

# Educational Pairings and Marriage Behavior in the Turkish Context

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## Abstract

Education plays a fundamental role in structuring individuals' life courses; including decisions to bear children and to marry. Using women samples from 2008 and 2013 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS), this paper examines demographic behaviors in relation to the educational characteristics of couples. It compares age at first marriage among couples with varying educational pairings. The findings unsurprisingly reveal that the university graduate women marry much later than those with lower levels of education. More importantly findings reveal that college education of husband postpones age of marriage only for college-educated women, not for other educational groups. In addition, college educated couples marry the latest compared to other groups including the ones, in which women are highly educated. The results support the idea that couples with higher education levels and potentially with similar attitudes about gender egalitarianism, reveal distinct demographic behaviors from the rest of the society.

## Extended Abstract

### Aims and Motivation:

Demographically, Turkish population reveals certain trends that fit well with the premises of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 2010). Similar to the global trends, marriage and fertility rates in Turkey are declining and age at first marriage is increasing at dramatic rates. This is an interesting finding for the Turkish context, as the Turkish government and the president have been relentlessly promoting high fertility rates and marriages at an earlier age and openly attacking women's rights of abortion and divorce, as well as publicly denouncing single and childless women. Furthermore, unlike the premises of demographic transition theory, Turkey does not go through an economic industrialization and we do not witness increases in women's labor market participation, as it stands only at 33% (Turkstat, 2018).

### Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Previous scholars tried to explain this through the lens of hybridity as different demographic regimes govern family formation and childbearing behaviors in different regions and of different social strata (Kavas and Thornton, 2013; Shorter and Fişek, 1968; Koç et al. 2010). An analysis of the 2013 Demographic and Health Survey data show that women with low risk of marriage are the ones who are more visible in public sphere, receive more support from their spouses for household chores, they are in a more egalitarian relations with their spouses

and they have lower tolerance toward domestic violence (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, Abbasoğlu-Özgören, Keskin, 2013).

What is missing in these analyses is the role of education. Increasing levels of education among women has major implications for the marital outcomes such as divorce and childbearing, composition of marriage markets, assortative mating and gender equality (Schwartz and Mare, 2005; Esteve et al., 2016). This paper examines demographic behaviors in relation to the educational characteristics of not only women but also of their partners (see Nitsche et al., 2018). My main question is how the educational attainment of women influences their marriage and childbearing decision conditional on the educational attainment of their husband. I also aim to examine how educational characteristics shape women's partner choice and expectations from marriage and a partner. In short, I am interested whether varying partners' educational pairings and attitudes toward gender egalitarianism shape differences in marriage and fertility decisions.

Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of educational attainment among husbands would lead to increases in the age at first marriage and decreases total parity only if women's educational attainment is equally high. In other words, couples in which husbands have a university education but wives do not would not be different from couples with lower or middle level education in terms of age at first marriage and fertility rates.

Hypothesis 2: In educationally hypogamous marriages (wives with higher level of education), the mean age of marriage would be highest compared to other types of educational pairings such as hypergamous (husbands with higher level of education) and homogamous (couples with equal levels of education) marriages.

Hypothesis 3: (IN PROGRESS) Wives and husbands' attitudes toward gender egalitarianism and gender ideology would also shape demographic behavior after controlling for educational attainment of the pair.

## Data and Methods

This study uses merged data from the 2008 & 2013 Turkey Demographic and Health Surveys (TDHS). TDHS data (since 2008) provide full histories of birth, union formation, migration, education and employment of women as well as a series of information regarding women's and their partners' attitudes and their household and partner characteristics. As my question is about age at first marriage and birth rates, and in Turkey childbearing out of official wedlock is very rare I focus my analysis on the ever-married women of 14,085 (N=6726 from 2008; N= 7359 from 2013)

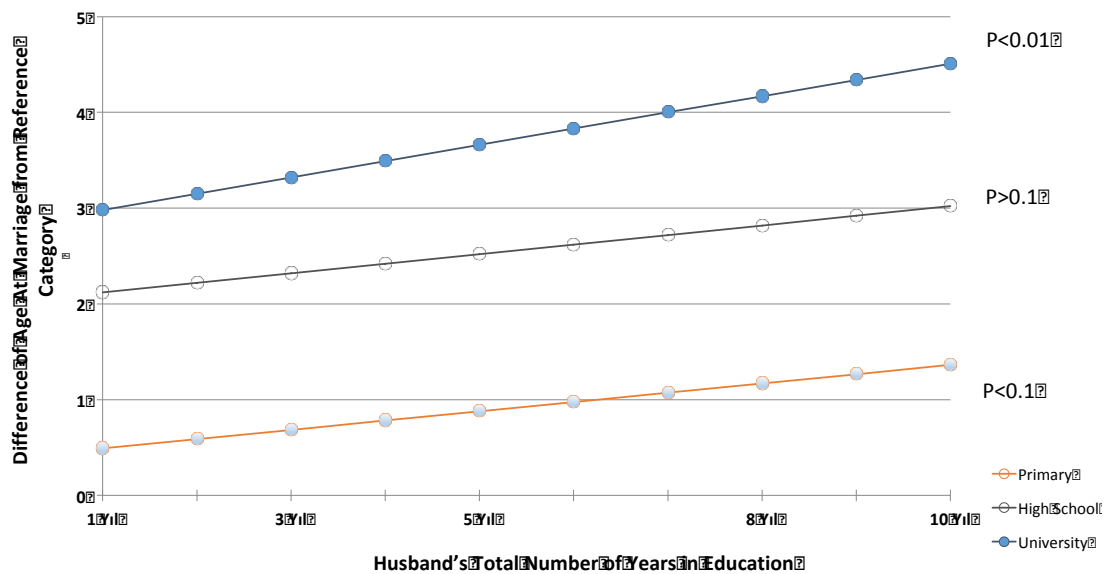
I estimate the age of first marriage using OLS multiple regression models, which has the following specification (THE ANALYSIS ON FERTILITY RATES ARE IN PROGRESS):

$$Y = \alpha X_0 + \gamma X_j + \beta X_{Education\ Variables} + u$$

where Y denotes women's first age at marriage,  $\gamma X_j$  is a vector of individual and household controls, and  $\beta X$  are the focal education variables; either the interaction of husband and wives' education and type of educational pairing such as hypergamous, hypogamous and homogamous. Here I present information on merged data but separate analyses indicate there are also moderate but important changes between years 2008 and 2013.

## Results and Discussion

Figure 1: Husband's total year in Education on Age at First Marriage

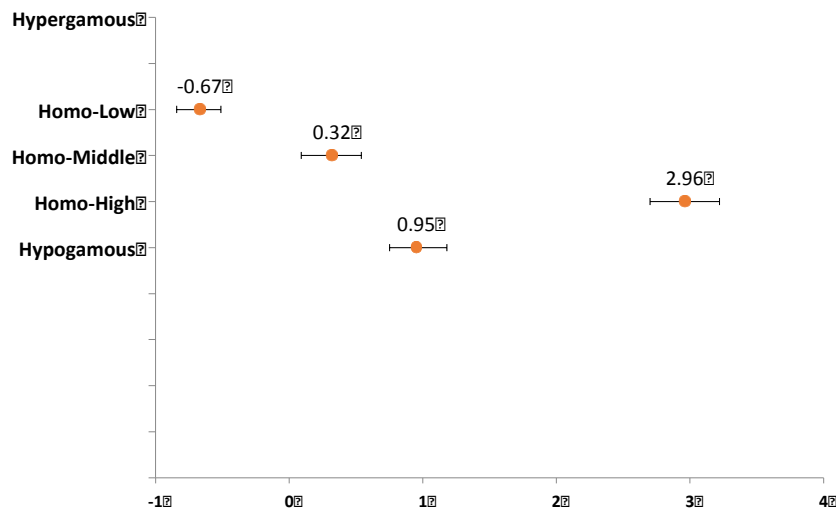


The first figure is based on the model above, in which educational attainment of wife is interacted with the husband's total years in education. The intercepts indicate the higher the educational attainment of wife the higher the age of marriage. The reference category is less than primary school education, and a woman with some college and more education gets married 3 years later than a woman with less than primary school education. The lines show the effects of increases in husband's year in education on woman's age at first marriage. Only for woman with at least some college education husband's year in education has a significant ( $P < 0.01$ ), i.e., if a husband spent 10 years in education, the age of marriage of a university graduate women by 1.7 year in average. For other groups, the effect of husband's education is statistically insignificant.

Figure 2 reveals that not the educationally hypogamous (wife with more education) marriages but homogamous marriages, in which both partners are university educated marry the latest, and these couples reveal a distinct marriage behavior than the rest of the marriage types. This is evidence against my second hypothesis but more evidence for the first one that highly and equally educated have distinct demographic behaviors.

These findings show that equally and highly educated couples show demographic behaviors that fits we observe in the European and high-income societies. They are the forerunners among which the tenets of second demographic transition are observed. This might be interpreted as the higher the education levels of both partners are, the more egalitarian the marriages become and there is more harmony in marital roles and gender ideology. I believe testing my third hypothesis on would further support this interpretation. This is in line with the findings of Sayer and Bianchi (2000) and Schwartz and Gonalons-Pons (2016) that assortative mating on educational attainment leads to ideological equilibrium as the highly educated embrace more egalitarian gender norms.

Figure 2: Age at First Marriage by Educational Pairings



The future implications of these findings are more dramatic. Turkey has been going through an educational expansion at the university level, where the number of higher institutions is tripled and the university enrollees are doubled only in the past decade (Council of Higher Education, 2019). Examination of the more recent data would probably reveal a clearer trend of educational assortative mating; and more importantly a more differentiated demographic behavior between the university educated and the rest. This means that the policy of educational expansion at the university level will harm the very population policies of the government that emphasize the sacredness of family, the motherhood as the only role for women and condemnation of singlehood, abortion and divorce. This probably would lead to the spread of the demographic behaviors that we observe among the university graduates.

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