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**Religiosity and Public Attitudes toward Abortion among Turkish
Adults: From an Islamic Perspective**

*Türk Yetişkinlerin Dindarlığı ve Kürtaja Yönelik Toplumsal Tutumları:
İslami Perspektiften*

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Religiosity and Public Attitudes toward Abortion among Turkish Adults: From an Islamic Perspective*

Abstract

For several decades, a handful of studies have examined the relationship between religion and abortion; they particularly pay attention to public attitudes. However, fewer quantitative studies have considered Muslims' attitudes toward abortion. This study explores a new religious and traditional perspective that comes from Islam and also enhances the existing literature on the topic of religion and abortion. The significance of this study is based on the fact that Turkey, as well as its importance of geographical location and cultural heritage in today's world, is one of two Muslim-populated countries in which performing abortion is legal. In order to measure the pulse of the public about this topic, we used data from the fourth wave of the European Value Study (2008). Our purpose is to display how religious factors influence people's attitudes toward practicing abortion in the cases, "Women who are not married" and "A couple who does not want more children." The findings indicate that people who have a high level of religiosity are more likely to disapprove of the practice of abortion. This finding also can be a considerable indicator of public attitudes regarding abortion to contribute to probable changes in the abortion policy of Turkey.

Keywords: Sociology of Religion, Religiosity, Abortion, Islam, Turkey.

Türk Yetişkinlerin Dindarlığı ve Kürtaja Yönelik Toplumsal Tutumları: İslami Perspektiften*

Öz

Din ve kürtaj arasındaki ilişkiyi yirmi-otuz yıldır inceleyen iki elin parmakları kadar çalışma vardır ve bu çalışmalar özellikle halkın kürtaj konusundaki tavırlarını göz önünde bulundurmışlardır. Bununla birlikte, daha az niceliksel çalışma Müslümanların kürtaja karşı tutumlarını ele almıştır. Bu çalışma, İslam'dan gelen yeni bir dini ve geleneksel perspektifi araştırıyor ve aynı zamanda din ve kürtaj konusundaki mevcut literatürü zenginleştiriyor. Bu çalışmanın önemi, Türkiye'nin günümüz dünyasında coğrafi konumu ve kültürel mirasının önemi kadar, kürtaj yapmanın yasal olduğu iki Müslüman nüfuslu ülkeden biri olduğu gerçeğine dayanmaktadır. Halkın bu konudaki nabzını ölçmek için Avrupa Değer Çalışmasının (2008) dördüncü dalgasından elde edilen verileri kullandık. Amacımız, "Evli olmayan kadınlar" ve "Daha fazla çocuk istemeyen bir çift" gibi durumlarda, dini faktörlerin insanların kürtaja yönelik tutumlarını nasıl etkilediğini bulmaktır. Bulgular, yüksek dindarlık düzeyine sahip kişilerin kürtaj uygulamasını onaylamama olasılıklarının daha yüksek olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bulgu aynı zamanda, Türkiye'nin kürtaj politikasında olası değişikliklere katkıda bulunmak için kürtaja ilişkin halkın tutumunun önemli bir göstergesi olabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Din sosyolojisi, Dindarlık, Kürtaj, İslam, Türkiye.

Introduction

In the last three decades, numerous scholars have examined public thoughts on family issues regarding religious effects, particularly, on attitudes toward abortion.¹ However, these empirical studies have been done mostly in western countries. There is little body of research in Muslim-majority countries.

* An earlier version of this paper were presented at RRA Annual Meeting of Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 11 August, 2013.

1 William Alex McIntosh vd., "The Differential Impact of Religious Preference and Church Attendance on Attitudes Toward Abortion", *Review of Religious Research* (1979), 195-213; Ted G. Jelen, "Respect for Life, Sexual Morality, and Opposition to Abortion", *Review of Religious*

What is the main reason to study religion and attitudes toward abortion in Turkish society? Turkey is one of the fastest developing countries (is 13th country based on IMF's 2020 data: Gross Domestic Product and Purchasing power parity) in the world and has almost 80 million Muslim people. Having a secular state government and being an associate member of the European Union, Turkey is known as an ally with both western countries as well as other surrounding Islamic countries.

Moreover, today's Turkey is shown as a model country with its democratic feature for other monarchic and theocratic Islamic countries. As a result of this position, the importance of Turkey is expanding day by day in the academic environment. Preparations by the government to change the abortion policy in Turkey have made the country more relevant to study. In 2012, the current Turkish government (the Justice and Development Party) came up with ideas bringing some restrictions on abortion, which is currently legal to perform without restrictions before the 10th week of pregnancy. Since even political discourse regarding a change to the abortion policy encountered a great deal of reaction from a certain part of society, examining public opinion toward abortion will provide a significant development for the process. As Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge argue, "money is not all there is to policy, but there is little policy without it;" therefore, the results might even shape the prospective abortion policy of Turkey.² This study also explores a new religious and traditional perspective that comes from Islam that will enhance the literature on abortion practice.

Overall, this study has four objectives: (1) to review key framework from recent literature; (2) to review the Islamic perspective regarding abortion and abortion policy in Turkey; (3) to review available results to provide empirical findings for the prospective policy change; (4) to discuss several promising directions for future studies.

Theoretical Background

Religion and Abortion Attitudes in Western Societies

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), each year 25 million unsafe abortions occur (WHO 2017). Almost all (97%) of unsafe abortions occurred in developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America; though, the majority of the research on abortion attitudes have been conducted in Western

Research (1984), 220-231; Bradley R. Hertel - Michael Hughes, "Religious Affiliation, Attendance, and Support for 'Pro-family' Issues in the United States", *Social Forces* 65/3 (1987), 858-882; Joseph B. Tamney vd., "The Abortion Controversy: Conflicting Beliefs and Values in American society", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (1992), 32-46; Christopher G. Ellison vd., "Religion and Abortion Attitudes among US Hispanics: Findings from the 1990 Latino National Political Survey", *Social Science Quarterly* 86/1 (2005), 192-208.

2 Hans-Dieter Klingemann vd., *Parties, Policies, and Democracy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

societies (e.g., The U.S., Canada, and Europe).³ The relationship between religion and abortion has been studied for decades, and it is found that religious people are more likely to oppose abortion and abortion attitudes than others.⁴ Emerson argued that although the effect of religion on abortion attitudes was indirect through worldview, public religiosity is directly associated with attitudes toward abortion in the U.S.⁵ In addition, many scholars state that individuals' conservativeness and activeness in their faiths are more likely to generate negative attitudes toward abortion.⁶

In addition to religiosity, the religious identities of individuals have an important effect on their attitudes toward abortion. As Harris and Mills argue, religious identities, affiliations, and practices that are effective considerably on people's cultural beliefs and values are also the indicators of people's attitudes.⁷ For example, Carol and Milewski claim that the effect of religiosity varies in a cross-national perspective (e.g., German and France), but religiosity has a strong correlation with abortion and attitudes toward abortion.⁸

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- 3 Michael O. Emerson, "Through Tinted Glasses: Religion, Worldviews, and Abortion Attitudes", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1996), 41-55; Clyde Wilcox, "Race, Religion, Region and Abortion Attitudes", *Sociological Analysis* 53/1 (1992), 97-105; Merlin B. Brinkerhoff - Marlene M. MacKie, "Religious Denominations' Impact upon Gender Attitudes: Some Methodological Implications", *Review of Religious Research* (1984), 365-378; Sarah Carol - Nadja Milewski, "Attitudes toward Abortion among the Muslim Minority and Non-Muslim Majority in Cross-National Perspective: Can Religiosity Explain the Differences?", *Sociology of Religion* 78/4 (2017), 456-491; Drew Halfmann, *Doctors and Demonstrators: How Political Institutions Shape Abortion Law in the United States, Britain, and Canada* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
 - 4 Curtis P. Oglan - Ana Paula Verona, "Religion and Attitudes toward Abortion and Abortion Policy in Brazil", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50/4 (2011), 812-821; Ted G. Jelen - Clyde Wilcox, "Causes and Consequences of Public Attitudes toward Abortion: A Review and Research Agenda", *Political Research Quarterly* 56/4 (2003), 489-500; Brian Steensland vd., "The Measure of American Religion: Toward Improving the State of the Art", *Social forces* 79/1 (2000), 291-318; John Lynxwiler, "The Impact of Religiosity on Race Variations in Abortion Attitudes", *Sociological Spectrum* 19/3 (1999), 359-377; Eric Woodrum - Beth L. Davison, "Reexamination of Religious Influences on Abortion Attitudes", *Review of religious research* (1992), 229-243.
 - 5 Michael O. Emerson, "Through tinted glasses: Religion, Worldviews, and Abortion Attitudes", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35/1 (1996), 41-55.
 - 6 John P. Bartkowski vd., "Faith, Race-ethnicity, and Public Policy Preferences: Religious Schemas and Abortion Attitudes among US Latinos", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51/2 (2012), 343-358; John P. Hoffmann - Sherrie Mills Johnson, "Attitudes toward Abortion among Religious Traditions in the United States: Change or Continuity?", *Sociology of Religion* 66/2 (2005), 161-182; Steensland vd., "The Measure of American Religion: Toward Improving the State of the Art", *Social forces* 79/1 (2000), 291-318.
 - 7 Richard J. Harris - Edgar W. Mills, "Religion, Values and Attitudes toward Abortion", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1985), 137-154.
 - 8 Sarah Carol - Nadja Milewski, "Attitudes toward Abortion among the Muslim Minority and Non-Muslim Majority in Cross-National Perspective: Can Religiosity Explain the Differences?", *Sociology of Religion* 78/4 (2017), 456-491.

Thus, based on these empirical results, people's involvement in religious practices and activities is a vital factor in their attitudes toward abortion in the Christian cultural background.

Religion and Abortion in Islam

In order to understand Muslims' attitudes on abortion, it is important to explain the Islamic perspective in terms of Islamic law (Sharia) and empirically examine this phenomenon in a Muslim majority country, Turkey. Today's Islam has two main branches, Sunni and Shia, with many sub-segments. The Sunni branch has four dominant subdivisions, Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, and Maliki, while Shia has Twelver, Yazidi and Ismaili. The main difference among these groups is the interpretation of the Quran and perception of Sunnah (teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad). Based on changing conditions in today's world, such as advancements in science and technology, religious leaders have various interpretations of social events that people have been facing in their life.

Abortion is one of the controversial topics that has remained since the early time of Islam. In contrast to the stereotype about the perception of Islam on the practice of abortion, which is "Islam prohibits abortion," the Islamic schools of thoughts have different approaches to it. Because of the absence of a clear and direct statement about abortion in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, the earliest Ulama (Muslim scholars) have debated the permissibility of the intentional miscarriage. They all agreed that killing a souled-person is murder, based on a verse from the Holy Qur'an "*When the infant girl, buried alive, is asked for what crime she was slain*" (81:8-9);⁹ and another states: "*Take not life which Allah has made sacred*" (6:151).¹⁰ These verses clearly declare the prohibition of the pre-Islamic tradition in which fathers would bury their female children alive. Another verse also supports the previous statement that led some scholars to take a position against all abortion. It is "*And do not kill your children for fear of poverty: We give them sustenance and yourselves (too): surely to kill them is a great wrong.*" (17:31).¹¹

The main debates over abortion have been made on the development of the fetus. The Holy Qur'an distinctly mentions the evaluation of the fetus that ends with ensoulment. Ulama agree that after the ensoulment process, a fetus takes a personality and cannot be aborted. However, there is doubt about the time of ensoulment based on this verse.

He who has made everything which He has created most good. He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay, and made his

9 *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary*, trans. Maulana Muhammed Ali (Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore Inc., 2002), Al-Takwīr 81/8-9.

10 *The Holy Qur'an*. Al-An'am 6/151.

11 *The Holy Qur'an*. Al-Isra 17/31.

progeny from a quintessence of the nature of a fluid despised. Then He fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him something of His Ruh (Life-Energy). And (with this) He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and understanding. (32:7-9).¹²

Because of the uncertainty of the exact time of the ensoulment process in the development of a fetus, Hanafī scholars accept the permissibility of abortion until 120 days, while Hanbali scholars permit it before 40 days.¹³ The Shafi'i school has three main views on abortion: first, it is permissible until 80 days; second, it is permissible until 120 days; last, Shafi'i jurist al-Ghazzālī (one of most influential people on Islamic history for the foundation of institutional religion) forbids it at any time, like the Maliki School and Imami Shi'is.¹⁴ Although some Islamic law schools allow the practice of abortion, they require a necessary reason to implement it. Without a reason, such as a mother's health in danger, they accept abortion as next to haram (forbidden), except for some early Hanafī scholars who argue that practicing abortion is like using contraceptive methods, which is permitted in Islam.¹⁵

Today, most contemporary Muslim scholars, with an eye on new technological advances that allow witnessing fetus development clearly, seem more likely to disapprove of the practice of abortion, except in some cases that lead to choosing the lesser of two evils, such as the mother's life in danger and rape, than early Islamic Schools of thoughts.¹⁶ This religious discourse also has influenced the justice system, in that Muslim-populated countries have legislation against practicing abortion, except for Tunisia and Turkey. Although Tunisia and Turkey liberalized their previous abortion policies, the religious pressures on the political arenas to make abortion prohibited still exist. Both in Tunisia, with an uprising in 2010, and Turkey, pro-Islamic parties have gained power and run the governments now. These changes in the political environments have made abortion an issue again, in that there are conflicts in both countries between religious people and secular people. Although

12 *The Holy Qur'an*. Al-Sajda 32/7-9.

13 Ali Bârdakoglu, "Cinsi Hayat", *İlmihal: İslam ve Toplum* (İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1998), 137-146; Nurgül Özen, *İslam Hukukuna Göre Kürtaj ile İlgili Görüşlerin ve Delillerin Değerlendirilmesi: Bosna Örneği* (İzmir: İzmir Kâtip Çelebi University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master's Thesis 2020), 48-56.

14 Kiarash Aramesh, "A Shiite Perspective toward Abortion", *DARU Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences* Suppl. 1 (2006), 37-39.

15 Donna Lee Bowen, "Abortion, Islam, and the 1994 Cairo Population Conference", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29/2 (1997), 161-184; Kiarash Aramesh, "A Shiite Perspective toward Abortion".

16 Nurgül Özen, *İslam Hukukuna Göre Kürtaj ile İlgili Görüşlerin ve Delillerin Değerlendirilmesi: Bosna Örneği*, 48-56.

Turkish people mostly belong to the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools of thought,¹⁷ according to the 2013 Pew Research Center's report, the majority of people think that abortion is morally wrong by 52 percent, while 18 percent thinks it is morally acceptable.¹⁸ The remaining percentage of people is divided into two categories, which are "depends on the situation (volunteered)" by 15 percent, "not a moral issue" by 14 percent and 1 percent refused to answer.

On the other hand, some Muslim scholars accept practicing abortion until 120 days as a contraceptive that is mostly permitted in Islam.¹⁹ Bowen claims that the imams who accept the permissibility of abortion are more likely spending their time mentoring people who have problems in their life rather than spending their time reading previous Islamic thoughts.²⁰ Bowen also continues to assert that listening to these people's reasons to have an abortion makes imams more sensitive to having a positive approach to the practice of abortion.²¹

As stated previously, Islam permits, even obligates, the practice of abortion in certain conditions. Therefore, because the reasons play significant roles in the permissibility of abortion, answering the question of which reasons justify the acceptability of abortion is a key to understanding the Islamic standpoint on abortion. It seems all Islamic jurists are unanimous on when the mother's life is in danger, the practice of abortion is necessary. The discussions on the remaining reasons are controversial: most Sunni scholars allow abortion in the result of rape, while Shiite scholars think it is not an adequate cause to practice abortion.²² Because Islam strictly prohibits sexual relationships out of the marriage institution, Muslim scholars have not considered it a reason for abortion. Actually, there are not many thoughts on abortion as a consequence of adultery. However, it is a common Turkish tradition when a woman becomes pregnant out of wedlock for the woman's family to force the man and woman to marry instead of having an abortion. On the other hand, especially in the eastern part of Turkey, since it is regarded as a very shameful behavior for the family, the older family members can decide to kill their pregnant girls to save their honor despite honor killings despite it is less practiced today.²³

17 Zübeyir Nişancı and Ümmügülsüm Aysan, "Türkiye'de Sosyodemografik ve Sosyokültürel Göstergelere Göre Dindarlık Seviyeleri", *Sosyoloji Dergisi/Journal of Sociology* 39/2 (2019).

18 Pew Research Center (PEW), "Spring 2013 Survey: *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project* (blog), 01 Mayıs 2013" (Access 24 August 2020).

19 Mehmet Dirik, "İslam Hukuku Açısından Kürtaj", *Türkiye Din Eğitimi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5 (2018), 73.

20 Bowen, "Abortion, Islam, and the 1994 Cairo Population Conference", 161-184.

21 Bowen, "Abortion, Islam, and the 1994 Cairo Population Conference", 161-184.

22 Aramesh, "A Shiite Perspective toward Abortion", 37-39.

23 Recep Doğan, "The Profiles of Victims, Perpetrators, and Unfounded Beliefs in Honor Killings in Turkey", *Homicide Studies* 18/4 (2014), 389-416.

Despite the Islamic schools of thought historically have various perspectives and fatwas for induced abortion the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs considers abortion is to kill an embryo that is accepted as a person and can be done only if the mother's life is in danger. Even in the rape of women circumstance, the decision of induced abortion should be taken by a scientific team indicating abortion is not a women's right to choose but respect to life.²⁴

In sum, there are four main discourses in Islam about practicing abortion that we understand: first, abortion is permissible in the first 120 days, with no need for justification; second, abortion is allowed in that period only with a valid reason; third, abortion within 120 days is disliked (makruh); and last, abortion is not acceptable in any case. However, in most of today's Muslim countries, scholars do not permit the practice of abortion in the case of unwanted pregnancies²⁵. Thus, the majority of Muslim attitudes toward abortion in these cases are negative in almost all Muslim countries.²⁶ Even though the results of the Pew Research Center's 2014 report indicate that the majority of Turkish people think that abortion is wrong, the practicing of abortion in Turkey is legal until the 10th week.

Abortion Policy in Turkey

In Turkish history, abortion discussions have their roots in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire consisted of quite a diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious population. Because of that diverse population, the system of law was quite dynamic to meet the needs of all people in the empire. There are three main parts in the Ottoman legal system: (1) Shari'a (Islamic law), (2) Kanun (customary law), and (3) in some cases, non-Muslims were treated by their law and rules, considering their religious background.²⁷ As an Islamic empire, the Ottoman Empire was mostly governed by Shari'a law until the Tanzimat (Reorganization) era between 1839 and 1876.²⁸ The Tanzimat era is the period in which the Ottoman Empire followed the transformation in political and social life in European societies and applied some of these changes to the Ottoman economy and society in order to shrink the growing weakness in comparison to a European power. During that period, one of the crucial arguments was about the anti-abortion regulations of the state.²⁹ Regulations

24 Perihan Elif Ekmekci, "Abortion in Islamic Ethics, and How it is Perceived in Turkey: A Secular, Muslim Country", *Journal of Religion and Health* 56/3 (2017), 884-895.

25 Aramesh, "A Shiite perspective toward abortion", 37-39.

26 Pew Research Center (PEW) (Access 24 August 2020).

27 Ahmed Akgündüz - Said Öztürk, *Bilinmeyen Osmanlı* (İstanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1999, 1-64).

28 Akgündüz - Öztürk, *Bilinmeyen Osmanlı*, 1-64.

29 Tuba Demirci, *Body, Disease and Late Ottoman Literature: Debates on Ottoman Muslim Family in the Tanzimat Period (1839-1908)* (Ankara: Bilkent University, Institute of Economy and Social Sciences, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2008).

included selling medical plants, performing, and assisting abortions. Some of the main reasons for these regulations were the Islamic rules about killing babies. Those religious rules prohibit people from having the right to talk over others' lives. The other reason was the recently started population-record system by the Ottoman central administration to measure the death and birth rate in society. The death records through abortion revealed a considerable increase that is quite a danger to the population; therefore, the regulations for abortion were utilized and remained until even after the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923.

Abortion regulations lasted until the law allowing voluntary abortion was enacted in 1983. According to this law, individuals can decide to have an abortion without any other obligation before the 10th week of their pregnancy; if the pregnancy is beyond the 10th week, the law requires a medical reason.³⁰ According to 2012 study of the Turkish Statistical Institute, 1.5 million pregnancies occurred in Turkey in 2012 and 77.9 percent of these pregnancies resulted in a healthy birth, 10.9 percent miscarriage, 8.7 percent abortion, and 1.7 percent stillbirth.³¹ Based on these results, abortion is discussed again as a crucial issue in Turkey in 2012 because it is becoming quite common and easy, so women undergo a second or third induced abortion, which can be dangerous for their health.³² The other striking point is that women who seek abortions are mostly in their young reproductive years.³³ The percent of induced abortion declined from 18 percent in 1993 to 6 percent in 2018, and most (62 percent) of the induced abortions were decided by the advice of doctors. The rest (38 percent) of the induced abortions were decided to have induced abortions without any medical advice. Thus, 38 percent of women who had induced abortion are more likely to be affected by the negative effects of induced abortion, such as the risk of mental health, posttraumatic stress and less coping ability.³⁴ In 2012, Health Minister Recep Akdağ gave an interview about this topic and his main points were related to women's health, specifically

30 *Resmî Gazete*, "Rahim Tahliyesi ve Sterilizasyon Hizmetlerinin Yürütülmesi ve Denetlenmesine İlişkin Tüzük", (18 December 1983).

31 Turkish Statistical Institute (Turkstat), "General Management of Population and Citizenship 2012" (Access 24 August 2020).

32 Vincent M. Rue vd., "Induced Abortion and Traumatic Stress: A Preliminary Comparison of American and Russian Women", *Medical Science Monitor* 10/10 (2004), 5-16.

33 Ayşe Akın - Münevver Bertan, "Contraception, Abortion and Maternal Health Services in Turkey", *Results of Further Analysis of the 1993 Turkish DHS* (1996); Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, "Türkiye Nüfus ve Sağlık Araştırması (2018)", (2018).

34 Rue, "Induced Abortion and Traumatic Stress: A Preliminary Comparison of American and Russian Women", 5-16.

reproduction health, the rights of doctors who do not want to perform abortions, and the changing characteristics of the population.³⁵

The problems that induced abortion creates are not only for women but gynecologists and for the whole population. First, because of abortion, women's bodies are drawn into a quite dangerous situation in which women's preterm birth risk and for infant, the risk of being born low birth weight increase.³⁶ In addition, women who have an abortion are more likely to have elevated rates of subsequent mental health problems (i.e. depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviors and substance use disorders).³⁷ Secondly, the minister touched on the rights of gynecologists who are working in state hospitals and not willing to practice abortion.³⁸ Because of the commonness and cheapness of state hospitals, even though it is not a necessary surgery for patients, these situations come to all gynecologists who work in state hospitals. Finally, the minister talks about people's understanding of abortion as a family-planning method.³⁹ He said that, as a government, we encourage people to have at least three children and do not approve of induced abortion if there are not medical reasons. The latent purpose of this discussion might be to point out "the decreasing rate of young people in the Turkish population" to avoid facing the results of having an old population, which European countries have been dealing with for decades.

Since May 2012, many scholars have analyzed the government's new policy proposal on induced abortions in Turkey from different perspectives. Because abortion is something woman related, some scholars studied intellectual religious women's (IRW) opinions in their columns and discourses. Özcan discusses the different agencies of IRW on the abortion policy proposal.⁴⁰

35 Bursadabugün, "Sağlık Bakanı Recep Akdağ, Gündemde Olan Kürtaj ve Sezaryen Uygulamalarına Getirilecek Yeni Düzenlemeler Konusunda Gazetecilerin Sorularını Yanıtladı" (Access 02 December 2020); *Hürriyet*, "Bakan Akdağ'dan Kürtaj Açıklaması" (Access 02 December 2020); Agos "Kürtaj Düzenlemesiyle ilgili Çelişkili Açıklamalar Geliyor" (Access 02 December 2020).

36 J. Lumley, "The Association between Prior Spontaneous Abortion, Prior Induced Abortion and Preterm Birth in First Singleton Births", *Prenatal and Neonatal Medicine* 3/1 (1998), 21-24; Prakesh S. Shah - J. Zao, "Induced Termination of Pregnancy and Low Birthweight and Preterm Birth: A Systematic Review and Meta-analyses", *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 116/11 (2009), 1425-1442.

37 David M. Fergusson, L. John Horwood, and Elizabeth M. Ridder, "Abortion in Young Women and Subsequent Mental Health", *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 47/ 1 (2006), 16-24.

38 *Milliyet*, "Kürtaj Yaptıran Kadına Hapis" (Access 02 December 2020).

39 Bursadabugün, "Sağlık Bakanı Recep Akdağ, Gündemde Olan Kürtaj ve Sezaryen Uygulamalarına Getirilecek Yeni Düzenlemeler Konusunda Gazetecilerin Sorularını Yanıtladı"; *Hürriyet*, "Bakan Akdağ'dan Kürtaj Açıklaması".

40 Tuğba Özcan, *The Ambivalent Political Agency of Intellectual Religious Women in Turkey: A Case Study of the Abortion Debate in 2012*, (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master's Thesis, 2015), 116-119; Çağla Kubilay, "İslami Muhafazakâr Kadın

First agency of IRWs comply with religious arguments and avoid abortion. The second agency of IRW criticized both the statements of the government male representatives about induced abortion and how secular people interpret their thoughts (“my body my decision”). The third agency of IRW grow their argument on the raped women discussion and criticized the male interpretation of Islamic tradition and opposed neither secular nor submission approaches. Kubilay argued that although some of IRW openly confront the abortion ban, because they develop their argument on the right to life to embryo and do not talk about the physical completeness of women body, Kubilay claims that IRW in secret support the ones who accept abortion ban.

Some other researchers focused on Foucault’s bio-politics concept indicating the interwoven relationship between politics and human biology.⁴¹ Both Güngördü and Kaynak discussed the abortion policy of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) to control the decreasing birth rate from Foucault’s biopolitics argument.⁴² In other words, the idea of decreasing the young dependency ratio will increase the responsibility of the government to take care of elder citizens in the state, thus JDP has built pronatalist policies, in this case, abortion ban, with the nationalist ideology.

The studies mentioned above are theoretical studies using the compilation of materials or observations to explore and develop theories. Thus, it is hardly possible to generalize those outcomes to Turkey and the findings barely represent the public opinion. Because of these limitations, it is important to reveal the people’s opinion on induced abortion through empirical studies to help policymakers. The argument above reveals the importance of conducting research through large datasets that represent the population.

The new policy proposal presented for the council of ministers included a consultation system for people who want to have an induced abortion.⁴³ During this consultation, those people will be given some videos about the abortion process to watch, will be informed about the possible risks of the process, and will be given some time to reconsider having an induced abortion.

Yazarların Perspektifinden Kürtaj Tartışması: Eleştirel Bir Değerlendirme”, *Alternatif Politika* 6/3 (2014), 387-421.

41 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (s.1.: Vintage, 2012).

42 Sedef Erkmen Güngördü, *AKP Döneminde Türkiye’de Biyopolitik Yönelimler: Kürtaj Politikaları Üzerine Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2019), 116-119; Merve Kaynak, *Bio-politics of the AKP Rule: Women, Sexuality and Reproduction* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University, Institute of Social Sciences, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2016), 190-195.

43 *Milliyet*, “Kürtaj Yaptıran Kadına Hapis”.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a negative relationship between people's subjective religiosity and approval of practicing abortion in the case that couples do not want more children.

H2: There is a negative relationship between people's subjective religiosity and approval of practicing abortion in the case that partners are not married.

H3: There is a negative association between people's belief in doctrinal orthodoxy and approval of practicing abortion in the case that couples do not want more children.

H4: There is also a negative association between people's belief in doctrinal orthodoxy and approval of practicing abortion in the case that partners are not married.

H5: There is a negative relationship between the importance of religion and God in peoples' lives and their approval of practicing abortion in the case that couples do not want more children.

H6: There is a negative relationship between the importance of religion and God in peoples' lives and their approval of practicing abortion in the case that partners are not married.

H7: The increase in peoples' frequency of prayer will negatively affect their approval of practicing abortion in the case that couples do not want more children.

H8: The increase in peoples' frequency of prayer will negatively affect their approval of practicing abortion in the case that partners are not married.

Data and Methodology

In order to explore religious variations in attitudes toward abortion, we used binary logistic regression analyses to test data from the 2008 European Value Study (EVS). This study used a subset of that data, utilizing responses from Turkey (N=2384). The sample was drawn from the adult population of the country 18 years old and older. The study included two separate binary logistic regression analyses to test the hypotheses regarding the effects of respondents' religiousness on their attitudes toward abortion. Prior to the regression analyses, missing variables were removed from the analysis through the listwise deletion method; thus, we obtained an analytic subsample of 1850 respondents from the EVS-2008.

Dependent variables

Two dependent variables were included to gauge the respondents' attitudes toward performing abortions. The first dependent variable is operationalized on the EVS: "Do you approve abortion if a woman is not married?" The pos-

sible responses include "1=Approve" or "2=Disapprove." The second dependent variable is measured by the question "Do you approve abortion if a couple does not want more children?" Two scales also measured the respondents' answers: "1=Approve" or "2=Disapprove." Both dependent variables were recoded into "0=Disapprove" and "1=Approve" in order to distinguish the religious variables' effect on people's approval attitudes toward abortion.

Independent Variables

This study runs five independent variables that consist of three different groups of religious outcomes. The first measure group is orthodoxy belief, which is a mean index variable with alpha .800 created by gathering six items which are "Do you believe in God?", "Do you believe in life after death?", "Do you believe in Hell?", "Do you believe in Heaven?", "Do you believe in Sin?", and "Do you get comfort and strength from religion?" The responses are 0="no"; 1="yes." The second group is religious salience, which contains three religious variables which are "How important is religion in your life?" and "How important is God in your life?" The responses of these two questions are recoded into two categories, 0="others"; 1="very important." The last question in religious salience group is "Are you a religious person?" which is recoded into a dummy variable having categories 1="religious person" and 0="not religious person." The last group is designed to measure behavioral dimension; that is, prayer. The respondents were asked "How often do you pray to God outside of religious services? The responses are recoded as a dummy variable: 0="less than every day" and 1="every day." We also need to clarify that the frequency of prayer measured in the survey does not include *namaz*, which is a prayer that all Muslims are expected to practice five times a day. Another available variable is religious attendance. However, because women do not attend regularly mosques, especially for Friday prayers, in Turkey, it is not possible to use in the sample to prevent statistical bias results.

Control variables

Important control variables included: annual income having five categories from "Poor" to "Rich." In addition, age (in years), gender (1=female), marital status (1=married), and education level that is recoded into four categories as no education, primary, middle, and higher education levels. All models include all control variables to adjust for the possible effect of these control variables that may be associated with the independent or dependent variables used in this study.

Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all variables in this study. 32.3 percent (599) of respondents who approve of abortion if women are not married,

in contrast to 67.7 percent (1256) do not approve. The percentage of respondents who approve of abortion if couples do not want more children is 28.1, in contrast to 71.9 percent of respondents who disapprove. These results indicate that the majority of respondents are opposed to abortion regardless of these two reasons. The frequencies of independent variables, which are religion variables, indicate that the majority of respondents are quite religious. As can be seen from the percentages of variables, the responses are gathered on the categories indicating individuals' highly religiousness in the variables: religious person, belief, importance of religion, importance of God, and frequency of prayer (91.6 percent, 92.5 percent, 83.6 percent, 84.4 percent, and 81.8 percent, respectively). The percentage of females, 56.2 percent (1042) is a little bit higher than the percentage of males, 43.8 percent (813). The majority of the respondents are married.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

		Frequency	Percent
Dependent Variables			
Abortion: If woman not married	Approve	599	32.3%
	Disapprove	1256	67.7%
Abortion: If couple does not want more children	Approve	522	28.1%
	Disapprove	1333	71.9%
Independent Variables			
Belief	Perfect believer	1699	91.6%
	Skeptic	156	8.4%
Religiousness	Religious	1715	92.5%
	Not religious	140	7.5%
Importance of Religion	Very important	1550	83.6%
	Not very important	305	16.4%
Importance of God	Very important	1547	84.4%
	Not very important	303	15.6%
Frequency of Prayer	Every day	1518	81.8%
	More than once a week	187	10.1%
	Once a week	58	3.1%
	At least once a month	28	1.5%
	Several times a year	29	1.6%
	Less often	14	0.8%
	Never	21	1.1%
Control variables			
Gender	Male	813	43.8%
	Female	1042	56.2%
Marital Status	Married	1343	72.4%
	Others	512	27.6%
Education Level	No education	232	12.5%
	Primary	1084	58.4%
	Middle	358	19.3%
	High	181	9.8%
Age	15-29	578	31.2%
	30-44	641	34.6%
	45-59	386	20.8%
	60 and over	250	13.5%
Income	Poor	353	19.0%
	Mid-Poor	212	11.4%
	Middle	775	41.9%
	Mid-Rich	432	23.3%
	Rich	81	4.4%

N=1855

While 12.5 percent of respondents do not have any educational background, 58.4 percent have a background of primary education, 19.3 percent have middle education, and 9.8 percent high education. The frequency of respondents is considerably high in young and middle age categories. The results also indicate that more than 70 percent of respondents are in the middle (Mid-poor, Middle, and Mid-Rich) income categories.

The logistic analyses in this study for our hypotheses. All religious variables reveal negative associations with the attitudes toward abortion that is consistent with previous studies. In the first part of Table 2, in Model 1, we examine the effects of respondents' self-definitions regarding their religiosity. More specifically, respondents who define themselves as a religious person have 35 percent less odds of approving attitudes toward abortion in the case of women who are not married than respondents who do not define themselves as a religious person, after holding all other independent variables constant. In Model 2, respondents' beliefs in orthodoxy are tested. The result indicates that for every unit increase in peoples' beliefs in doctrinal orthodoxy, the odds of having approving attitudes toward abortion for women who are not married decrease by 25 percent, all else being equal. In Model 3, we analyze the effects of the importance of religion in individuals' lives. The results reveal that all else being equal, for respondents who say that religion is very important in their lives, the odds of having approving attitudes toward abortion for women who are not married is 58 percent less than for respondents who do not say that religion is important in their lives, after controlling all other independent variables. In Model 4, the importance of God in respondents' lives is analyzed.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Analysis of Attitudes Toward Abortion on Religious Variables

Variables	Abortion: If Woman Not Married						Abortion: If Couple Does Not Want More Children					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Annual Income	1.388***	1.363***	1.328***	1.357***	1.336***	1.302***	1.295***	1.274***	1.245***	1.275***	1.252***	1.216**
Gender (Female)	1.287*	1.307*	1.292*	1.318*	1.364**	1.362**	1.389**	1.398**	1.367*	1.393**	1.451**	1.463**
Age	1.001	1.001	1.001	1.002	1.003	1.003	1.007	1.007	1.007	1.007	1.009*	1.008*
Education	1.171*	1.049*	1.041†	1.047*	1.046*	1.040	1.070**	1.072**	1.065**	1.072**	1.071**	1.063**
Marital Status	0.905	0.905	0.909	0.940	0.927	0.941	0.865	0.845	0.848	0.877	0.867	0.887
Religious Person (Yes)	0.650*					1.292	0.434***					0.834
Belief		0.754***				0.952		0.653***				0.826*
Importance of Religion			0.433***			0.589***		0.409***				0.613**
Importance of God				0.394***		0.532***				0.387***		0.553***
Prayer					0.727***	0.818*					0.715***	0.854**

* p<0.050 ** p<0.010 *** p<0.001.

N=1855

The model shows that for people who say that God is very important in their lives, the odds of having positive attitudes toward abortion in the case of women who are not married is 61 percent less than for respondents who do not say that God is very important in their lives, after holding other independent variables constant. In Model 5, the effect of respondents' frequency of prayers on their attitudes toward abortion is tested. The results reveal that, all else being equal, for each unit increase in respondents' prayer, the odds of having approving attitudes toward abortion in the case of women who are not married decreases by 27 percent. In Model 6, which is a full model, we tested the effects of all religious variables on abortion in the case of women who are not married. While the variables, religious person and orthodoxy belief of respondents, lost their significance, the other three independent variables, importance of religion, importance of God, and prayer, maintain their significance by having negative effects on attitudes toward abortion in the case of women who are not married. More specifically, for people who say that religion and God are very important in their lives, the odds of having approving attitudes toward abortion in the case of couples who do not want more children is 41 percent and 47 percent, respectively, less than people who say that religion and God are not important in their lives, after holding all other independent variables constant. After controlling other independent variables, for every unit increase in people's prayers, the odds of having positive attitudes toward abortion for couples who do not want more children decrease by 18 percent.

In the second part of the table, we analyze the effects of religious variables on people's attitudes toward abortion in the case of couples who do not want more children. All religious variables reveal negative associations with the dependent variable. In Model 1, the result indicates that for respondents who define themselves as religious persons, the odds of having approving attitudes toward abortion in the case of couples who do not want more children is 56 percent less than for respondents who do not define themselves as religious persons, all else being equal. In Model 2, respondents' orthodoxy belief shows a highly significant negative result indicating that for every unit increase in people's belief in doctrinal orthodoxy, the odds of having approving attitudes toward abortion for couples who do not want more children decrease by 35 percent, holding all other independent variables constant. In Model 3 and 4, results reveal that, after controlling all other independent variables, people who say that religion and God are important in their lives have 59 percent and 61 percent, respectively, less odds of approving attitudes toward abortion in the case of couples who do not want more children than people who say that religion and God are not important in their lives, all else being equal. In Model 5, respondents' frequency of prayer shows a highly significant negative effect on abortion for couples who do not want more children. The result reveals

that for every unit increase in prayer, the odds of having positive attitudes toward abortion in the case of couples who do not want more children decrease by 29 percent, holding all other independent variables constant. In Model 6, we tested the effects of all religious variables on abortion in the case of couples who do not want more children. In this analysis, the variable of religious person lost its significance. Even though there is a decrease in the significance of peoples' belief in doctrinal orthodoxy, it is still significant, $p < .050$. More specifically, all else being equal, for every unit increase in individuals' belief in doctrinal orthodoxy, the odds of having positive attitudes toward abortion if a couple does not want more children decrease by 17 percent. Holding all other independent variables constant, people who say that religion and God are important in their lives have 40 percent and 46 percent, respectively, less odds of having approving attitudes toward abortion in the case of couples who do not want more children. For every unit increase in people's prayers, the odds of having positive attitudes toward abortion for couples who do not want more children decrease by 15 percent, all else being equal.

Discussion

This study improves the existing literature on abortion by focusing on a non-western basis study. We pay attention to reasons for practicing abortion and Islamic teaching, beliefs, religious salience and practices on the attitudes that form Turkish adults' opinions on abortion issue differing from the existing theoretical and descriptive abortion studies on Turkey. Our findings display that the importance of God is the most dominant predictor for the attitude on the practice of abortion. Particularly, our study suggests that religious salience and religious practice is related with decrease of odds of Turkish adults' attitudes toward abortion in cases of unwanted pregnancy and pregnancy out of marriage. Although we look at ancillary analysis to examine the interaction effects with control variables, we did not find any significant results. In this section, we argue that the implications of our results note the study limitations and discuss future possibilities for future inquiries.

The results suggest that particular religious doctrines of Islam, when religious people internalize them, shape individuals' perspective a great deal. Although subjective religiosity and doctrinal orthodoxy of Turkish adults display varied results in our analysis, their robust effects are observed in one-predictor models. Belief is not significant only in cases when women are not married in the full model, while religiousness has an indirect relationship with our dependent variables. Because we used five mutual religious variables in the full models, it is more likely acceptable to lose the significance of some variables in those cases. Thus, even though subjective religiosity has an indirect relationship between our dependent variables, the first and second hypotheses are not supported in this research. In addition, belief also has an

indirect predictor for Turkish adults' attitudes toward abortion in the case of women who are not married, but in the situation of unwanted pregnancy, belief also is a predictor as discussed. Therefore, even if the results do not support the third hypothesis, they support the fourth hypothesis. Because the religious salience factors are significant and have a strong outcome over people's conception of abortion, the findings support our additional hypotheses that are consistent with previous studies.

As mentioned previously, religious practices and behaviors are viewed as a considerable predictor of individuals' social attitudes and behaviors. In the case of attitudes toward abortion, individuals who are highly active in their religious behaviors have mostly disapproving attitudes toward abortion. The results of our study give consistent results with the general literature and also support our fifth and sixth hypotheses, "The increase in peoples' frequency of prayer will negatively affect their approval on practicing abortion in the case that couples do not desire more children," and "The increase in peoples' frequency of prayer will negatively affect their approval on practicing abortion in the case that those partners are not married."

As a result of our investigation, we are able to capture the image of Turkish people's attitudes toward abortion that predictably affect the future legislation process in the Turkish government. The present Turkish government considered banning abortion upon that request. They claim that the reason for banning abortion is to prevent the decrease in fertility rates.⁴⁴ They might be correct in their statement because they consider prohibiting not only abortion but also a type of cesarean section that puts women's lives in danger when they have more than two or three children.⁴⁵ In addition, the former prime minister's (current president) speeches encouraging having at least three children per family are well-known facts.⁴⁶ However, as a pro-Islamic party, their viewpoint on abortion matches the Islamic discourse on abortion that most Turkish people have the same attitudes too. Thus, the main findings of our study are substantially parallel with the current Turkish public and political arena and provide empirical implications to the discussion.

These findings provide us an opportunity to reassess the influence of religion on abortion attitudes from a Muslim country. There is a substantial amo-

44 İçten Keskin, *Amerika ve Türkiye'de Kürtaj Politikaları ve Feminizm Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Analiz* (İstanbul: Yıldız Technical University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master's Thesis, 2014), 60-63.

45 *Haber Türk*, "Sağlık Bakanı Recep Akdağ, Gündemde Olan Kürtaj ve Sezaryen Uygulamalarına Getirilecek Yeni Düzenlemeler Konusunda Gazetecilerin Sorularını Yanıtladı" (Access 03 December 2020).

46 *Hürriyet Daily News* "Turkish PM Pushes for 'Three Children Incentive' - Turkey News" (Access 24 August 2020).

unt of study that considers different patterns of relationships between abortion and religion in the United States and other western countries; however, the present study focuses on that topic to fill the gap in the literature by providing results from an Islamic country. The present study reveals highly significant and consistent results with previous studies, which are mostly from a western cultural background and religious background (mostly Christian), indicating the negative influence of religion on abortion attitudes.

There are some limitations to this study. First, even though we have highly significant results and a large sample, there are only two measures of attitudes toward abortion. In order to strengthen the scope and representativeness of the study, we suggest that future studies broaden the measures. Thus, we believe that any future study will reflect total public attitudes on performing the abortion. The second one is having only attitudes toward abortion because people might act differently from what they say about abortion when they are in that situation; thus, in order to obtain a better examination of that topic from an Islamic perspective, peoples' abortion experiences should be analyzed.

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