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This chapter addresses the principal factors other than contraception that affect a woman's risk of becoming pregnant, namely, nuptiality, postpartum amenorrhea, and abstinence from sexual relations. Marriage is an indicator of exposure of women to the risk of pregnancy and, thus, is important for the understanding of fertility. Populations in which age at marriage is low tend to experience early childbearing and high fertility. Therefore, an increase in the average age at which women marry can help to explain the trends in fertility levels. Measures of other proximate determinants of fertility including the duration of postpartum amenorrhea and postpartum abstinence are also important in understanding fertility patterns.

7.1 Current Marital Status

In the TDHS-2003, some information on never-married women was collected with a module included in the household questionnaire. In the individual questionnaire, nuptiality questions for ever-married women were included in a separate section. In this section, in addition to the basic questions on marital status and age at marriage that are included in the standard DHS questionnaire, there were also questions about family formation, religious marriages, and consanguinity. Unlike, the standard DHS questionnaire, ever-married women were not asked about the age at which they initiated sexual activity, for cultural reasons.

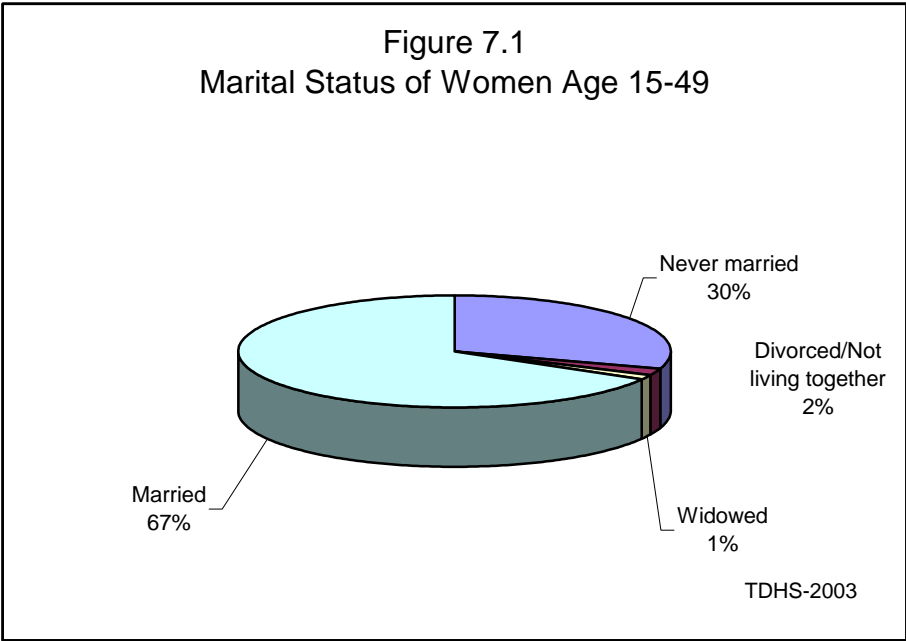
Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1 show the distribution of all women age 15-49 by their marital status at the time of the survey. Overall, 67 percent of all women are currently married¹ and 30 percent are never married. The proportions of women who are widowed and divorced are above 1 percent and the proportion separated is less than 1 percent. Looking at the age patterns, it is clear that marriage is almost universal in Turkey. The proportion of never-married women declines rapidly with age, from 88 percent among teenagers to 20 percent among women in their late twenties. Among women age 30 and older fewer than 1 in 10 women have never married, and the proportion never married among women age 45-49 who are nearing the end of the reproductive years is less than 2 percent.

As expected, the proportion widowed increases with age, from less than 1 percent of women under age 30 to 5 percent among women at ages 45-49. The percentage of women who are divorced is markedly higher among women age 30-44 (although still less than 3 percent) than in the other age groups.

¹The term married refers both to "currently married" and "currently in union."

Table 7.1 Current marital status
Percent distribution of women by current marital status, according to age, Turkey 2003

Current age	Never married	Marital status				Total	Number of women
		Married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated		
15-19	88.1	11.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	2,003
20-24	50.2	48.5	0.1	0.6	0.5	100.0	2,101
25-29	20.0	77.6	0.5	1.3	0.7	100.0	1,849
30-34	8.2	87.7	0.9	2.4	0.8	100.0	1,622
35-39	4.1	90.0	1.8	2.6	1.6	100.0	1,481
40-44	3.0	89.2	4.4	2.5	0.9	100.0	1,371
45-49	1.5	91.9	5.0	1.0	0.7	100.0	1,089
Total	29.9	66.6	1.4	1.4	0.7	100.0	11,517



Overall, there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of women currently married over the past five years, from 69 percent based on the TDHS-1998 to 67 percent in TDHS-2003. Much of this trend appears to be due to the postponement of marriage among younger women. The proportion of women who have never married increased in all age groups between the surveys, except the 45-49 age group. The increases were especially marked in the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups (11 percentage points and 7 percentage points, respectively)

7.2 Age at First Marriage

In Turkey, marriage demographically is very important, because, besides being prevalent throughout the country almost all births occur within marriage. Therefore, age at first marriage is a significant demographic indicator since it represents the onset of a woman’s exposure to the risk of pregnancy.

As shown in Table 7.2, the median age at first marriage is 20 among women 25-49, indicating that half of the women in those age groups married before that age. A steady increase is observed in the median age at first marriage, from 19.2 years for the 45-49 age group to 21 years for the 25-29 age group. There has been a marked decline in getting married at very young ages. For example, the percentage of women married by age 15 has dropped from 8 percent among women age 45-49 to 2 percent among women 20-24.

Current age	Percentage first married by exact age:					Percentage never married	Number of women	Median age at first marriage
	15	18	20	22	25			
15-19	1.4	NA	NA	NA	NA	88.1	2,003	a
20-24	2.2	18.4	33.1	NA	NA	50.2	2,101	a
25-29	3.6	23.1	40.4	58.5	73.3	20.0	1,849	21.0
30-34	4.4	27.3	46.4	64.1	80.8	8.2	1,622	20.4
35-39	5.7	28.7	50.6	66.3	82.0	4.1	1,481	20.0
40-44	8.3	37.4	58.3	73.3	86.2	3.0	1,371	19.2
45-49	8.3	34.7	58.0	76.4	88.5	1.5	1,089	19.2
20-49	5.0	27.0	46.0	NA	NA	17.6	9,514	20.5
25-49	5.7	29.5	49.6	66.7	81.3	8.4	7,413	20.0

NA = Not applicable
^a Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women married for the first time before reaching the beginning of the age group

Although the median is a convenient summary measure, not all changes in age at marriage are necessarily reflected in the median. Cohort trends in age at marriage can be more thoroughly examined by comparing the percentages who first marry at specific ages for successive 5-year age groups. These percentages confirm that substantial changes have occurred in the age at which women marry in Turkey over the past several decades. The percentages of women married at each specific age are all lower for the younger cohorts than for the older cohorts. For example, among women age 45-49, 58 percent married by age 20, whereas only 40 percent of women age 25-29 married by age 20.

Table 7.3 and Figure 7.2 present differentials in the median age at first marriage among women age 25-49 by residence, region and education. Looking at the residence patterns, urban women marry slightly later than their rural residence counterparts (20.3 years and 19.4 years respectively). This pattern is observed for all age groups.

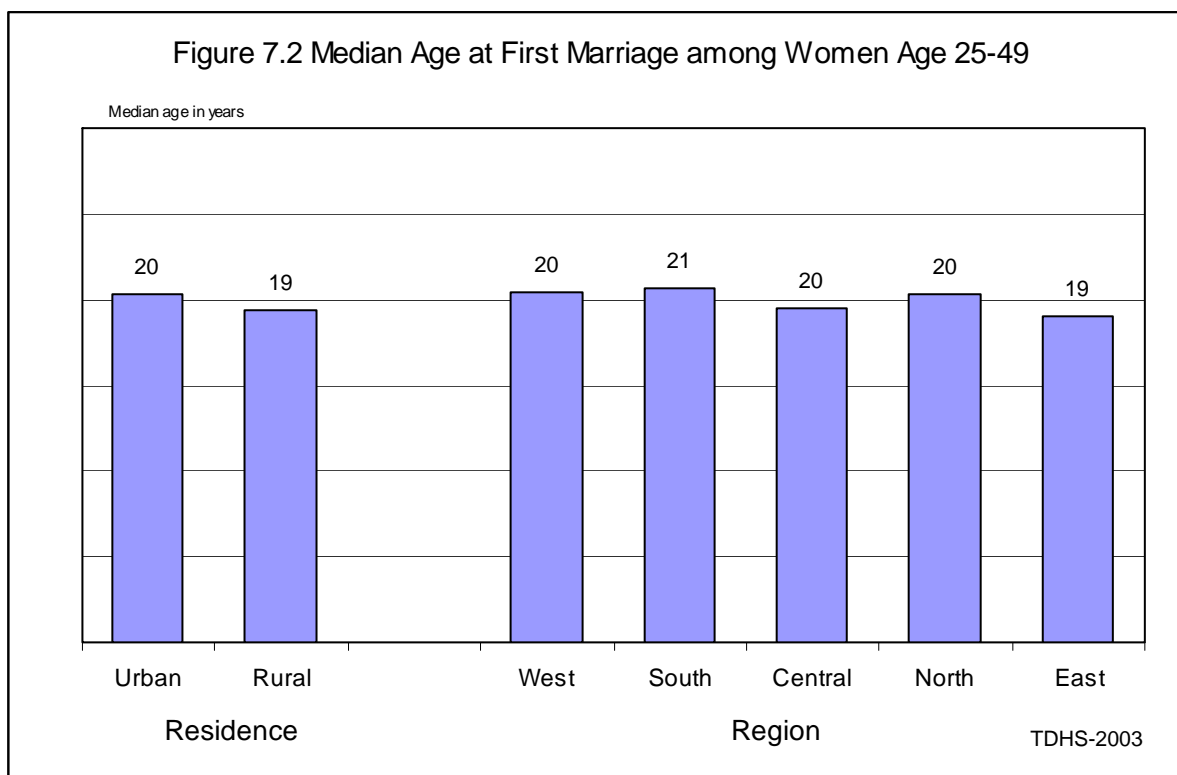
The regional comparisons indicate that women get married earliest in the East and Central regions (19 years and 19.5 years, respectively) and latest in the South region (20.7 years). When the results for the NUTS 1 regions are examined, Mediterranean is the region with the highest median age (21.3 years) at marriage, whereas Central Anatolia has the lowest median age (19.1 years). Within regions, the median ages at first marriage for younger women are higher compared with those of the older age groups. For example, the median age at marriage in the 25-29 age group at Central East Anatolia is 23.7 years, five years later on average than the ages at marriage reported for women 35 and above in the same region. Likewise in İstanbul, West Marmara and

East Black Sea regions, half of the women in the 25-29 age group married after age 23, which is three or four years later than women age 35 and over married in the same regions.

Background characteristics	Current age					Women age 25-49
	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
Residence						
Urban	21.3	20.5	20.3	19.4	19.7	20.3
Rural	20.4	20.1	19.5	18.8	18.5	19.4
Region						
West	21.3	20.6	20.6	19.6	19.7	20.4
South	21.1	20.8	21.0	19.7	20.4	20.7
Central	20.8	19.9	19.3	18.9	18.7	19.5
North	21.4	20.6	20.7	19.5	19.4	20.3
East	20.3	19.3	18.4	18.1	17.8	19.0
NUTS 1 Region						
Istanbul	23.0	21.4	20.3	19.5	19.8	20.9
West Marmara	23.1	20.2	19.8	19.1	18.9	20.4
Aegean	22.2	21.3	20.7	19.9	19.3	20.6
East Marmara	21.6	20.4	20.5	19.3	19.5	20.3
West Anatolia	21.9	20.1	19.8	19.8	19.7	20.4
Mediterranean	22.5	21.3	21.8	19.9	20.6	21.3
Central Anatolia	20.8	20.1	18.7	18.2	19.1	19.1
West Black Sea	22.1	22.4	20.9	19.9	19.0	20.6
East Black Sea	23.2	20.6	20.2	19.2	19.4	20.4
Northeast Anatolia	20.9	19.8	19.2	19.0	18.4	19.7
Central East Anatolia	23.7	20.2	18.3	18.5	18.3	20.0
Southeast Anatolia	21.1	19.6	18.8	17.8	16.9	19.3
Education						
No education/Prim.incomp.	18.4	18.8	18.4	17.5	17.7	18.0
First level primary	19.8	19.7	19.5	18.9	19.0	19.4
Second level primary	22.1	21.7	21.4	21.4	20.7	21.7
High school and higher	a	25.2	24.4	24.5	23.5	24.8
Total	21.0	20.4	20.0	19.2	19.2	20.0

^a Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women married for the first time before reaching the beginning of the age group

As expected, there is positive association between the median age at first marriage and educational level of respondents. The differences between women who have completed at least high school and other women are especially pronounced. The median age at first marriage among women attending high school or higher is 24.8 years, almost 7 years higher than the median age among women with less than primary education (Table 7.3). Within educational categories, the relationship between the woman's age at first marriage and her current age is not uniform. For women with primary or higher education, the age at marriage increases from older cohorts to younger ones. For women with no education, however, while the median age at marriage generally increases from the older to younger cohorts, the pattern is not as uniform.



7.3 Postpartum Amenorrhea, Postpartum Abstinence, and Insusceptibility

The period of postpartum amenorrhea is the interval between childbirth and the return of menstruation. How long after child birth the protection from conception lasts depends on the length and intensity of breastfeeding and on how long it takes the woman to resume sexual intercourse.

The percentage of births whose mothers are postpartum amenorrheic, abstaining, and postpartum insusceptible at the time of the survey is presented in Table 7.4 by the number of months since birth. Women are considered as insusceptible if they are not exposed to the risk of pregnancy, either because they are amenorrheic or are still abstaining from sexual intercourse following a birth. The estimates of the median and mean durations shown in the table are calculated from these current status proportions. To calculate these averages the data were grouped by two-month intervals to minimize fluctuations in the estimates.

The results in Table 7.4 indicate that 92 percent of women are amenorrheic immediately following the delivery, but this value decreases to 57 percent starting from the second month after birth. The median duration of postpartum amenorrhea is about 3.4 months.

In Turkey, the period of sexual abstinence after birth traditionally lasts 40 days. The estimates of postpartum abstinence in Table 7.4 are in accordance with this tradition. Of all mothers, 86 percent abstain from sexual relations immediately following a birth. However, starting from the second month after a birth, the contribution of abstinence to the period of

insusceptibility is greatly reduced. At 2-3 months following a birth, the percentage of abstaining mothers decreases to 13 percent and by 6-7 months, to 7 percent (Figure 7.3).

Number of months since birth	Percentage of births for which the mother is			Number of births
	Amenorrheic	Abstaining	Insusceptible	
< 2	92.2	85.6	97.1	96
2-3	57.1	12.7	60.9	129
4-5	38.4	7.0	42.3	151
6-7	27.4	2.0	27.4	146
8-9	12.7	2.0	14.0	120
10-11	13.0	2.3	14.3	113
12-13	5.8	1.8	7.6	142
14-15	1.1	0.0	1.1	104
16-17	2.6	0.0	2.6	141
18-19	0.7	1.4	2.1	137
20-21	3.0	0.0	3.0	107
22-23	0.6	2.4	3.0	133
24-25	0.0	3.2	3.2	110
26-27	0.3	1.0	1.2	125
28-29	0.0	2.3	2.3	167
30-31	0.0	0.0	0.0	145
32-33	0.4	1.1	1.5	159
34-35	0.0	0.0	0.0	155
Total	13	5.7	14.5	2,380
Median	3.4	1.9	3.8	NA
Mean	5.4	2.8	5.9	NA

NA = Not applicable

Corresponding with the results of the previous surveys conducted in 1993 and 1998, findings from the TDHS-2003 show that the period of postpartum amenorrhea is comparatively longer than the period of postpartum abstinence. Postpartum amenorrhea therefore appears as the principal determinant of the length of postpartum insusceptibility to pregnancy in Turkey. For example, at 2-3 months following a birth, women are more than four times as likely to be amenorrheic as to be abstaining. As seen in Figure 7.3 the proportion of mothers who are amenorrheic drops sharply during the first year after a birth. At about 12-13 months, the proportion of mothers who are amenorrheic drops sharply to 6 percent and by 14-15 months only one percent of mothers are still amenorrheic while none of the mothers abstaining. Thus, virtually all women are susceptible to pregnancy by the second year after giving birth.

Figure 7.3
 Percentage of Births Whose Mothers are Amenorrheic,
 Abstaining, or Insusceptible

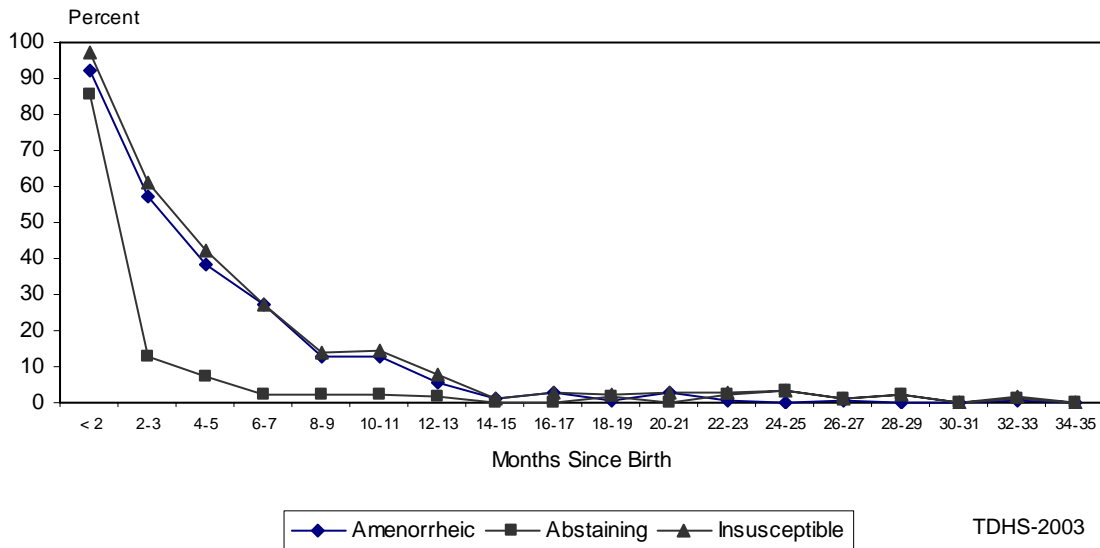


Table 7.5 shows the median duration of postpartum amenorrhea, abstinence, and insusceptibility by background characteristics of mothers. In Turkey, the average duration of postpartum abstinence does not vary greatly according to the mother’s age and residence. Somewhat greater variation is observed, however, among regions and with the level of mother’s education. For example, postpartum abstinence seems to be practised longer in the Aegean, East Marmara, and Central Anatolia than in other regions. İstanbul and Southeast Anatolia have the lowest median durations for postpartum abstinence (1.6 months).

Differences in the duration of postpartum amenorrhea by age, region, and level of education, although small, are worth highlighting. Women above age 30, women living in the East region, and women with less than primary education have the longest median duration for postpartum amenorrhea (3.9 months, 3.8 months, and 4.4 months, respectively). The shortest duration for postpartum amenorrhea is observed in the West Marmara region (0.8 months). The median number of months for postpartum amenorrhea is 4.4 months among women who do not have education, while it is 2.8 months for women with at least high school education.

Tablo 7.5 Median duration of postpartum insusceptibility by background characteristics

Median number of months of postpartum amenorrhea, postpartum abstinence, and postpartum insusceptibility following births in the three years preceding the survey, by background characteristics, Turkey 2003

Background characteristic	Amenorrheic	Abstaining	Insusceptible	Number of births
Mother's age				
<30	3.3	1.9	3.5	1,626
30+	3.9	1.9	4.5	754
Residence				
Urban	3.5	1.8	4.0	1,571
Rural	3.3	1.9	3.4	809
Region				
West	3.6	2.0	4.1	789
South	3.1	1.7	3.5	317
Central	3.2	1.9	3.7	456
North	2.4	1.9	2.5	144
East	3.8	1.7	3.9	674
NUTS 1 Region				
Istanbul	3.4	1.6	3.6	365
West Marmara	0.8	2.0	4.7	74
Aegean	2.8	2.2	3.7	247
East Marmara	3.4	2.2	3.6	195
West Anatolia	3.7	2.0	4.7	182
Mediterranean	3.1	1.7	3.5	317
Central Anatolia	3.8	2.2	3.9	134
West Black Sea	2.0	1.9	2.1	116
East Black Sea	4.7	1.8	4.7	75
Northeast Anatolia	2.9	1.9	3.2	105
Central East Anatolia	3.5	1.8	3.5	172
Southeast Anatolia	4.1	1.6	4.1	397
Education				
No education/Prim.incomp.	4.4	1.7	4.4	481
First level primary	3.2	1.9	3.6	1,288
Second level primary	3.3	2.0	3.6	488
High school and higher	2.8	1.9	4.6	123
Total	3.4	1.9	3.8	2,380

Note: Medians are based on current status

In Turkey, differentials in the median duration of postpartum insusceptibility reflect the combined effects of amenorrhea and abstinence. They exhibit a pattern similar to those for amenorrhea. In general, women over age 30, urban women, women living in the West, and educated women are insusceptible for relatively longer periods.