is one of the expectations from child brides to prove fertility and strengthen marital bond (Shoup, 2007). Moreover, positive correlation was found between early marriage age and rising fertility (Onagoruwa & Wodon, 2018; Raj, Saggurti, Balaiah, & Silverman, 2009). High number of children is thought to contribute to family budget, domestic labour and care in low socio-economic status families thus child marriage becomes an instrument in terms of increasing fertility in refugee communities.

Expectation of virginity, religious morality, obedience and adaptation to husband and family at an early age (Cankurtaran & Albayrak, 2019), host society being less conservative and modern communication technologies like cell phones and social media, increased the perceived risks families for flirts, loss of virginity, pregnancy have been shown as important dynamics in refugee child marriages Concerns over girl's stigma led Syrian parents to behave more restrictive, marriage was regarded more as a protective mechanism (Women's Refugee Commission, 2016). It was emphasized that child marriage is more common among Syrians who migrated from rural areas. Honour which was thought to be threatened due to migration, was restored through marriage (Bartels et al., 2018; FXB Center, 2014; UNICEF, 2017). Some girls were reported to describe marriage "way out" from restrictive parents and lack of social life however it was likely to experience more oppressive settings in marriage (Bartels et al., 2018). In a research conducted in Turkey (UN Women, 2018), marriage was also seen as a way to escape from domestic violence.

Although research with non-refugee communities showed that viewing marriage as a path to freedom, romantic relationship, respect and statue, meeting emotional and sexual needs, escape from family problems and poor living conditions were found to promote child marriages (Montazeri, Gharacheh, Mohammadi, Alaghband Rad, & Eftekhar Ardabili, 2016; Schaffnit, Urassa, & Lawson, 2019; Segal-Engelchin, Huss, & Massry, 2015), negative consequences concentrated on loosing agency and decision-making power, learning to be submissive, exposure to domestic violence, deprivation of education right therefore being at the risk of economically independent and ambivalent feelings towards motherhood (Al-Kloub et al., 2019) are much more risky for refugee girls.

II. Method

Qualitative research design was conducted with phenomenological approach to understand and interpret experiences of professionals working in the field related to child welfare, on the dynamics of child marriage among refugees. The phenomenological

approach is used to integrate experience and to discuss the context of the experiences of individuals. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted as tools of data gathering.

A. Sample

Four different focus group meetings were held with 47 professionals from various organizations working in the field of child welfare, who were reached by purposive sampling. The institutions where participants were employed in Ankara were as follows: Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services (MFLSS) and affiliated agencies such as residential care units for abused children, group homes for children and coordination units, emergency care units, social service centers in four different districts. Moreover professionals from child protection units in hospitals, a child hospital and hospital police, juvenile court, the child rights center of the bar association, child units of police headquarters, counseling services in primary and secondary schools where refugee population is high, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), The Red Crescent, Immigration Directorate, Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, provincial directorate of security units of foreigners and children, Association of Social Workers, Association of Prevention for Child Abuse and Neglect, Network Struggling with Commercial Sexual Trade of Children were included.

B. Procedure

The questions of the focus group interviews were prepared with a social worker working in child protection field for about ten years to include practical experience. Researchers are experienced in in-depth interviews and focus groups who have been involved in different research related to child welfare. In all of the focus group interviews the authors were present; one of the authors was the facilitator and the other one was the assistant facilitator, while the other two kept observation notes. Two of the authors made two deep interviews together while the others made one.

The focus group discussions were held on four different days in a pre-arranged meeting room. Interviews were recorded with the voice recorder with the permission of the participants. Transcription was carried out by two social workers who were observers during the meetings. Afterward, the questions of the next interview were reviewed by the researchers using the notes about the interviews which lasted two and half hours on average. The all four group discussions relied on sexual abuse cases including child marriages in both refugee and host communities, in one of them we focused solely on refugee child marriages with professionals working with refugees. In this article, the narratives on the dynamics of refugee child marriages were discussed.

The need to conduct in-depth interviews raised to gather detailed information. Two of them were conducted with a Syrian psychologist and a Syrian lawyer to understand

the problem from their own cultures. They were reached through a non-governmental organization working for refugees. Other two interviews conducted with two social workers working in non-governmental organizations. The last two in-depth interviews were made with a commissioner and a deputy commissioner also dealing with sexual abuse cases in risky areas. Semi-structured interview form was used with a six professionals in total.

C. Data Analysis

Transcripts of focus group interviews and in-depth interviews were combined and read by the research team both individually and in the group. Themes and sub-themes were analyzed following Corbin & Strauss's (2014) stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The evaluations of professional staff about the dynamics of refugee child marriages, which reflected practitioner insight, were codified by conceptualizing in the open coding process and then themes emerged. Themes and sub-themes were related to generate comprehensive explanations using axial coding. During selective coding, themes were organized under the dynamics of child marriages among refugee children in the context of research questions. The inductive coding process helped explore the issue based on the narratives.

D.Ethical considerations

After the official authorization process was completed, the participants were informed about participation in the focus group meetings by telephone and those who voluntarily agreed to participate were interviewed. Verbal statement of informed consent was asked for voice recording.

To maintain the anonymity of the narratives, the participants were given code. For example, FG1-5 stands for the fifth participant of the first focus group meeting and DI1 stands for the first professional in-depth interview.

III. Findings

A. Child marriage as being a wide traditional and religious practice in the source country

Despite the legal age limit in the source country or in Turkey, according to traditional and religious marriage norms, a girl can marry as she enters puberty. It is understood that especially in rural areas, childhood is finished with puberty, a child's individual existence and rights are not recognized and child marriages are forced as family decisions. Considering that many of the Syrian refugees (38%) are of rural origin (UN Women, 2018), the perspective that accepts marriage at a young age, remains prevalent.

> *The age of marriage in Syrian law for girls is 17, for boys is 18. But there are exceptions. The exceptions are given by judges, courts, and women. If the body of the child was thought to be ready for marriage, it would be tolerated, at 15 for boys, and at about 13 for girls when they reach puberty. Additionally, for boys, there is no need for family permission, for girls it*

is needed. If there was a sexual relationship between two children, judge's permission would be needed. But when it comes to practice, there isn't such a thing about the age limit of marriage. There is a limit even in Kur'an, but there is no limit in Syria. ***(Syrian NGO Employee, DI)***

The majority of Syrians are from rural areas, they are villagers. As a result, child marriage already does exist in their lives. The tendency would carry on as if their lives were the same. Even more, the definition of child is different. The 14-15-year olds are not seen as children. According to them, childhood ends at 12. They consider that after the age of 12, the child is already grown up, and can take responsibility. Boys should work and girls get married. ***(NGO Employee, DI4)***

*Families do not think that children have rights. They are just scared of legal sanctions. They say that "This is my child, I own her/him, I decide all about him/her. If I wanted, I would get them married. The law or the children's rights do not concern us." (****Public officer, FG2-4)***

Cultural and religious grounds in the country of origin were stated to legitimize child marriages. The argument that child marriage was widespread as a cultural, religious and legal practice in Syria, was used as resistance against conforming to legal arrangements.

They claim that "This is a part of our culture." We say that pregnant children must have necessary health checks and we have to inform the state. They react, saying that "This is part of our culture, please do not interfere, you are constantly telling us things since we came here, peace within our family has been disturbed. We don't want to come here anymore; we don't want to talk about that." ***(NGO employee, FG4-5)***

C. Poverty and financial gain from child marriages

As a result of low educational level and poverty, it is common that girls get married in return for bride price even before puberty. Particularly due to poverty, the groom's family is expected to meet some financial needs of the family. In the following narratives, a participant pointed out that refugee children stated they have been sold under the name of marriage.

Child marriage is very common within economically deprived, uneducated Afghan families. According to our organization's data, almost two out of four women are victims of child marriage, meaning they married at a very young age. We have seen some married at the age of 12, even nine. Some were forced to marry even before their periods had started. They say that "My father sold me for money, on the condition that I wouldn't be touched", but of course they are raped. A woman's child was raped at a

> *young age, she couldn't have accepted that. That's how it is in Afghanistan. Women do accept that. If a woman married at the age of 18, she would say "I got married at a very late age". Marriage at the age of 13 – 14 is very common.* ***(NGO employee, FG4-4)***

> *We hear things such as "At the moment we live in Turkey, we need money, the money we take is not the bride price. It is to make our living conditions better, the family I've given my daughter, gave us a house and furniture."* ***(Public officer, FG3-3)***

Marriage is aimed at reducing the expenses as well as providing the family with financial gain and better living conditions. The fact that both the number of people in the family would decrease and the belief that child would have a better life were influential for motivation towards child marriage. Moreover, for families who work as seasonal agricultural workers, nomadic living conditions bring many difficulties which increase the risks.

> *Families claim that when their children get married their conditions will be better. Some of the children say that they want to get married because of the presents they will get and better standards of living.* ***(NGO employee, DI3)***

> *Children of the families who are seasonal agricultural workers married at very early ages. Because families constantly move according to harvest times, they have high travel costs and living conditions in tents are hard. It's common to marry their children to Syrian adult men who live permanently in areas they go for work.* ***(Public officer, DI6)***

There are also cases different than traditionally accepted forms of marriage which are used to provide livelihood in cases of extreme poverty. In the narrative below, a perpetrator promised to look after the girl's family and used severe forms of violence.

> *We had a case, a 15-year-old Afghan girl, fled from another city and came to us. She was crying a lot. I immediately went to child monitoring center with this girl, the girl was already ruined, she was bruised all over when she undressed. They used to live together with the perpetrator in the same house because the father was old and unable to work. There were three other daughters at home who can't work either. One of the Turkish men came and asked for the 15-year-old daughter. The father did not accept first, then the man said, "Okay, I'll come and start to live in your house, I will work, look after you and your family." The father agreed and they had a secret marriage, not official. Afterwards the girl ran away and told us that "Every night the perpetrator is in my house, next to me. My father knows, he beats me and my father." His father couldn't have been resisting. "Because he was going to bring our dinner tonight, what should I do?" She was taken under protection, now she is in residential care.* ***(NGO employee, DI5)***

Refugee girls are sometimes married as the second spouses with reference to religious law. As research done in Turkey (Agcadag-Çelik & Vural, 2018; Cankurtaran & Albayrak, 2019; ICC, 2015; Mazlum-Der, 2014) showed, older men from the local community preferred to marry Syrians as the second spouses because they "costed less" and girls were being particularly preferred.

> *In Turkey, polygamous marriages still remain. They live in the same house with other wives and also children or in different houses in some cases. In fact, most Turks marry Syrian women or girls as second wives. For example, a Turkish man says "I do not want to tell my wife. The second wife is forbidden here. You will get everything in Syrian law, the 'mehir' and so on." It may be easier for them to marry young girls.* ***(Syrian NGO employee, DI2)***

D.Considering marriage as a means of protection from security problems and protection of "honour"

Parents worried that their daughters might have lost their virginity before marriage as the girl were growing older and therefore to marry at a child age was preferred in order to avoid "dishonour" of family.

> *They say that, if there were girls aged 14 and 18 in a household, men would like to marry the 14-year-old, the older girl not being married would be a big problem. There may be another problem for certain, maybe with her "honour".* ***(Public officer, FG2-3)***

This concern seems to prevail even in the conditions of war where gender-based violence is used as a weapon of war. As a result of the ISIS gangs, many women were captured, sold and forced to marry. When it was heard that women and girls were captured and raped, families married their daughters immediately against risks of sexual abuse and violence (Puttick, 2015). Taliban forces widely used forms of violence such as kidnapping, rape and coercing girls in Afghanistan (UNICEF, 2018). Marriage of girl children has become a strategy to protect against risks of sexual abuse and violence.

> *Syrian girls who were nine years old at the start of the war, becomes 14-15 years old now and already married. At the beginning of the war, boys were sent to school, "No matter the war, you still should go to college". Because kidnapping and rape of girls increased, very few girls attended to school or university. They were immediately married so they wouldn't have been kidnapped in the battle.* ***(Syrian NGO Employee, DI2)***

> *... And the Taliban come to the door of the family and ask for their daughters. That's why families marry their children.* ***(NGO Employee, DI3)***

In order to prevent a blood feud or conflict between two families/groups in Afghans, a girl from the family is given to the other party for marriage as compensation which is called "baad marriage". In this traditional marriage, the girl may be subjected to violence as revenge for the actions of her family (UNICEF, 2018).

> *If one of the relatives was killed, they would give a girl to avoid blood feuds, this is very routine. Retaliation is made, child is given as a price.* ***(Public officer, FG3-6)***

E. Problems of attending education

Along with the problems experienced by girls about school enrolment and attendance, especially in families with low levels of education, low expectations due to negative attitude towards women's work, reduce educational motivation and pave the way for child marriage (UN Women, 2018). Some families don't send girls to school after primary education on the grounds that "honour of the girl would be in danger" (Emin, 2019) or as their daughters got married (Agcadag-Çelik & Vural, 2018). Investment on education was not preferred due to girls' traditional gender roles.

> *They do not have much expectations from girls about education, it is more profitable for them to get married. As the number of children is high in the neighbourhoods where they live intensely, the capacity of the schools is full and registration cannot be made. Or they quit school because of language problems and peer violence. If she didn't go to school, they would try to get her married as soon as possible. Sometimes, while the girl goes to school, they take them out of school for marriage. In fact, this is related to the instrumental value of the child, they look from the utilitarian point of view.* ***(Public officer, FG4-7)***

> *11-12-year-old girls can marry but it is seen very few. But if she didn't go to school, she usually gets married at the age of 14-15. Sometimes a girl is 15 years old but also very smart, it is thought that she can marry. If a 20-year-old still acted like a child or if she was irresponsible then we would say "This one is a child..." If a girl's period started and wasn't going to school, she would get married. If she wasn't married until she's 18, the family would consider it as having waited too long.* ***(Syrian NGO Employee, DI2)***

As security risks of war; poverty and adaptation problems have negative effects on attending education, the risk of marriage increases. Families prefer to marry their daughters because of concerns about sexual abuse, flirting and having pre-marital sexual intercourse.

> *"What would she be doing at home at 15-16, if she wasn't going to school? Let her get married, that's the safest place for her." They think that if she didn't, there's no safe life for her... If she married, she wouldn't be flirting with anyone. That's how they think. Families are comfortable about*

marriage. Someone would not knock on our door one day and they would not commit murder. Not to hear that she is in love... They are afraid of rape actually. If she didn't attend education then she would not understand anything, she may be fooled and she would not be able to protect herself. ***(Syrian NGO Employee, DI1)***

F. Covering up sexual abuse with child marriage

A survey among Syrian refugees in Lebanon has shown that marrying a girl in case of sexual abuse is used as a protection mechanism (Roupetz, Michael, & Bartels, 2018). In this study, it was stated that families feared about loosing of honour in case of sexual abuse. Therefore, a girl was married to either abuser or one of her relatives to close of the sexual abuse.

We hear about sexual abuse of children. They don't tell us directly, it's hidden. It's a top-secret, a very sensitive issue. If there was something like that, they wouldn't formally complain. If that happened, she wouldn't be able to marry because a man never wants the girl when he hears about it. People say "Did she do it willingly or did it happen by force? So, the issue always remains secret in the family. They take her off school. A month later, she gets married. Everything is done in secret. But for example, if they knew who raped her, she has to marry that person. If they knew him or he was someone from the family, for example, she would marry her cousin to cover up or after a hymen surgery she would get married. The family doesn't even talk about it at home. I have never heard anything like going to police or reporting to court. If sexual abuse was committed by a relative, it would be kept secret in the family. Otherwise, no one would want to marry other girls in the family, if there were boys, no one would give their daughters as brides. ***(Syrian NGO Employee, DI2)***

G. The aim of increase fertility to compensate war losses

In traditional Middle East societies where being a large family means being socially strong, reproduction implies maintaining the family lineage and legacy of goods as well, receiving support in old ages and support for family labour (Inhorn, Birenbaum-Carmeli, Tremayne, & Gürtin, 2017; Karakaya et al., 2017; Moghadam, 2003; Salehi-Isfahani, 2013). Therefore, child marriages become functional to increase fertility as there is a link between high fertility rate and early marriage age. The deaths due to the war and the disintegration of the family due to migration boost motivation to maintain lineage through reproduction (Karakaya et al., 2017).

Families want to have many children as they lost many family members in the war and like to continue their descent due to the dispersion after the migration. That's why they want girls to get married early. Girls and

> *women are seen as means of reproduction. Compensation for losses in the war is the aim. Family is in crisis, not all can come from Syria to Turkey. To improve family connections and belonging, to feel safe by reproduction in Turkey, families decide to marry their children as early as possible.* ***(NGO Employee, FG4-8)***

V.Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore the main dynamics of child marriages among refugees in Turkey through the viewpoint of professionals working directly with refugees. The analysis identified that refugee girls face serious risks of child marriage due to inability of families to meet the basic needs of children. Moreover, religious practices and traditional cultural norms, security risks, sexual abuse, inaccessibility of education and pressure to increase population due to losses in war were emerged as the main dynamics. Financial gain and decrease in expenses with marriage motivate families in poverty. By the agency of the traditional patriarchal culture, marriage is considered to be a protective mechanism for honour of girls.

The dynamics explored in this research are consistent with previous research done in the Middle East countries which were mostly about Syrian refugees as mentioned in the theoretical part. However, a participant mentioned cases which girls wanted to marry as they expect financial gain therefore we could not discuss about the dynamics relevant with the argument of being agency and giving meaningful consent of girls that marriage is a way to gain statue and solve problems as argued in some research done with non-refugee communities (Schaffnit et al., 2019; Segal-Engelchin et al., 2015).

Refugee families, who pursue child marriage as a traditional practice, consider their children out of modern childhood paradigm (Ariès, 1996) which respects the needs of the child for physical, emotional and social development and distinguishes childhood from adulthood. Modern childhood paradigm also prioritizes emotional value rather than economic value of child, recognizes the individual existence of the child, and values girls and boys equally in the context of child rights. It is argued that child marriage is a reflection of pre-modern childhood in the sense that childhood ends just after girl's period starts. It usually takes place within the traditional paradigm that objectifies the girls for the dignity of the family, restricts their social life based on honour, and instrumentalizes them for domestic labour and reproduction. Marriages take place before girls reach maturity which disable them to show free and full consent. It keeps girls away from education and restricts their social lives by appraising patriarchal gender roles. It is also used to cover up sexual abuse to "protect honour" of family and child by ignoring psychological and social needs of child as social meaning of virginity is highly valued for whole family. The body of the girl child is sexualized and degraded into an instrument for continuity of the lineage, increase in fertility and widen the family for gaining social power which was almost lost during war and migration.

Besides war, migration, poverty, security issues, discrimination and lack of access to education, establish risky situations for refugee children. Difficulties in living conditions

prevent the realization of children's rights and transform childhood into complex or non-normative forms different from those defined in the pre-modern child paradigm. Under the devastating conditions of war and migration, child marriages can become widespread as a livelihood and security strategy, and at worst child marriages can be used for the purpose of child prostitution. As Stearns (2006) points out modern childhood is dislocated due to war, violence and migration also in modern societies. Based upon this argument, it is suggested that pre-modern childhood has been degenerated due to the extremely challenging life conditions of refugees. Therefore, we conclude that refugee child marriage is closely related to patriarchal and traditional values however the compelling effects of war and migration, which prevent child rights to be realized, transform the phenomenon into a severe form of it to struggle with.

VI. Recommendations

We should start with gender inequality which lies on the basis of child marriage and fostered by the patriarchal social structure. In order to question and transform patriarchy, special efforts are needed to ensure the empowerment of refugee girls/women and the realization of equal rights to health, development, education, work and participation. Considering that poverty surges gender inequality and child rights violations, social programs towards eradicating poverty are needed in order to reduce the importance of income gained by marriage. Besides social aids, participation in formal employment and vocational training should be supported. In particular, social and economic barriers against young girls to education should be eliminated. For example, social work practices such as home visits, counselling, and group work with the families should be practiced for access to education.

We need to work with decision-makers of family and community, mainly fathers, local community, religious leaders and local medical professionals by enabling community participation to change the cultural or religious justifications. Community-based practice should be developed to raise awareness on the perception and value of the child, about reproductive health and social risks of child marriages, pregnancy, and birth. Besides interactive training should be given about legislation on child marriage, negative impacts of child marriage, gender equality and child rights both to families and children. Key professionals, opinion leaders, adult women who have been victims of child marriage and young girls who can offer peer support should be actively involved in planning and conduct of projects.

A. Limitations

This research only covers the perspectives of professionals about the issue. Also having reached a small number of professionals from refugee's own community is the most important limitation of this study that it reflects a limited aspect of the refugee community. Although the sample was not representative, as can be seen from the

literature review, narratives are considered as quite sufficient to understand the dynamics of child marriages.

VII.Further research

Research with refugee children who are married and families whom married their children should be carried out to hear their voice and considerations.

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