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Nathalie E. Williams *Editors*

Comparative Demography of the Syrian Diaspora: European and Middle Eastern Destinations



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Preface

Barely a decade ago, the population of Syria stood at 21 million—a population similar to the state of Florida, or in between the population totals for Romania and Australia. In less than 10 years, this population has been fractured by a perfect storm of demographic, economic, political, ethnic, and sectarian forces. Today, about one-fourth of Syria's people have been scattered across other countries as refugees, asylum seekers, and self-settled migrants. Another one-fourth of them live as internally displaced persons inside the country, driven from their homes by violence and economic and political chaos. Syria furnishes one of the most terrible lessons in recent history about just how disrupted life can become in a country and how quickly it can happen.

Who are the six million or more Syrians who have fled the country? These pages provide a factual demographic portrait of the Syrian diaspora, now found for the most part in the neighboring states of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, but also including a sizeable minority who shelter in more distant destinations concentrated predominantly in Europe.

The very serious economic and social challenges thrown up by this sudden, dramatic population movement in the second decade of the new century are obvious to everyone around the world. Angry, vocal, even violent reactions against perceived danger from strangers sometimes erupt inside these Middle Eastern and European destinations. So far, the resolve of both neighboring host countries and those further afield in Europe has been equal to these challenges and continues to furnish a humanitarian example to the rest of the world.

One aim of this volume is to provide more detailed comparative information about the Syrian populations in a range of countries. We believe this information can provide a firmer foundation for making decisions about future population movements, about policies related directly to the current situation of these Syrians (and perhaps other groups), and about what we may have to look “forward” to as other kinds of natural and man-made crises threaten to displace other populations in the remaining decades of this century.

Chapters contributed by population experts provide demographic details about Syrian residents in each country, including age distributions, sex ratios, and

information about education, marital status, and family living arrangements where available. We show the salience of families with young children in this exodus from Syria and highlight the concentration of these migrants in a few countries in particular as a result of both varying national policies toward refugees and the preferences of these Syrian exiles themselves. While there are demographic similarities in Syrian populations in different countries, we also document clear and systematic differences distinguishing the populations of Syrians in some countries from those in other places. Above all, we seek to reveal the variety of human faces behind this most dramatic and terrible demographic upheaval so far witnessed in the twenty-first century.

The volume begins with three chapters setting the stage for the Syrian population diaspora. We first review the state of our current understanding of the general phenomenon of displaced populations as a result of armed conflict and other organized state-level violence. Masek provides a baseline sketch of the population of Syria itself in 2009, a year or two before the whirlwind struck, giving us a reference point with which to compare observations about Syrian populations displaced to other countries. Kohlenberger, Buber-Ennsner, Rengs, and Hosner then share knowledge gained in Austria about how to design and conduct detailed, intensive surveys of displaced populations in order to record the specific characteristics, the successes, and the needs of such groups.

The second section of the book includes chapters on the situation of the vast majority of Syrian refugees and other internationally displaced persons found in the adjacent countries of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. There are Syrian refugees in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa as well, but nothing to compare with the massive populations found in these three contiguous states. Adali and Türkyılmaz provide the demographic portrait of Syrians in Turkey, along with an added chapter by Dumon that concentrates on the special problems faced by Syrian women in Turkey. Sieverding and Calderón-Mejía contribute the demographic portraits of Syrians now found in Lebanon and in Jordan.

The third and largest section of this study then turns to Syrian populations in several European countries more distant from Syria. Buber-Ennsner, Rengs, Kohlenberger, and Zeman summarize the demographic portrait for Austria, followed by the picture in Belgium provided by Vause and Schumacher. The German team of Worbs, Rother, and Kreienbrink tackle the most daunting challenge for Europe, giving us details regarding nearly 700 thousand Syrians living in Germany today—more than two-thirds of all the Syrians in Europe as a whole. Strozza and Gabrielli summarize the picture for Italy, while Lubbers and de Valk detail the situation in the Netherlands. Tønnessen, Drahus, and Dzamarija provide a look at Syrians in Norway. Janicki offers a brief look at Syrians in Poland, one of the European countries with the smallest Syrian communities, and the section concludes with the portrait of Syrians in Sweden by Aradhya and Mussino. This range of national case studies provides valuable comparative perspectives, but we confess to some disappointment that we could not manage to locate or convince any of our colleagues who might have contributed information about Syrians in the United Kingdom or France; in Denmark or Finland; in Eastern European countries like

Hungary, the Czech Republic, or Romania; or in countries even closer to the front-line states such as Bulgaria or Greece. These are significant gaps in the picture we are able to present, but we think that the comparisons possible from the range of countries represented still here give unprecedented insights into just how the Syrian diaspora has unfolded—who moves where, and perhaps a hint about why.

The last section of the book includes two chapters. The first by Ghio, based on data for EC Member States from Eurostat and the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, examines how three outcomes for Syrian refugees are patterned across Europe—the share of all Syrians who apply for asylum in different countries, the time (speed) involved in the decision process for such applicants, and the balance of positive and negative results when these decisions are reached. Ghio then attempts ambitious multivariate modelling to predict the share of all Syrians applying for asylum in Europe who apply in each country in a given year. Predictors include the population size of the member states, their gross domestic product levels, and several measures of the previously existing Syrian populations already in each of those countries—a model with a strong assumption of path dependence that is reinforced over time. The final chapter by Carlson and Williams draws on data from all the earlier chapters to develop a comparative perspective on similarities and differences between the Syrian populations found in different destination countries, with what we hope are stimulating new insights into the phenomenon of migration resulting from a massive and long-lasting armed conflict.

We hope that this effort to document the Syrian diaspora in comparative perspective may give rise to additional studies, including data collection through surveys or registration systems, intensive ethnographic and qualitative field research on particular issues, and complementary systematic, quantitative, and comparative demographic analysis. Decision-makers and public opinion in every country of the world stand to benefit from the lessons we learn here, as we all face the decades ahead and the likelihood of future sudden population shifts.

Tallahassee, FL, USA
Seattle, WA, USA
May, 2019

Elwood D. Carlson
Nathalie E. Williams

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Part I
Genesis of the Syrian Diaspora

Part II

Population Movement to Front-Line States

Chapter 5

The Situation of Syrian Women in Turkey

Tuba Duman

Abstract This study aims to investigate polygamist marriages of Turkish men with refugee Syrian women and its consequences on Syrian women and the Turkish community. The data includes in-depth interviews and content analysis. The interviews, which addressed experiences and ideas about these marriages were conducted with Turkish people in Şanlıurfa (a border city with Syria) and Ankara (the capital of Turkey). Additionally, the content analysis includes articles on polygamist marriages with Syrian women in Turkish newspapers. The study concludes that many people believe that marriages conducted by Turkish men with Syrian women harm Turkish family life and social order. Furthermore, Syrian women are victims of these marriages. The reasons for this are that they are informal marriages and many women accept them because of their vulnerability. They may be cheated or lied to about the conditions of the marriages and they are also often the accused party and are stigmatized as home wreckers.

Keywords Syrian · Women · Refugees · Polygamy · Stigmatization · Turkish society · Şanlıurfa · Ankara

5.1 Problems of Women Among Syrian Refugees

Refugees coming from Syria to Turkey due to the Syrian civil war face a new life with various challenges. One of the problems is that Syrian women can be stigmatized due to informal, polygamous marriages they are engaged in with Turkish men. The main concern of this research is to comprehend the stigmatization process, its reasons and results for Syrian women. During visits to border cities such as Şanlıurfa, Hatay and Gaziantep to study Syrians in Turkey, while talking to local people in the streets and during conferences, I discovered the existence of

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polygamous unions involving Syrian women. Even though polygamy is restricted by law in Turkey, it has been a problem occurring especially in the southeastern and eastern parts of the country. People were mentioning polygamy with Syrians as a "hidden and extremely dangerous" topic, ruining Turkish society. I could find only a few interviews conducted by journalists (Unknown author, 2013, Haberler; Unknown author, 2014, *The Guardian*; Avcı, and Happani, 2014, Haberturk; Gedik, 2016, *Hurriyet*). Little or no academic research has examined polygamy involving Syrian women with Turkish men. The few news stories emphasized the victimization of both first wives and families and polygamous/illegal Syrian wives.

This study is based on in-depth interviews with 20 Turkish citizens, on participant observation within the field of the study, and on content analysis of news about Syrians in local, national and international newspapers. The field of the study is Ankara (the capital of Turkey), Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Gaziantep and Hatay (border cities). Questions inquired about the personal experiences and thoughts of the interviewees and their observations on the topic. Additionally, interviewees are asked about public opinion on Syrian women, particularly relating to these marriages.

I investigate vulnerability of refugee/migrant women to stigmatization. Goffman (1986) indicates three types of stigma that can affect life chances including employment, housing, psychological wellbeing and life itself. The first is based on physical deformities such as being handicapped or wounded; this type is not involved in the present study. The second type of stigma is based on individual character, and polygamy as a form of deviant behavior would fall into this second basis for stigmatization. The third type of stigma is collective: tribal stigma of race, nation, religion (Link and Phelan 2001), and also gender (Hynes 2004; Ghosh 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013), in this case applying to Syrian women as both foreigners and as women (Turpin 1998; Cohn 2013).

Gender can interact with other bases for stigma described above. Women actually may be more vulnerable than men to being stigmatized due to their race, religion, citizenship status and ethnicity. Brazilian women in Portugal (Malheiros and Padilla 2015) are stigmatized as "exotic", "sensual", "sexy" or even "easy." These stereotypes have been the foundation for generalised discrimination. Immigrant Chinese women were accused and stigmatized as being "suspect prostitutes" in arguments for the Page Act of 1875 (Turpin 1998). Undocumented immigrants growing up in the United States (Menjívar and Kantroom 2014) experience stigmatization at school and in social life more generally due to their illegality. Berg (2016) documents how young Muslim girls in Norway experience prejudice and stigmatization in their daily life due to their religious beliefs and practices.

Thus in Turkey there are at least three potentially interacting circumstances that can generate stigma: being a woman (gender), being a Syrian displaced to Turkey (foreigner/minority status), and being in polygamous unions (behavioral deviance). Polygamous marriages of displaced Syrian women and their stigmatization due to this practice have not been studied before. Some significant similarities between informal polygamy and women trafficked for sex work have been observed (Malarek 2003). Trafficking victims are forced into sex work illegally and also stigmatized as immoral women. They also frequently are illegal immigrants.

Polygamous marriages are also illegal/informal and women are forced into them because of difficulties in their lives. But there is always a chance to change the situation of stigmatized people. The most important approach to change the stigma is to change the fundamental cause of stigma. Thus, either the discriminating attitudes and beliefs must be changed or the situations that limit the power of a stigmatized group must change.

5.2 Polygamy as a Social Problem in Turkish Society

In order to understand polygamous marriages of Syrian women and minor girls and stigmatization of Syrian women due to these marriages, we first need to understand the background of polygamy and child marriage in Turkey before the Syrian influx. Extra-legal polygamous marriages did not suddenly appear only with the arrival of the Syrian population fleeing violence in that country. Even though polygamy is restricted by law in Turkey, it has long occurred especially in the southeastern and eastern parts of the country. Polygamous marriages are mostly made in informal religious ceremonies called *imam nikahı*. Due to its illegality, there is no official record on the prevalence of polygamy, but it is seen in every part of Turkey as emphasized in the report of TBMM in 2011.

Sencer (1993) reports that in southeastern cities of Turkey (Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Mardin and Şanlıurfa) in 1992–1993, 13% of marriages within the area were unofficial *imam nikahı*. He estimated that 70.8% of polygamous marriages were in rural areas and that 4.7% of all married men have two spouses (5.7% in rural areas and 3.4% in urban areas). The percentage polygamous in the urban area of Şanlıurfa may be as high as 10.2% of all marriages. Marginality and rarity of divorce and a desire for many children are the main reasons for polygamy in the area, but polygamy is decreasing due to changing socio-economic conditions and mechanisation of agriculture.

İlkkaracan's 1998 study of polygamy and early marriages in the Eastern and Southeastern areas of Turkey and Ümraniye district in İstanbul indicates that even though it has been illegal since 1926, polygamy continued in Turkey during the 1990s. İlkkaracan estimated that 16.3% of women in the studied areas got married before they reached 15 years old with unofficial *imam nikahı*. The Governor of Şanlıurfa held a meeting with leaders of families (*aşiret*), NGOs and representatives from political parties which aimed to stop traditions causing social problems including polygamy, early marriage and bride money, because polygamy had been normalized and tolerated.

A medical study of polygamy in the city of Van (Gücük et al. 2010) includes interviews with 462 women, and found that 11.3% of them lived in polygamous marriages. Data on religious and informal marriage ceremonies based on a national survey in 2011 (Turğut and Feyzioğlu 2014) estimated *imam nikahı* to be about 3% of all marriages in the entire country of Turkey, mostly involving polygamist marriages. The report on early marriages prepared by TBMM (2011) also indicates

desire for children, especially sons, as a reason for such unions. Turğut and Feyzioğlu (2014) concluded that the highest level of unofficial marriages (7.5%) continues to be in the southeastern region of Turkey.

Çakmak (2009) indicates in her article “Türkiye’de Çocuk Gelinler” (*Child Brides in Turkey*) that marriage of minor girls with much older men is also a problem within the Turkish population. A TBMM report (2010) on early marriages in Turkey links these unions with polygamy since minor/young Turkish girls have been getting married also as second wives. The report also indicates non-attendance rates in schools for students due to engagement and marriage. According to the report, 675 of these students are girls while only 18 of them are boys. A report from UNICEF (2011) on marriages of children indicates that there are child marriages in every part of Turkey. The data and statistics on the issue are contradictory and inconsistent since the practice is illegal.

5.3 Polygamy as a Problem for Displaced Syrian Women

A 2014 report on Syrian women living outside of the camps in Turkey (MAZLUMDER Group for Women Studies 2014: 33–36) indicates a problem with polygamy and early marriages. Another report on the health of displaced Syrian women (Davas and Zencir 2014) also observes the threats and challenges that they encounter: poverty, deprivation of security, and access to health services even during pregnancy. According to the report, as a result of these difficulties Syrian women are vulnerable to marriages at early ages with old and middle aged married men, forced polygamous marriage and forced sex work. In the city of Şanlıurfa (especially in Şehitlik neighborhood and Harran district), and Mardin (especially camps of Kızıltepe and Midyat) payment of bride money has fallen from 40,000 to 5000 Turkish Lira for polygamous marriages with young girls. When women living in the camps are sold to Turkish men living outside the camp, they leave the camps and move to the cities or villages of their husbands. Local women accuse these girls of stealing their husbands, producing discomfort in social life between Syrian and Turkish women (participant observation, 2016, Şanlıurfa). The same “market price” was also mentioned in one of our in-depth interviews with a shopkeeper in Şanlıurfa.

Aktaş (2016) emphasizes polygamy and early marriages as the primary problems that displaced Syrian women encounter. She also mentions that polygamy now is exploiting Syrian refugee women and is becoming commercialized, providing profits through bribe money and commissions for the families and the mediator, but not for the women married through this process. This study also reveals that Turkish men forming polygamous marriages with Syrian women claim they are doing a good deed (*sevab* in Islamic terms) and “helping” the women. A report from AFAD (2014) on Syrian refugee camps in Turkey also points to the problem of early marriages and motherhood and polygamous marriages of Syrians. It concludes that Syrians used to form polygamous marriages in their country and they continue them in Turkey. According to a 2015 report prepared by ORSAM and TESEV (Orhan and Gündoğar

2015, ORSAM AND TESEV), in the cities with high Syrian refugee counts such as Adana, Osmaniye, Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Mersin and Kahramanmaraş, polygamy has increased in Turkey as a result of mass migration of Syrians.

5.4 Research Design

Because there are no reliable statistical data on Syrian women living as extralegal second wives of Turkish men, various methods were used for this study. Polygamy is illegal and it is difficult and dangerous to record it as a civilian. Police do not investigate these marriages unless there is a crime, so they also do not have any statistical records on the subject. There are some studies on marriage habits in Turkey but they only mention polygamy in academic terms. This study includes ethnographic participant observation, content analysis, and in-depth interviews. These methods have advantages for building and investigating new data on the subject in a more multi-faceted and wide perspective on the problem of stigmatization of Syrian women.

Fieldwork was conducted in cities of Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis and Ankara. Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Kilis and Gaziantep are border cities receiving large numbers of Syrian refugees. Polygamy was a problem in these four cities even before the Syrian migration, as documented above. Similarly, in all four of these cities polygamy involving Syrian women has been a significant concern since the influx of Syrians. To give the study a wider perspective, the non-border city of Ankara (the capital of Turkey) has also been included. Even though polygamy has been rare in Ankara, polygamous marriages and attempts for polygamous marriages with Syrians is also observed in Ankara.

Research took place between 2015 and 2017. Participant observation occurred in 2015 and 2016 and in-depth interviews took place in 2016 and 2017. Content analysis of secondary sources from 2013 through 2016 was accomplished in 2017, as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Results of content analysis

City	Registered Syrians	Turkish population	% Syrian	Location	Polygamy before Syrians	Polygamy after Syrians
Şanlıurfa	420,532	1,940,627	21.6	Border	Significant problem	Problem increased
Hatay	384,024	1,555,165	24.6	Border	Problem	Significant problem
Kilis	124,481	130,825	95.2	Border	Problem	Significant problem
Gaziantep	329,670	1,974,244	16.7	Border	Problem	Significant problem
Ankara	73,198	5,346,518	1.4	Capital city	Rare but a problem	Rare but a problem

5.4.1 *In-depth Interview Procedures*

The study included in-depth interviews based on a semi-structured questionnaire (Taylor et al. 2016). Interviews were conducted with Turkish citizens (not with Syrians) because this study investigates the attitude of the host society. The language of the interviews was Turkish. Respondents were visited personally at their workplace, or Skype meetings were conducted through internet. They were asked to suggest other interviewees. This way respondents also helped to find people in different cities. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) argue that this method is suitable when the subject is a sensitive one especially concerning private issues. Polygamy is also a taboo and stigmatized subject in Turkish society. This acquaintance provides mutual safety and trust between interviewer and interviewee.

First-person contacts were made with 12 expert/volunteer NGO representatives, 5 men and 7 women, all between the ages of 33 and 58. 10 of them were married and the other 2 were single. 5 were from Şanlıurfa, 2 from Gaziantep, 1 from Hatay, 2 from Ankara and 2 from Kilis. Their professions included 2 managers, 5 housewives, 2 teachers, 1 assistant professor, 1 businessman and 1 shopkeeper. The assistant professor conducts studies on Syrian refugees. The managers work with Syrian refugees. All the others do volunteer work for Syrian refugees besides their professional jobs. These respondents encounter Syrians almost every day, have dialogue with them, and learn about their life stories, needs and problems. They explain their opinions on Syrian women and they also comment on the perception of Turkish citizens in general about Syrians.

The study also included eight interviews with ordinary Turkish citizens, three women and five men aged between 35 and 64. Seven of them were married and one was a widower. They held various jobs including worker, imam, shopkeeper, retired shopkeeper, hairdresser, housewife, and professor. These people did not directly work with Syrian people either as a profession or voluntarily. These respondents were selected because they were willing to explain their experiences and observations about Syrians. Not everyone in this group talked with or saw Syrians on a regular basis. While some are relatives or neighbours of Syrians, some just meet Syrians occasionally and some did not have any personal experience with Syrians but still had plenty of opinions about them. These interviews were conducted personally during visits to neighbourhoods within the border cities in study areas. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 min. After these conversations, I found a quiet place during the same day to take notes in my field notebook which is always with me.

5.4.2 *Content Analysis*

In addition to participant observation and in-depth interviews, I also completed content analyses of newspapers about Syrian women as informal polygamous wives between 2012 (the earliest news stories found on subject) and 2016. I located 21

original stories in 30 newspapers, including news about my own study. All of the newspapers are broadsheets. I categorised them as national, local and international. I also indicated their language and their specification as internet paper only or both internet and published papers. Stories about my own study have been republished more than 40 times, and other stories were republished up to four times, but the count above only includes original stories the first time they appeared.

All of the stories include interviews conducted with ordinary people ranging from shopkeepers to first wives, second wives, husbands, NGO representatives, lawyers, and experts. There are a variety of newspapers including those with national, international or local circulation; leftist, internet news sites, pro-government, and opposition orientations. Two of these papers concentrate on academic studies. These newspapers included in the study are: Haber Sol, Onedio, Gerçek Gündem, Mynet, Migrantinnen, Halkız Biz, Amerika'nın Sesi (Voice of America), Vira Haber, Haber Sol, Aljazeera, Milliyet, Hürriyet, Vice, Huffington Post, Yurt Gazetesi, Equal Times, Gaziantep Haberler, Oda TV, BBC, The Times, t24, Cumhuriyet, Habertürk, CS Monitor, Mail Guardian, The Guardian, Mynet, Vocativ, Haberler, and Gerçek Gündem. Some newspapers have more than one original story about the topic. These are Aljazeera, Milliyet, Haber Sol and Hürriyet.

Some stories present tragic/dramatic accounts of Syrian women married to Turkish men but they do not always explain whether they are extra-legal polygamous wives. The focus of these stories is on crimes within such marriages including murder, fraud or violence. One story concerned a Syrian minor and her tragic end in suicide after a divorce, but she was married to a Syrian relative and was not in a polygamous union. There are also stories about polygamy and child marriages of Syrian women in other countries such as Lebanon and Jordan.

5.5 Results of Interviews and Participant Observation

Some people contacted for this study think that Syrian women are not victims, that they married these men as a second wife to get a better life or as a result of their culture and cultural motivation. They sometimes think that polygamy and early marriages are normal and acceptable for Syrians, or perhaps even justified by Islamic religion. One NGO volunteer agrees with this opinion:

"Polygamy is normal for Syrians. They think that monogamy is a shame, it means insufficiency of the man. Syrian women are surprised at monogamy of Turkish men" (I-16, I.D., Housewife, (E/V/N), 36, F, married, Hatay, 2017). The names of interviewees are not used for privacy, instead they are numbered as Interviewee 1, 2 and so on. Another example is also from an expert (a volunteer), in this case from Gaziantep:

I know that Syrians have polygamist marriages. Once we went to a neighborhood to provide help to Syrians. Three Syrian women came for registration to receive the donations. I have seen that all three of them are married to the same Syrian man. (I-14, I.D., Teacher, (E/V/N), 41, M, married, Gaziantep, 2017)

A teacher shares the same opinion and observation about the issue: "Families offer their daughters to Turkish men as the second wife" (I-22, P.O., Teacher, (C), 31, M, married, Gaziantep, 2016).

Some of the participants also believed that Turkish men were saving these women as their second wives and protecting them from harassment and poverty. "Saving the women" is a discourse stigmatizing Syrian refugee women as passive and weak. A manager in a municipality responsible for the assistance of disadvantaged groups also shares his reaction against polygamy with Syrians in his personal life. "Two uncles of my wife married with Syrians as the second wife. They defend themselves saying 'we did it so save them'. I tell them 'You just take advantage of vulnerable women, you are sinners. Just give them money or a job if you want to help them for the sake of Allah'" (I-15, I.D., Manager, (E/V/N), 38, M, married, Şanlıurfa, 2016).

However, these women are often simultaneously stigmatized as husband stealers and home wreckers as we can see from the quote of a businessman.

Syrians increased divorce. Turkish women and children are destroyed because of them. Many men got married with Syrians and offended, neglected or left their families. (I-23, P.O., Businessman, (C), 42, M, married, Şanlıurfa, 2016)

There are urban legends about Syrian women that they prefer being a second wife, because they think they will have more affection and less work. A volunteer from Hatay adds:

Syrian women come and offer my friends to be their second wife. My friends get frustrated, but it is normal for Syrians. The wives in polygamist marriages call each other 'big sister' (*abla* in Turkish). In these marriages, everyone is Syrian. There is no problem between these wives. (I-16, I.D., Housewife, (E/V/N), 36, F, married, Hatay, 2017)

However, respondents also say that Syrian women avoid polygamy in their own families, which means polygamy is not really desired for them. I-13 from Gaziantep, a volunteer shares her view:

Polygamy is normal in Syrian culture but women try hard to avoid it. They keep making new babies, even 7-8 to prevent their husband to get married again. They are afraid of polygamy. They cannot object. (I-13, I.D., Housewife, (E/V/N), 48, F, married, Gaziantep, 2017)

In most of the cases men are not accused and are even defended (Malarek 2003).

There are other significant similarities between trafficked women and second wives and the stigmatization processes in both cases. In both cases, the women take no money or just a little money. Bribe money is paid to families, not to the women. In many of the polygamous marriages women are mistreated or abandoned due to lack of any legal marriage rights. They may be only used sexually (like sex workers), not saved or protected as claimed. In both cases, though people may accept that sex workers and second wives do what they have to do, they stigmatize the women anyway. In both cases the police are insufficient in prevention. In both cases men exercise power by their actions but women are stigmatized. In both cases first wives and families are also victims.

Others think that Syrian women are victims who have no choice but to accept polygamous marriages. The question of whether Syrian women have any chance to refuse these marriages is a significant issue. First, people may explain becoming a victim of these marriages in economic terms: poverty, the housing shortage, or being an unwanted daughter. An expert (volunteer) from Şanlıurfa describes this situation:

Syrian families are crowded and poor. They are afraid that something will happen to their daughters. A father gets his daughter married with someone even older than himself because of the despair. (I-11, I.D., Housewife, (E/V/N), 38, F, married, Şanlıurfa, 2017)

We can see the same idea of this expert also from a common person in the same city: "The women do not get married for fun. They do it just to survive, afford a living, to eat. But men let these women down. They abandon them, mistreat them" (I-10, I.D., Shopkeeper, (E/V/N), 56, M, married, Şanlıurfa, 2017).

People who do not blame the Syrian women are also more likely to mention Syrians being abandoned without any protection for them and their children and being caught in short-term temporary "marriages" for sex (sex work in the name of marriage).

Participants also describe young women sacrificing themselves for their families or being sacrificed by their families; women getting married with much older men, being misled about becoming a second rather than a first wife, having no rights within the marriage, experiencing domestic violence, and being treated as house servants.

Young girls sacrifice themselves for their families. An educated young Syrian girl told us that she would accept the marriage offer of a Turkish old man even though she does not want to, just to save her family. She was in tears. (I-9, I.D., Businessman, (E/V/N), 54, M, married, Şanlıurfa, 2017)

Most of the common people interviewed or observed think Syrians are not really victims. On the other hand, most of the experts think that Syrians are victims in these marriages and do not have much choice. Both experts and common people, however, do mention that Syrian women are refugees and in a special position.

5.6 Results of Content Analysis

All of the newspaper stories used interviews as their sources. There are interviews with first wives, with some Turkish men who have married with Syrian women as the second wife, and a limited number of interviews with Syrian second wives. Furthermore, there are interviews with common people such as shopkeepers and other Syrian and Turkish people who witnessed polygamous marriages. Other interviews are with experts such as doctors, NGO members, and lawyers. These news stories focus on several separate substantive issues, but the phenomenon of Syrian refugee women as second wives appears throughout all of these.

5.6.1 Women Abuse, Child Abuse and Sex Trafficking

These news reports mostly present both Turkish and Syrian women as victims. Experts such as lawyers, doctors, reporters and NGO members refer to these problems as results of the war and mass migration. They also mention the hard burden of the border cities who host big numbers of Syrians constituting large shares of the total population, and the disadvantageous conditions of these cities even before the migration. Orhan and Gündoğar also describe the extra burden of the border cities – crowdedness in hospitals and insufficient budget of the municipality for services. (Orhan and Gündoğar 2015, ORSAM AND TESEV) These stories also emphasize the problem of marriages with minor girls as a child abuse issue. Both camps and outside of the camps have the same problem.

“In the refugee camps, minor girls under 15 are sold by their families” (Unknown author, 2012, Haber Sol). A Syrian woman confirms the situation in the camps: “They proposed my 12 year old daughter for marriage several times. I want her to study but they keep asking all the time.” (Soguel, 2014, Csmonitor) Another news story explained the situation outside the camps, along the border as, “Syrian women being trafficked in the border, their families sell them” (Poyrazlar, 2013, Vocativ).

A report in Voice of America claims that 4.5% of Syrian refugee children in Turkey got married according to a report conducted by ECPAT International. “Syrian children (minor girls) are married by their family to protect them with a payment (dowry). Turkish men prefer younger and even child aged ones” (Yazıcıoğlu, 2016, Voice of America).

Some reports claim that Syrian women and girls are sold for sex in the name of being informal second wives. A report on Syrian Refugees Living Outside of the Camps emphasizes the hazards of sex trafficking on physical and psychological health of Syrian women. The interviewed Syrian women complain about being seen as potential second wives and being vulnerable to sexual abuse and marriages at early ages (MAZLUMDER, Group for Women Studies 2014). In their report based on their field work and interviews in Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa outside the camps, Davas and Zencir emphasize that Syrian women live in fear of sex trafficking and polygamy. These women also claim that these threats are even bigger in the camps if you live in a household without a man (Davas and Zencir 2014).

We can see this claim also in the news: “Syrian women are vulnerable to various dangers such as illicit marriages. They do sex work. Turkish customers take advantage of these women. They are under danger of human trafficking, pimps, match-makers, drug dealers, and traffickers” (Soguel, 2014 Csmonitor).

5.6.2 Blaming the Syrian Women

On the other hand, accusations against Syrians and Syrian women emerge in news interviews with common people like hairdressers and shopkeepers. A woman coiffeur in Kilis says “They steal our husbands” (Unknown Writer, 2014, The Guardian).

These comments often define Syrian women as non-victims and even accuse them. This is a clear stigmatization process against Syrian women. Syrian women are regarded as “homewreckers” “frauds” and “sex workers”. Syrian women are accused of making fraud marriages in the interviews conducted in Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep: “Some Syrian women are frauds, they take the dowry and run back to Syria”(Soguel, 2014 Csmonitor).

A common claim about Syrian women being homewreckers also can be seen: “Syrian women increased divorces. Syrian women work for much less. Turkish women and children are victims. Syrian women are very well-cared-for, fancy. Syrian women think ‘Turkish men are Turkish delight/candy, but women are not well cared-for’” (Avcı and Happani, 2014, Habertürk).

Blaming only the Syrian women because of the polygamy, not the men getting married with them, is also a serious hostile attitude: “Society sees the second wives, as prostitutes” (2016, Zambrana, Equal Times).

One story printed in Habertürk and another by columnist Gedik in Hürriyet seem critical of Syrians and Syrian women, apart from the views of interviewees. She even quotes from a doctor she met that Syrian women are frauds, and seems to agree with him/her (Gedik, 2016, Habertürk).

Another party blaming Syrian women are first wives who have been forced by Turkish husbands to accept the Syrian second wives. They express their own vulnerability, desertedness, loneliness, or poverty. Some were left, some left their husbands, some have to live with the second wives. While many of them blame the Syrian women and their husbands for this problem, all of them want their family and husband back.

Women in border towns and cities accuse Syrian women of luring away their husbands, saying their spouses routinely threaten them with taking a Syrian wife. They are angry with Syrians, they say their husbands are like beasts now. (Unknown author, 2014, The Guardian)

An interview with a doctor in Şanlıurfa who studied psychiatric problems resulting from the second wife phenomenon reported negative conclusions about polygamy for men and women involved in these marriages. He expresses that polygamy has increased after Syrian mass migration and all the polygamy cases with or without Syrians involved caused depression for men, first and second wives and increasing polygamy with Syrians also has the same result. (Unknown Writer, 2013, Haberler).

5.6.3 *Marriages to “Save” Syrian Women*

In interviews conducted with ordinary Turkish people, men marrying Syrian women as the second wife defend themselves as “caring for these women, giving them a family, and saving women and themselves from prostitution.”

A Turkish man says “They are cheap and I got married to help them as a good Muslim.” (Khadour, 2014, Syrian Observer).

An interview from The Times also supports this situation:

They are vulnerable to forced marriage and prostitution. Some have support of family, most don't. They feel they are burden for their families and have to get married as second wives. Lack of male kin to protect is unacceptable for them. (Ihsan, 2016, The Times)

This attitude both defines and stigmatizes Syrian women as passive victims. Saving them from prostitution also stigmatizes Syrian women as having an inclination to be sex-workers due to their conditions.

It is also mentioned that Islam allows polygamy. In some news reports, interviewees claim that polygamy is not restricted in Islam and it should be legal.

A Turkish husband defends his second marriage claiming that a second wife is more moral than girl friends. The West is immoral, not him. (Evin, 2014, Milliyet)

Another example is also from a Turkish husband.

We get married instead of going to brothels. This is more convenient in religion. We annoy our wives instead of Allah. (Unknown writer, 2015, Milliyet)

A husband in a polygamist marriage says, "polygamy is Islamic and should be legal" (Nawa and Sebzeci, 2016, Huffington Post).

Some NGO representatives are concerned about rising Islamic groups who defend polygamy.

People accuse the Muslim community claiming they promote polygamy after they got strengthened due to failure of the coup attempt in 2016. (Nawa and Sebzeci, 2016, Huffington Post)

5.7 Conclusions

As a result of mass migration of Syrians to Turkey, Syrians have encountered a new country with many challenges. Even though many people help the refugees, there are also abuses. Polygamous-informal marriages with Syrian minors and women are among these problems. As a result of these marriages, Syrian women are stigmatized as home wreckers and fancy women. This study aims to understand the representation of Syrian women in Turkey and analyse the stigmatization of Syrian women as the second wife and home-wrecker in Turkey due to polygamous marriages. In order to accomplish that, we have described stigmatization theory and its relation with Syrian women in Turkey, polygamous marriages as a problem in Turkey. Moreover, we have analysed the issue based on our observations, content analysis, and in depth interviews. In Turkey, Syrian women are described negatively due to their position as being minority and foreigner women. This is the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion stigmatization. (Goffman 1986: 13) Furthermore, Syrian women are also criticised based on their religion and morality. They are also stigmatized since they are non-citizens and this has similarities with stigmatization of non-citizens in the USA.

We can see that early marriages and polygamy was a problem of Turkey especially in East and South East of Turkey before Syrian migration, and the intensity of the problem of polygamy with Syrians is also in the same locations.

We investigated the issue with various methods such as content analysis of newspapers, in-depth interviews and participant observation to understand the stigmatization process of Syrian women in Turkey. We observed that Syrian women and minor girls are forced to get married with elder Turkish men in polygamous, informal marriages. These marriages cause many problems for Syrians and Turkish families.

The newspapers make their points with the interviews they have conducted. Within these stories only a few of them accuse Syrian women directly, while stigmatization towards Syrian women is expressed based on the experiences and observations of the interviewees and the editors. Within the in-depth interviews we conducted, mostly common people are critical towards Syrian women, while experts see them generally as victims.

According to the interviews and newspapers, Syrian women can be defined as victims. In this case they think that women must accept being the second wife to survive. Or they can be defined as non-victims. In this case the participants and newspapers think that Syrian women prefer these marriages, believing that they are normal and legal in Syria and that the women want an easy life. Even though there are many social reasons for stigmatisation of Syrian women for their polygamous marriages, the stigma is generally associated with being a woman (gender), and being a Syrian (minority racial status/ethnonational characteristics).

Men are not accused even when they instigate the informal/polygamist marriages. They are seen as privileged. Moreover, men claim that they are saving these girls by getting married with them. It is easier to accuse women in these kind of issues, and foreigners are the "others" who are not known well and have a different lifestyle open to criticism by everyone.

Reasons for these marriages may be summarized as financial problems and social problems of the Syrian women as refugees, with intentions of Syrian women to save their family financially and to gain cultural adaptation and social networking from Turkish families. Furthermore, they are seen by men as easy to marry as a second wife. Since these marriages are informal, Syrian women do not have legal rights in them, which also causes them to have a more disadvantageous position. Thus, polygamous marriages harm Syrian women in two ways causing double victimization: as being stigmatized and being in a marriage which is not legal.

As we can see, polygamous marriages with Syrian women have various aspects. The newspapers and in depth interviews reveal many common issues such as abuse of women, child marriages, sex trafficking, poverty and cultural differences. As a result of these marriages, Syrian women are overgeneralised, accused and stigmatized as second wives and home-wreckers. Polygamous marriages with Syrian women in Turkey causes many problems for Syrians and Turkish people. The circumstances of this stigmatized group, Syrian refugee women as second wives, must be changed. Increasing quality of life chances of Syrian refugee women, we can help to prevent irrational hatred and prejudice towards Syrians and provide solutions towards these illegal marriages with the support of common sense and collaboration with related institutions.

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Comparative Demography of the Syrian Diaspora: European and Middle Eastern Destinations

This book provides a demographic profile of the Syrian diaspora into Europe and identifies the issue of forced migration as a separate and increasingly salient topic within the more general field of migration research. It describes the progressive increase in numbers of Syrian refugees in different European countries during recent years and gives a demographic profile of the Syrian refugee population. The book also compares and synthesizes the demographic profiles presented, to show how the population of Syrian refugees differs from country to county in terms of age structure, sex ratio, family status, educational attainment and other social and economic characteristics. By providing a solid empirical portrait based on national and international statistics, this book will be a great resource to students, academics in migration and refugee studies as well as social scientists and policy-makers in European countries.

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