

Never married women and the social difficulties they faced in Turkey in the context of the institutionalization of bachelorhood

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Abstract: Among other things, the modern urban life has changed the dominant norms regarding the family and marriage. The trends of delayed marriage and never marrying after divorce have become prevalent. Relative normalization has followed the prevalence of this trend. According to the basic argument of this study, in the third stage, like the others, the trend of never marrying has also reached to the stage of institutionalization. Especially among women, the trend of never marrying attracts much more attention compared to that of men. While numerous studies have been conducted on this issue in many countries around the world, this topic has not yet been studied adequately in Turkey. The aim of this study is to investigate and discuss the societal pressures and problems faced by the never-married women in Turkey. The data of the study is based on the questionnaires and interviews conducted with a total of 60 unmarried women over the age of 35 from three different cities in Turkey. Thus, it became possible both to obtain quantitative data on this topic for the first time in Turkey and to make a comparison among three Turkish cities with different social and cultural characteristics. The data shows that, as in the rest of the world, never marrying has been institutionalizing in Turkey as well, but parallel to this process, the women face serious exclusion, obstruction, deprivation, and stigmatization from the society.

Keywords: never-married women, institutionalization of non-marriage, Turkey, societal pressure, gender roles

Introduction

The modernity deeply influenced and transformed every institution, including the family and marriage.

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The phenomenon of living alone arose as a significantly different social reality for both men and women, without having the necessity of marriage in two different aspects. Firstly, the phenomenon of living alone became represented by a larger and growing group unlike ever before. Secondly, the notion of men and women choosing to live without marriage started to exist as a conscious and voluntary choice and as a lifestyle, unlike the exceptional or obligatory circumstances of the past.

In this study, the notion of unmarried women refers to the women who have never been married and currently do not have a marital or partner relationship. They are not divorced or widowed women or those living with a partner. The unmarried women in different cultures are labeled with various terms ranging from the least pejorative to the most derogatory. Some of those terms include “single woman”, “unmarried woman”, “old virgin”, “old maid”, “spinster”, “leftover woman” and “surplus woman” (İbrahim and Hassan 2009, 397; Alwi and Lourdunathan 2020, 2; Situmorang 2005). In the literature, there is also the term of “parasite singles” (Yamada, as cited in Knarvik Svendsen 2006, 42), which refers to women who, despite being of marriageable age, continue to live under the care of family members. However, at least in the context of Turkey, it is not unmarried men but unmarried women who make more sacrifices, as they are often tasked with the care of the elderly parents or unmarried siblings. According to the TÜİK data (2018), while the percentage of men with care giving responsibilities in the population not participating in the workforce is 14.8% in Turkey; for women, this percentage is 45.9%.

Increasing numbers and rates of the unmarried women in Turkey, as a country undergoing modernization, are following an upward trend. Comparing Turkey with the Asian countries and societies would be appropriate in this regard. In the literature, the following statement regarding the Asian countries is noteworthy: “The Asian avoidance of marriage is new, and striking. Only 30 years ago, just 2% of women were single in most Asian countries. The share of the unmarried women in their 30s in Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong has risen 20 points or more” (Beri and Beri 2013, 858). In other modernizing Asian countries, similar trends are observed in varying degrees. While Turkey is one of the countries where the percentage of the unmarried women has significantly increased, it may be argued that the research on this topic is inadequate when compared to the volume of research conducted on other Asian countries.

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In many Asian countries, the rate of unmarried women, which was only around 2% among women 50 years ago, has increased tenfold, reaching up to approximately 20% in some modernized countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Similarly, in Thailand, the proportion of unmarried women over the age of 40 was 7% in 1980, but forty years later, it increased to 12% (Beri and Beri 2013, 858). The figures from different countries, especially among those women in their 30s and 40s, indicate significant changes in those rates. Contrary to the past practices, nowadays it has become quite normal for women to marry in their 30s.

According to a study conducted in Malaysia, the rate of unmarried women aged 30-34 increased from 6% in 1990 to 9.7% in 2000 (Saili and Saili 2018). Another data related to Malaysia indicates that the proportion of unmarried women over the age of 30 was 3.1% in 1960, but by 2000, it increased to 23.3% nationwide and to 37.8% in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur (Ibrahim and Hassan 2009, 396).

Considering the widespread worldwide trend of living without marriage, this phenomenon may be seen as the institutionalization of virginity and bachelorhood; and it may be argued that virginity and bachelorhood are no longer viewed as temporary states but as established norms. The state of being unmarried applies to men as well, but it is more prevalent among women. This is because the society perceives a woman's solitude as a greater problem than that of a man. However, the institutionalization of bachelorhood will not be as straightforward as the institutionalization of marriage. Marriage has been endorsed, commanded, and legitimized by religions, traditions, and cultures, externally and in a top-down manner. Conversely, bachelorhood lacks such external legitimization and faces significant opposition. Under these conditions, the institutionalization of bachelorhood, with little potential support from the values of modernity, would be much more challenging and laborious than the institutionalization of marriage.

Institutionalization and the institutionalization of bachelorhood

As it is stated in the literature (Marshal 2009), a social institution is a different concept than the culture. The culture is concerned with meanings, whereas a social institution is concerned with social existence. This is precisely why the social institutions resemble social structures rather than culture. A social institution represents a stable cross-section of life and embodies a certain degree of consolidation. At

the core of social institutions are habits, and a series of stabilized, patterned, and generally accepted behaviors. If a behavior or series of behaviors is endorsed, practiced, or potentially applicable by all or most members of society, it emerges as a social institution.

In the pre-modern societies, remaining unmarried, staying single, and living a single lifestyle were exceptional and rare occurrences. However, in the modern society, they have evolved into a lifestyle choice. What was once not fully approved by the entire society or its dominant majority, such as being single and living a single lifestyle, has become increasingly accepted or has become regarded as acceptable by the majority, particularly in the last decade. Thus, concepts like family, marriage, divorce, and widowhood, among others, have started to evolve into social institutions as norms. Previous studies have emphasized phrases like “remaining single in a married world” or “living single in a married society” (Situmorang 2005). However, nowadays, it’s not about “remaining single”. Not marrying and being single are now about choice, preference, and it is a way of life. Namely, in the past, being single for women was an external condition determined by men, but today, it’s a choice made by women, a way of life, and an internal state. It is self-determined and requires no validation from others. Individuals construct their existence by themselves. Ultimately, in today’s world, being single in older age is becoming almost as normal as getting married, even trending towards becoming an institution.

This study claims that singleness and the single lifestyle are becoming increasingly institutionalized as widespread behaviors. Based on this main claim, field research data on the societal issues of single or never-married Turkish women was collected, compared with similar examples from around the world, and finally interpreted.

Literature

As previously mentioned, there are relatively few and recent studies conducted on the topic in Turkey. One of the first studies conducted on the topic is the article titled “Silent and Invisible, “Young” and “Woman”: Unmarried Daughter in the House” by Lüküslü and Çelik (2008). However, this study is a qualitative study and obtained its data through interviews. The participants consisted of a total of 30 individuals aged 15-25, half of whom lived in Istanbul and the other half in Ankara, and they neither worked and studied. The article is highly significant and noteworthy within its scope, as it is almost the

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first and the last study by using a qualitative method which examines the problems of young women, who do not receive education or work, in their parents' homes. Nevertheless, there is no numerical data or percentage concerning the unmarried participants or this specific group in Turkey in the study.

Another study regarding the topic is an article written by Çelik (2018). According to Çelik's study, like cohabitation, living alone is also rare in Turkey. Less than 10% of the population is living alone, and nearly half of this population is above the age of 65. In this respect, Turkey is the least "western" country ranked 69 in the Gender-related Development Index (in 2013), with a low level of women in the labor force (28% in 2014) which is 1% of the never-married women and a fertility rate of 2.17 (cited from TÜİK, 2014 by Çelik, 2018). In her article, Çelik (2018) emphasizes that there hasn't been a sociological study conducted on the never-married women aged 35-50 in Turkey. The current study is particularly significant in addressing the relevant gap in the literature.

The noteworthy studies on the subject in Turkey are limited to those mentioned above. One of them is an unpublished master's thesis, and the oldest one dates back to 2008, totaling three studies. This situation may indicate that this issue has emerged as a relatively new social phenomenon in Turkey and also points out the inadequacy of scientific research on the topic. However, this subject has been researched and studied globally for many years.

The studies on the topic in the U.S. date back as far as 90 years ago. As early as 1932, Housheer and Moseley (1932) conducted a study titled "A Study of the Unmarried", focusing on the reasons for remaining unmarried by surveying 65 unmarried women and 55 unmarried men. The authors examined those reasons under four main categories: economic, emotional, social, and familial. However, considering that the topic was addressed alongside men, it is understood that the preference of women for remaining unmarried was not yet a widespread or individually significant topic for examination in the U.S., or it was not seen as a topic worthy of examining separately. Ten years later, Foster and Wilson (1942) focused on the college-educated women in their study, questioning 100 college-educated women about their reasons for remaining unmarried. The authors received responses highlighting self-sufficiency, freedom, shyness, sensitivity, and being tense as prominent reasons. In the same year, Reed (1942) published a book titled "The Single Women", in

which she extensively examined the reasons for remaining unmarried under five main headings: social, economic, educational, familial, and personal. Reed, who conducted her study through interviews conducted with 300 women, may be considered to have written the first book on the subject in the U.S.

In his study, by directly focusing on the reasons for remaining unmarried, Stone (1949) found out the parental attachment, no physical desire, homosexuality, feelings of inadequacy, fear of sex, and illness as reasons for remaining single.

One of the early articles that thoroughly researched and analyzed the subject in the literature belongs to Gigy (1980), where open-ended questions were directed to 66 unmarried women over the age of 30. The participants of the study mentioned the mismatch between marriage and career, as well as not having encountered anyone they would consider marrying up to that point. Additionally, the participants expressed that they believed marriage would significantly impact their personal freedoms and independence in their private lives in a negative manner, which they were not willing to compromise at that stage. Another reason cited by the participants for remaining single was their sexual orientation. A similar early article study was conducted by Loewenstein in 1981. In this study involving 60 women aged 35-65, 38 of whom had never been married, the reasons for remaining single were investigated. The 24% of the participants reported that they had chosen to remain unmarried, 13% indicated that they had previously been in a serious relationship but had not pursued a new one after it had ended, and 8% stated that they remained single due to the incompatibility of the marriage with their career (cited by Apostolou 2017 from Loewenstein et al. 1981).

The studies conducted in India (Prabakhar 2011; Krishnakumari 1987) have shown that the percentage of unmarried women in urban areas was twice that of rural areas. This data may be considered as an indication that remaining unmarried was somewhat more feasible and easier in modern settings as a challenge against the traditions by women, whereas it was much more challenging in rural and traditional settings.

Yamada identified four common characteristics that may be observed among most single women, except for exceptional cases, which may provide insight into why those women haven't married. Firstly, the unmarried women generally have pursued a career and have a professional occupation. Secondly, most unmarried women

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have mothers who are homemakers. Thirdly, the unmarried women have parents who are supportive of them dating and having boyfriends. Finally, all unmarried women either have a boyfriend or are generally in a position where they could find one whenever they want (Yamada 1999, 41).

One of the notable studies conducted in England is by Macvarish (2006), which is based on interviews conducted with 14 women aged between 34 and 50. According to this study, the proportion of single women living alone, representing all unmarried women, divorced, and widowed women in England, increased from 17% in 1971 to 31% in 2000 (Macvarish 2006, 81). Although the percentage includes the other two groups besides those who have never married, it is evident that the number of single women living alone nearly doubled over the course of 30 years. Undoubtedly, Apostolou et al. (2023) conducted the most comprehensive study in the literature. This study, authored by a total of 22 researchers, is a complete international collaborative work. The data for this study were collected from 7,141 single women and men aged 18 and over from 14 different countries, including Turkey. A total of 953 individuals participated from Turkey, 684 of whom were women. Without gender distinction, it was found that 22.2% of the Turkish participants were voluntarily single, while 14.6% experienced involuntary singlehood, meaning they were currently waiting for a suitable partner and still had hopes of getting married (Apostolou 2023, 6). It is understood that this group worldwide constituted the significant portion of those who have never married.

Turkey presents a variable and dynamic outlook in terms of women living alone, situated between Asia and Europe, in a transitional phase from traditional to modern, characterized by both stability and change.

Method

This study was conducted with the unmarried women aged 35 and over, a demographic segment for which reaching out to and persuading for survey participation and interviews are quite challenging tasks. The reason for targeting the unmarried women over the age of 35 is the perception that the societal pressures and stigma are even more pronounced for the women in this age group due to the belief that they have passed the typical age for marriage. The survey research was conducted with 60 unmarried women in total and 20 women from each of the cities of Gaziantep, Eskişehir, and Zonguldak, and the interviews were conducted with 32 of them.

The decision to conduct this study in three different cities is related to Turkey's structural conditions and its tripartite cultural character. The first of these is Turkey's inland character, where relatively traditional culture prevails. The second character is its coastal character, where modern culture is more dominant. The third character is the transitional culture experienced in regions between traditional and modern (Mardin 1991) Gaziantep has been chosen for the first cultural type, Zonguldak for the second, and Eskişehir for the third, and field studies have been conducted in these cities. It is considered that the problems experienced by unmarried women living in each of these three cities, representing each of the three regions and cultures, will differ.

The sample was determined by using the snowball sampling method. When interpreting the societal pressures on the unmarried women, both the social and cultural context of Turkey and the different social, economic, and cultural characteristics of the three cities were taken into account. It should be noted that these interpretations and inferences are not universally applicable, and the limitations of the survey should be considered. While the entire study contains detailed data ranging from the reasons for remaining unmarried to the outlook on marriage, this paper specifically focuses on the data related to the problems experienced by the unmarried women, the interpretations of the data, and the relevant interview transcripts.¹

Demographic data

When examining the age range of the participants, it was observed that 48.3% were aged 35-40, 16.7% were aged 41-45, 23.3% were aged 46-50, and 11.7% were aged 51 and above. As seen above, the percentage of the unmarried women decreases as the age increases, while the percentage of widowed women increases. Therefore, it may be said that the age group of 35-40, which has the highest proportion in this study, represents the main target audience for the research in this subject matter.

When the educational levels of the participants are considered, it was found that 5% were illiterate, 3.3% were literate, 13.3% were elementary school graduates, 10% were middle school graduates, 18.3% were high school graduates, 16.7% had associate degrees,

¹ This study obtained the permission of the Ethical Board of Social Sciences at the Black Sea Technical University, dated 21 January 2022, and numbered E-82554930-050.01.04-255205.

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18.3% had bachelor's degrees, 11.7% had master's degrees, and 3.3% had doctoral degrees. Comparing these data with the Turkey Women's Survey conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) in 2018, it can be observed that the educational level of the unmarried women was higher than the overall educational level of women in Turkey. From this, it may be inferred that there is a positive correlation between the level of education and being unmarried, and particularly that the higher education process may be a reason for delaying marriage among women.

The participants in the research sample were asked with whom they lived, and a large majority of the participants, around 70%, stated that they were living with their families, while 3.3% were living with their siblings, and 26.7% reported living alone. Fry and Parker (2021, 11) have addressed this issue in the literature, and according to a study conducted in the U.S., 24% of the unmarried women live with at least one family member. Although this percentage is considerably higher compared to the 2% rate among the married women, the rate of the unmarried women in Turkey living with family members is much higher. This situation can be associated with Turkey's relatively traditional family structure. These data reveal that only about 1/4 of the unmarried women in Turkey dare to live alone. The majority of the rest do not dare to live alone due to both economic and social reasons, or their individual or societal conditions do not allow for it. Özbay (2015, 106) indicates that women who struggle with poverty, do not work in any job, lack institutional security, and undertake childcare and eldercare tend to prefer living with their families as a survival strategy. On the other hand, it may be argued that the male-dominated understanding in the Turkish society exerts "neighborhood pressure" on women in this regard. In the in-depth interviews, it has been observed that the care of elderly and sick parents is often entrusted not to the male children but rather to the female children, especially to the unmarried daughters.

R3: My father passed away when I was 23 years old, and since then, I have been taking care of my mother, and I couldn't think of getting married.

R4: I needed to help my family, so I worked and supported them. Their health was my top priority, and I couldn't think of myself before they recovered.

R28: My mother was ill, and I dedicated all my youth to her. There were many people who wanted to meet me or sent news, but I postponed marriage for my mother's health. I just lost my mother, and if I am going to marry, I may do it in the future.

R35: I have two elder brothers, and they are like my mother and father. They prevented me from getting married with excuses like "How will we manage without you? We did not get married, and neither will you".

R55: My family was very difficult. My father, may he rest in peace, was bedridden, and I was taking care of him. My mother was taking care of him at home, and I was working.

By those statements, all participants indicate that the responsibilities of the family fell on the unmarried women. Especially the responsibilities such as caring for family members' health, providing care and financial support have led those women to postpone their thoughts of marriage. The losses or serious problems in the family such as the death of a father and the illness of a mother, as seen in the statements of P3 and P28, have caused those women to spend their lives caring for the family members. This has been a significant factor in postponing their thoughts of marriage. These statements highlight that the family responsibilities are not equally distributed within the family, with unmarried women bearing a heavier burden of the family responsibility compared to the married or unmarried men.

The employment status of the research sample was also examined. Accordingly, it was determined that 63.3% of the participants were employed, while 36.7% were unemployed. These results indicate that the majority of the unmarried women participating in the survey are actively engaged in the workforce and economically active. According to the TÜİK data (2014), the labor force participation rate among the unmarried women in Turkey is 39.7%, while, it is 30.7% among the married women. The likely reason for the higher rate in the study sample is probably partly due to the time difference and more significantly due to the 17-year age gap between the ages of 18 and 35. When the employment status is considered at the level of different cities, the rates are 55% in Zonguldak, 60% in Eskişehir, and 75% in Gaziantep. It may be said that Gaziantep is surprising in this regard compared to other issues. Being an industrial, agricultural, and service-oriented city and the strong economy of the city seem to have had an effect in this regard. Zonguldak, on the other hand, is a city known especially for its mining sector. Since its economy is more based on this sector, and mostly men are employed in this sector; it may be said that there are not sufficient employment opportunities for women. Additionally, being a small city may translate into limited job opportunities for Zonguldak.

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Societal pressures and challenges experienced by the single women

Understanding the experiences of unmarried women aged 35 and over regarding the societal pressure to marry, our surveys and interviews addressed the participants' thoughts and experiences through various questions. The participants were asked about the pressures and difficulties they encounter in their daily social lives.

Table 1: "Survival for the unmarried women is harder than that of men."

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	22	36.7
Agree	9	15
Partially Agree	10	16.7
Disagree	10	16.7
Strongly Disagree	8	13.3
Missing System	1	1.6
Total	60	100

36.7% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement of "The single women have a harder time standing on their own feet compared to the single men", while a total of 68.4% responded positively to this proposition. This suggests that the single women face more difficulties and societal barriers compared to the single men. Based on these findings, it may be argued that the Turkish society, despite undergoing a modernization process spanning over a century, still exhibits patriarchal characteristics, demonstrating a tendency to tolerate single men while being less tolerant towards single women. In the Turkish society, remaining unmarried still carries gender-specific implications, making the lives of single women even more challenging.

The responses given for this proposition also exhibit significant differences across cities. The overall responses agreeing with this proposition are 95% in Eskişehir, 75% in Gaziantep, and 55% in Zonguldak. The inland characteristics in the first two cities, corresponding to patriarchal, traditional, and controlling social structures, contrast with the coastal city's tolerant, egalitarian, and individualistic societal structure, which appears to have influenced the results. The unmarried women aged 35 and over, across the research field, have indicated that they are disadvantaged compared to the unmarried men, with rates reaching up to 70%, clearly stating that this disadvantage is entirely related to the gender roles. Additionally, the participants have indicated that they are under even more pressure due to the gender-biased approach in Gaziantep and Eskişehir compared to

Zonguldak. Overall, these results indicate that marriage is still a societal norm for the women in all three cities and that this norm affects the potential for the unmarried women to thrive.

Table 2: “I struggled to find rental housing because I live alone”

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	2	3.3
Agree	2	3.3
Partially Agree	6	10
Disagree	12	20
Strongly Disagree	36	60
Missing System	2	3.3
Total	60	100

According to the findings of this study, 16.6% of the single women aged 35 and over have reported experiencing difficulties in finding rental housing in varying degrees. However, since the question begins with the phrase “Because I live alone,” the responses of the single women living alone would be more explanatory than the entire sample. In fact, the cross-tabulation reveals that while this rate remains at 10% for those living with their families, it rises to 37.6% for the single women living alone. These results indicate that despite undergoing modernization for at least a century, Turkish society, while to some extent tolerating single women living with their parents within the sanctity of the family concept, does not show the same tolerance towards the single women living alone. More than one-third of the single women living alone are rejected and excluded from the society simply because they are single and living alone.

When the issue is examined at the level of different cities, the rates of the women struggling to find rental housing due to living alone manifest as 10% in Zonguldak, 15.8% in Gaziantep, and 21.1% in Eskişehir. Despite having the same rate of living alone by 25% in both Zonguldak and Gaziantep, it is quite understandable that the difficulty in finding rental housing is higher in Gaziantep, which supports and extends all previous interpretations about this city. This city’s inland, conservative, and traditional characteristics have led to greater difficulties for the single women living alone in this regard. Conversely, the coastal, individualistic, and open-minded environment

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of Zonguldak has somewhat alleviated the difficulties experienced by the single women in this regard. These figures indicate that the single women still face significant challenges due to their status of living alone. During the in-depth interviews, the participants expressed their experiences and views on the matter as follows:

P6: I faced difficulties in finding a rental apartment when they learned that I would live alone because I am single.

P43: I faced difficulties in finding a place to live because they treated being single as a crime, so I could only rent a house through acquaintances. My boss intervened and helped.

P57: They prefer the married couples more when renting a house, and the singles are judged as unreliable.

The participants have stated that the society perceived the singles as “unreliable” and viewed them as potential criminals, and for these reasons, the landlords did not rent out apartments to the singles without the intervention of the intermediaries and did not include the singles in their midst. This situation is a strong indication that the single women may experience social isolation and feelings of loneliness.

Table 3: “I believe that the unmarried women are excluded from society”

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	23	38.3
Agree	4	6.7
Partially Agree	9	15
Disagree	16	26.7
Strongly Disagree	8	13.3
Total	60	100

The unmarried women may face stigmatization and ultimately exclusion from the society due to societal pressures aimed at preserving the sacred family values and upholding the social morals (Lüküslü & Çelik 2008; Uslu 2012). A significant portion of the participants, 38.3%, strongly agreed with the statement of “I believe that the unmarried women are excluded from the society”. Though to a lesser extent, when combined with the other two affirmative responses, this rate reaches to 60%, which is quite high. When the matter is examined in terms of different cities, the percentage of the participants who responded affirmatively to this statement is 40% in Zonguldak,

75% in Gaziantep, and as high as 90% in Eskişehir. As usual, being a coastal city, Zonguldak may have fostered a more open-minded population over time, resulting in relatively lower feelings of exclusion among the unmarried women in this city. Conversely, the inland characteristics of the other two cities may have cultivated a culture that tends to exclude the unmarried women from the society over time.

The participants have expressed their views on this matter as follows:

P11: I live with my family, so I didn't struggle, but when I interacted with my friends, I felt that I was left out of the conversation. It's really difficult to have nothing to contribute when they talk about their family life, spouses, and children.

P24: We're seen as those who can't relate to our married peers. We face exclusion and judgment, and these are problems stemming from the entrenched ideas in the society.

P31: The unmarried women are stigmatized by being labeled not as unmarried but as 'staying at home.' If you're not conventionally attractive or slim, you're seen as unable to get married for those reasons. Those who remain unmarried due to family pressure are perceived as single not because of what their family did but because of their own choices or preferences.

P57: In another form of pressure, when I'm the only single one in my friend group, they don't invite me to gatherings.

The literature reveals that some studies have found similar results, identifying various forms of exclusion faced by the unmarried women despite their advancing age. For instance, in a study conducted in Malaysia (Situmorang 2005, 302), the participants reported feeling excluded and perceived as a threat to their married friends' husbands during the social gatherings among friends, echoing sentiments reiterated by the participants in the study conducted by Reynolds and Wetherel (2003). Indeed, one of the earliest studies on the subject in the U.S. (Weiss 1973) was titled: "Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social isolation", emphasizing the loneliness experienced by the unmarried women.

According to Sharp and Ganong (2007, 836), as the number, proportion, and visibility of the unmarried women increase, so does the discrimination, labeling, and othering against them. This negative attitude, termed "Singlism" by DePaulo and Morris (2006), has been extensively studied in the U.S. and Europe (DePaulo & Morris 2005; Morris, DePaulo, Hertel, & Taylor 2008; Greitemeyer 2009; Hertel, Schütz, DePaulo, Morris, & Stucke 2007). Perhaps labeling exclusion, isolation, and othering of the single women as a common behavior and

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belief as “anti-singlism” with a slight modification could be a clearer and more appropriate concept.

Table 4: “I was considered immoral because I am single and living alone”

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	2	3.3
Agree	2	3.3
Partially Agree	4	6.7
Disagree	12	20
Strongly Disagree	40	66.7
Total	60	100

The percentage of those who indicated that they were seen as immoral because they were single and living alone is 6.6%, while this percentage doubles when combined with the “Partially Agree” response. Furthermore, when looking at the responses of those who live alone in the cross-tabulation, the first percentage rises to 18.8%, and the second percentage rises to 25%. Since the subject is sensitive, the “Partially Agree” response could easily be considered as part of the affirmative responses, as individuals may refrain from expressing their situation. Therefore, the total percentage reaches to 43.8%, which is an alarming level. These data highlight that even in a society where the patriarchal norms are still dominant despite the modernization process, the positive moral values are actually associated not with the individual, but with the group, category, or social structure which the individual is part of. It also indicates that the single women may be perceived as immoral with a sexist and bigoted approach, which is quite striking.

Table 5: “I have been harassed by men because I am single and live alone”

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	1	1.7
Agree	2	3.3
Partially Agree	3	5
Disagree	12	20

Strongly Disagree	42	70
Total	60	100

According to the table, while 10% of the participants responded positively to this statement, when the cross-tabulations are examined, the same percentage rises to 25.1% among the single women who live alone. Considering the possibility of not expressing the harassment that the single women experience, it becomes clearer how alarming these rates are. This means that if a woman is single, one out of every ten, and if she also lives alone, one out of every four women, is subjected to physical, verbal, or emotional harassment by the opposite sex.

When looking at the rate of the women who declared that they were harassed by men due to being single and living alone, the rate appears as 15% in Zonguldak, and 10% both in Eskişehir and Gaziantep. Based on the sensitivity of the matter, it may be argued that the participants from the inland regions might have inclined towards concealing or hiding this issue due to their fear of stigma. In Zonguldak, however, where there is a cultural emphasis on individuality and autonomy, this issue might have been expressed more comfortably. Overall, it becomes apparent that harassment is a significant issue for women in general, but even a greater problem for the single women living alone. This issue persists even in cities of a country like Turkey, which has been undergoing modernization for at least a century. The single women not only have to cope with various hindrances and difficulties imposed by the society but also have to deal with this issue. More importantly, due to societal norms, they may feel compelled to conceal it.

In Turkey, some studies conducted by the conservative sources (KADEM, 2014) report a harassment rate for women at 0.9%, while another source (MMO, 2021, 5) indicates this rate as 5%. However, this study found the same rate to be 10% for the single women and 25% for the single women living alone. Depending on the scope and detail of the research question, it is apparent that the single women in Turkey experience more instances of sexual harassment compared to women in general, and the single women living alone experience even higher rates of sexual harassment. The data obtained from this study is consistent with the existing literature, and particularly in rural areas, single women tend to conceal their experiences related to sexual harassment and abuse.

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The literature includes data on unmarried women being harassed by the individuals in their social circles and being seen as easy sexual objects, but there are very limited studies on this topic. The unmarried women often refrain from reporting those incidents to the police or from participating in academic research due to fears of losing their jobs, prestige, social relationships, and friends, as well as facing social stigma. However, according to a study, 66% of the unmarried women experience verbal harassment, while the remainder face emotional abuse (cited by Raghu, 2019 from Giri, 2000).

Conclusion

This study is the first in Turkey conducted by collecting qualitative data on the unmarried women who have passed the age of marriage according to the general acceptance in the Turkish culture. It is acknowledged that this situation has various advantages and disadvantages. The most significant advantage is pioneering in this field, while the biggest disadvantage is the necessity to rely solely on its own resources. In other words, there is no opportunity to compare and contrast the data with other studies conducted previously in Turkey. However, to some extent this study will be able to provide an opportunity for future research related to Turkey.

As it happened in the rest of the world, the spread of modernity as a framework process in Turkey has brought about the opportunity for individual freedoms and particularly for women, the choice to live independently. In almost every society, the rate of the unmarried women is roughly around 10%. This rate tends to be slightly lower in rural areas and higher in urban areas. Similarly, in countries that are still in the process of modernization and development, this rate is somewhat lower, while it is slightly higher in modernized and developed countries.

The indirect studies and data suggest that the rate of never-married women in Turkey is also around 10%. While 10% of the society is unmarried, it seems that the remaining 90% is subjected to significant pressure. This is indicated by the responses provided by the participants in this study.

The first significant finding emerging from the data of the study is based on the comparison between the unmarried men and the unmarried women. Accordingly, more than two-thirds of the women participating in the study believe that it is much more difficult for the unmarried women to sustain their lives in Turkey compared to the

unmarried men. The participants must have experienced this difficulty in their daily lives, so that they expressed such an impression in this regard. This result is highly noteworthy as it demonstrates that the social sphere in Turkey remains predominantly masculine and patriarchal, leaving women, especially the unmarried women, with extremely limited space.

The second significant finding of the study pertains to the difficulty that the unmarried women face in finding rental housing. According to the data, while about 1 in 10 unmarried women living with their families experience this problem, more than one-third of the unmarried women living alone experienced the same problem. In other words, more than one out of every three unmarried women living alone experiences difficulty in finding rental housing. This difficulty is increasing among the unmarried women, but it peaks especially among those living alone. This data may be interpreted as indicating that the patriarchal social structure in the Turkish society does not wish to accept women as unmarried individuals, nor does it accept seeing them as independent actors in the social sphere. In this sense, the data may demonstrate that the Turkish society still predominantly maintains a conservative structure despite undergoing a transformation, and is reluctant to consider women as interlocutors in the public social sphere.

The third significant finding of the study is the high level of perception among the participants regarding the exclusion of the unmarried women from the Turkish society. According to the data, nearly two-thirds of the participants believe that the unmarried women in Turkey were excluded from the society and social spheres. These results vary slightly in the coastal city of Zonguldak but increase to a rate of 9/10 in the inland cities, which is a remarkably notable finding. These findings indicate that the unmarried women in Turkey, especially the unmarried women living alone, and particularly the unmarried lonely women in inland and more conservative regions, experience significant exclusion, isolation, and loneliness.

The fourth significant finding of the study is the perception among the participants, by 13.3%, believing that the unmarried individuals in the Turkish society are deemed immoral solely due to their single status. Moreover, this percentage nearly doubles among the unmarried women living alone. Approximately one-fourth of the unmarried women living alone in Turkey face societal treatment that leads them to believe that they are considered immoral simply because they are

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single and they live alone. It is evident that in Turkey, some members of the society may label individuals as immoral based solely on their unmarried and solitary status, without requiring any other concrete evidence.

The fifth and most significant finding of the study relates to the issue of harassment. The data revealed that one out of every ten single women in Turkey experienced harassment due to being single and “vulnerable”. This rate increases significantly among the single individuals living alone, surpassing one-fourth of them. Even if we set aside the possibility of those who do not report harassment, these rates are incredibly alarming. Under normal circumstances, this shameful situation should not occur or be experienced. However, it becomes a harsh reality for one out of every four single women living alone.

All these quantitative findings, probably similar to other countries and with varying rates, indicate that the single women face serious societal issues. In this study, the problems such as isolation, exclusion, deprivation, embargo, alienation, and even more severe forms such as counterattacks and harassment have been highlighted. While some studies in the literature have referred to those negative attitudes and behaviors towards the single women living alone as “singlism,” it is deemed more appropriate and accurate to conceptualize this phenomenon as “anti-singlism”. The notion of anti-singlism refers to the normalization, justification, and advocacy of the thought, attitude, and behavior that isolate, ostracize, deprive, embargo, marginalize, and even subject the single women, particularly the single women living alone to harassment in social life.

Beyond all the findings of this study, the most significant conclusion revealed by this study is the inference and determination that being single has ceased to be viewed as a “deviation”, an exceptional circumstance, or a deficiency, and it has been moving towards institutionalization. The concept of social institution refers to the general acceptance, tolerance, implementation, continuity, stability, and the ability to reproduce itself or be given at least minimal recognition of an attitude, behavior, or practice in the society. Although singleness is still a subject of pressure and suppression, it has managed to gain acceptance by a significant portion of the society. Like all institutions, the institution of singleness is an innovation that emerges or is in the process of emerging from within an existing traditional and conservative structure and becomes accepted by it through a dialectical process. The notion of singleness is no longer the

rule of the rule-less world, the anomaly of the married world, the secular of the religious world, the family-less of the family-oriented world and finally, the unlucky situation, stance, and behavior of the lucky world; it has become or it is on the way to become a lifestyle in its own right. Nowadays, the women may exhibit lawful, legitimate, religious, family-oriented, and fortunate behavior by remaining single. Various factors, such as the spread of modern lifestyle, the dominance of individualism, the increase in the number of those who prefer to have a single life, and the termination of the significant portion of marriages in a short period, have made singleness acceptable, and allowed for its institutionalization.

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