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QUESTIONING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND MARRIAGE: DOES RELIGION AFFECT LONG-LASTING MARRIAGE? TURKISH COUPLES' PRACTICE OF, PERCEPTION OF, AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS RELIGION AND MARRIAGE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between religion and long-lasting marriages. The study, with sixty participants (thirty Turkish married couples), attempted to explore couples' perception of religion, practice of religion, views about the relationship between religion and marriage, and how they perceive religion as a solution to their marital problems. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used. Data were collected using face-to-face interviews, participant observation, socio-demographic questionnaire, and survey methods. Data were analyzed using Grounded Theory method and SPSS software. Findings indicated differences among couples' practice of, perceptions of and attitudes towards marriage and religion. With regard to religious practice, variety was observed among participants in general and couples in particular. With respect to the effects of religious beliefs and practices on the marriage, it was discovered that some couples did not found religion to be effective on their marriages while majority mentioned positive effects of religion on solving their marital problems. Also, majority of the couples believed that religion could present solutions for marital problems.

Keywords: Religion, Marriage, Long-lasting Marriage, Family, Turkey.

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Introduction

According to 2011 data of Family Structure in Turkey research, 50% of society considers religion as indicative for spouse selection, while 28% considers it as very indicative (ASPB, 2011: slide 60). That is 88% of the society thinks that religion is an important determinant when choosing the spouse. Also, 93% of married people arranged both formal and religious wedding ceremonies (ASPB, 2011: slide 25). 36% of the Turkish society agrees with the idea that "women could marry to men with different religion and nationality" while 56% disagrees with this idea. For the case of men, 42% of the society agrees while 50% disagrees. Finally, 38% of the society agrees with the idea that "denominational difference does not matter in marriage," while 51% disagrees with this idea (ASPB, 2011: slide 56).

Broadly speaking, relationship between religious values and marriage is a sensitive issue. As can be seen from the data above, religion is an important determinant of choice of a spouse for nine out of ten people in Turkish society. Similarly, nine out of ten people prefer to arrange a religious wedding ceremony as well as a formal one. Data interestingly indicate that at least half of the population, regardless of being men or women, rejects to marry to a person with a different religion.

The relationship between religion and marriage/family has received attention not only in Turkey but also in various countries around the world. These studies generally focused on the relationship between religion and marriage, interfaith marriage, assimilation, children and conversion (Bossard & Boll, 1957; Yinger, 1968; Lehrer, 1998; Tarakeshwar & Pargament, 2001; Kalmijn & Tubergen, 2010; Webb *et al.*, 2010).

Literature Review

Change in society is inescapable (Coşkun, 2011), and; as a result, family also undergoes a transformation. For example, it is possible to observe some changes in Turkish families such as "increase in marriage age, increase in the number of divorce, spread of out of wedlock relationships, and decrease in the number of households" (Yılmaz, 2012b: 87). Thus, it is significant to examine the relationship between religion and marriage in contemporary Turkish society.

Religion is an important and powerful institution as oppose to proponents of secularism (Berger, 1990; Şentürk, 2004). Particularly speaking, there has been an interaction between religion and marriage/family from past through today. Therefore, influence of religion on marriage/family is apparent at both structural and relational level (Wach, 1944; Weber, 1964; Yinger, 1968).

Marriage, as a sophisticated institution, has an important role in the continuation of family and society. Therefore, it has been a focus of attention not only in societies but also in academic studies (Meriç-Yazan, 1989; Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005; Yılmaz, 2012a).

All Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) attribute to special importance to marriage (Harris *et al.*, 2008) and; hence, have influenced structures of societies. In that sense, especially Christianity in Western World (Browning, 2008) and Islam in Turkey (Nauck & Klaus, 2008) and other Muslim societies affected family and marital values.

Generally speaking, relationship between religion and marriage/family has multifaceted nature (Marks, 2004). This has been investigated with its various dimensions such as satisfaction in marriage, continuation of marriage, dealing with problems of marriage, and other aspects of marriage such as ethnicity, age, child, and religiousness, since "religion-family links may also vary according to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, religious tradition, and other facets of social location" (Mahoney, 2010: 823). For instance, Brown *et al.* (2008) discovered that religion affected duration of marriage with respect to gender and race. Furthermore, they found that religious practices reduce the rate of divorce especially for women. Dollahite and Marks (2009) stated that there is a connection between religious context and outcomes of marriage. They concluded that married couples followed religious rules because they believed that these rules could have positive effects on their marriages. In a study that focused on Jewish, Christian and Muslim couples, religion has been found to be helpful in various aspects. "Couples reported that religiosity affects the conflict in their marriage at three phases of the conflict process: (a) problem prevention, (b) conflict resolution, and (c) relationship reconciliation." Therefore, various studies suggest that family counselors who deal with marital problems of religious couples should make use of religious references (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006: 439, 447; Mahoney, 2005).

It was also found that religious beliefs have effects on the number of children and domestic behaviors. In that sense, number of children tends to be bigger in religious families (Adsera, 2006), and religion has great influence on couples' and their children's perceptions of families especially at early adolescence period (Pearce & Thornton, 2007).

Another aspect of marriage that was influenced by religious beliefs is divorce. As couples' religious beliefs get stronger, rate of divorce decreases (Vaaler *et al.*, 2009). In their study, Tulane *et al.* (2011) found that religious beliefs of married couples who defined their

marriages as successful, have effects on their marriages and they did not consider divorcing due to believing in God. Similarly, a positive relationship has been found between beliefs of couples in Abrahamic religions and duration of and satisfaction in marriage (Marks, 2005).

The relationship between religion and marriage/family has been investigated considering other aspects. For instance, religious beliefs were found to be influential in couples' behaviors and attitudes in case of death of a child (McIntosh *et al.*, 1993), care of a 'special' child (Tarakeshwar&Pargament, 2001), couples' attitudes towards depression, financial difficulties, social cooperation, and communication (Webb *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, "religious factors influence their decisions about career choice, marriage, residency, and number of children" (Sigalowet *al.*,2012: 304).

As mentioned in the introduction section, there is a strong relationship between religion and marriage/family in Turkey (ASPB, 2011). On the other hand, relationship between religion and long-lasting marriages in Turkish society has not been received enough attention in the related literature. To fill this gap in the literature, this study aims to investigate practice, attitudes and perceptions of couples in long-term marriages. Criteria for the duration of a long-term marriage were considered differently by different researchers (Robinson, 1994; Glenn, 1998; Weigel& Ballard-Reisch, 1999; Rogers & Amato, 2000; Bachand& Caron, 2001; Finchamet *al.*, 2002; Miller *et al.*, 2003; Mroczek& Spiro, 2005). In this study, twenty or more years in marriage was considered as the criterion for a long-term marriage since bringing up an adult requires at least twenty years including one year for getting pregnant, eighteen years for bringing up an adult, and one more year for any risk.

Methodology

Data Collection

This study is a part of an independent research project, which focused on long-lasting marriages, which lasted for at least twenty years. Research population consisted of married couples who have been married for twenty or more years and who live in İstanbul. Using two stages of sampling methods, purposive and snowball sampling, thirty volunteer married couples (sixty participants) were selected for the study.

Face-to-face interview, participant observation, a socio-demographic questionnaire and a survey were used for data collection. Interviews were conducted in participants' home to be able to create a comfortable environment. Each researcher and participant before each interview signed 'informed consent form.' After that, participants filled out socio-demographic

questionnaire and survey followed by an interview. Interviews were tape-recorded and researchers took observation notes.

Data Analysis

As Grounded Theory by Strauss and Corbin (1998) has been used in various qualitative studies, this study also used this method for data analysis. Each interview was assigned to an identification number and verbatim transcribed. At the first stage of the interview analysis, transcripts were open-coded to reveal main characteristics of data. Selective coding to discover basic concepts and relationships among them followed open-coding stage. At the last phase of the analysis, axial coding was used to reveal concept maps and theoretical framework to be able to establish conceptual relationships and coherence of findings. Finally, socio-demographic questionnaires and surveys were analyzed using SPSS software. Data obtained from participant observations were triangulated with interview data.

Findings

Participants' practice of, perception of, and attitudes towards religion and marriage were specified using data obtained from interviews, observations, socio-demographic questionnaires and surveys. Findings from quantitative data are presented in this section, whereas findings from qualitative data are discussed in the following sections.

Table1 indicates that half of the participants were women and the other half of them were men (N: 60). On average, they were 52 years old (mean: 52.13), and the average length of marriage of the respondents was 30 years (mean: 30.23). 5.3% of the respondents had no children, 10.5% of them had one child, 81.6% of them had two children, and 2.6% of them had four children. 31.6% of the respondents had an elementary school degree, 15.8% of them had a middle school degree, 26.3% of them had a high school degree, 23.7% of them had a university degree, and 2.6% of them had a graduate degree. On average, a spouse had a 1,209 Turkish Liras monthly income. Almost all of the respondents were Muslim pre- and post-marriage expect one spouse (wife) was Christian pre-marriage and converted to Islam after the marriage. Finally, almost six out of ten of the respondents (57.9%) mentioned that religious beliefs of individuals absolutely influence spouse selection, 34.2% of them remarked that religious beliefs of individuals influence spouse selection, and; in contrast, 7.9% of them stated that religious beliefs of individuals do not influence spouse selection.

According to the table, 2.4% of the couples defined their marital relationship as unhappy, whereas 92.9% as

happy. For trust, 9.5% of the couples mentioned that they almost always trust their spouses, while 90.5% of couples always trust. In other words, couples trust each other in any case. When couples status of relationship is considered, 4.8% of them almost always disagree, 9.5% of them rarely disagree, 35.7% of them almost always agree, and 47.6% of them always agree with each other. Finally, 4.8% of the couples often disagree, 4.8% of the couples rarely disagree, 19% of the couples almost always agree, and 71.4% of the couples always agree on religious issues.

Table 1: Percentage, Minimum, Maximum, and Mean of Samples (n = 60), Twenty or More Years Married Turkish Couples, 2012

Variable	Percentage (%)		
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Gender			
Male		50	
Female		50	
Age			
38	77		52.13
Length of Marriage			
20		52	30.23
Number of Children			
0	4		1.84
No Child		5.3	
One Child	10.5		
Two Children		81.6	
Three Children		-	
Four Children		2.6	
Education			
1	5		
1- Elementary School	31.6		
2- Middle School		15.8	
3- High School		26.3	
4- University Degree	23.7		
5- Graduate Degree		2.6	
Monthly Income*			
0		10,000	1,209.63
Religious Identity Before Marriage			
Muslim		90	
Christian		10	
Religious Identity After Marriage			
Muslim		100	
Influence of Religious Beliefs on Spouse Selection			
Absolutely Influence	57.9		
Influence		34.2	
Does Not Influence		7.9	
Level of Happiness in Marital Relationship			
Unhappy		2.4	
Happy		92.9	
Other		4.7	
Trusting Spouse			
Almost Always		9.5	
Always		90.5	
Agreement Between Spouses			
Almost Always Disagree		4.8	
Rarely Disagree		9.5	
Almost Always Agree	35.7		
Always Agree	47.6		
Other		2.4	
Religious Issues			

Often Disagree	4.8
Rarely Disagree	4.8
Almost Always Agree	19.0
Always Agree	71.4

* Monthly individual income measured as an exact amount of Turkish Liras.

Relationship between religion and marriage

Couples who have been married for twenty or more years were asked questions regarding their perceptions of religious beliefs and practice, how these perceptions influence their marriages, and whether their religious beliefs could be an option for solving their marital problems. Analysis of data from interviews and observations revealed practices, perceptions, and attitudes of couples about the relationship between religion and marriage and are presented in the following sections.

Couples' religious beliefs and practices

When religious practice was examined, it was discovered that there was a variety of attitudes. In other words, there was a spectrum of religious practice, from couples who do not consider religion in their lives to couples who try to practice religion in every aspect of their lives.

Mr. Fatih who has been married for twenty-three years mentioned that he has never carried out religious exercises and stated that: "No, I never prostrated myself before (smiling)," while his wife Mrs. Nazlı has a more religious profile: "I exercise prayers, I try to fast and give obligatory alms. I want to go on pilgrimage. If Allah wishes! In addition to these, I try to say a prayer. I just started to learn to read Koran. If I can (laughing), I try my best."

Mr. Mehmet who has been married for twenty years said that he tries to find a midway in terms of religious practice: "Normal. In other words, we are not very religious really. Let me tell you considering my wife, she is more knowledgeable in this. I'm below her level!" His wife Mrs. Nilüfer said the following: "What we do most is to say a prayer (laughing). In fact, I fast during the Ramadan, and I could not perform five time prayer. What else, I give obligatory alms. If Allah wishes, I want to go on pilgrimage and umrah. If Allah wishes, I sometimes give alms."

Data indicated that some of the couples present permanence in their religious practices. One of them was Mr. Akif who has been married for twenty-eight years and he revealed his commitment to religious practice: "Five time prayer and religious conversation, that's it! Fasting, alms-giving, sacrifice an animal for Allah! Whatever is required, we try to do it. Thank Allah." His wife Mrs. Serap was also commented in a

similar way. Mr. Cemil who has been married for twenty-three years is very sensitive in religious terms:

I try to follow all religious duties, as much as I can. I even try to follow the Sunna. This is my fourth year, I fast on Mondays and Thursdays. Over the four years I never skip. I follow religious duties as much as I can. Similarly, for the Sunna, our prophet Muhammad's Sunna. Although we seem to look like a modern family, we do our best.

When other couples' religious practices are considered, it was found that they were in the midway, neither extreme nor liberal. To express it in a more specific terms, couples are in between two different approaches, that are Mr. Mehmet's (married for twenty years) and Mr. Akif's approaches (married for twenty-eight years). If religious practices are placed over a spectrum from the most common to the least, we can make a list as follows: Pray to Allah, sacrifice an animal for Allah, fasting, reading the Koran, alms-giving, five time prayer, pilgrimage, umrah, and some other religious social activities.

Effects of Religious Beliefs and Practices on Marriage

During the interviews, couples were asked whether their religious beliefs and practices had any effect on their marriages. Some of the couples mentioned that their religious beliefs and practices have not had any direct effect at least not in a negative way. It was because of the fact that spouses either had similar religious beliefs and practices or did not interfere with each other's religious practices. On the contrary, some of the couples strongly emphasized that their religious beliefs and practices influence their marriages in a positive manner.

Among those couples, Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Müjgan who have been married for forty-three years responded to the question, "do your religious beliefs and practices affect your marriage," as "no!" Also, both Mrs. Feride who has been married for forty years and Mr. Salih who has been married for thirty-six years said: "No, it doesn't affect our marriage." Similarly, Mrs. Süheyla who has been married for twenty years said the following to emphasize this ineffectiveness: "It doesn't affect anything. Not only because of ineffectiveness of religion, but my husband has never been religious."

Some of the couples mentioned that religion did not have any effect (at least not in a negative way), because they have coherent beliefs and practices. For example, Mr. Hatice who has been married for forty-five years said that she and her husband have been agreed on religious issues; therefore, religious beliefs and practices

do not affect their marital life: "Since we don't have conflicts, we don't clash with each other." Similarly, Mrs. Seda who has been married for thirty-six years said: "No! [Doesn't affect mine]. According to my religious beliefs, I pray five time in a day. I don't cover my head, but I'm a religious person. I hope, if Allah wishes, I may also do it. I didn't have problems. We've agreed on religious issues." Lastly, Mrs. İnci who has been married for twenty-five years, stated: "We have not been affected since our religious beliefs are in parallel. We are in harmony."

Some couples claimed that they do not intervene with each other; thus, their religious beliefs and practices have not had any effect on their marital life. Among those couples Mrs. Semiha who has been married for forty-three years said: "Our religious beliefs do not affect our marriage. He doesn't intervene with me and I do not intervene with him. My husband does not say: 'Why do you pray five times in a day and read the Koran?' Similarly, I don't say anything like this neither!" Mr. Fatih who has been married for twenty-three years stated his liberal approach by mentioning that: "Well, our religious beliefs do not affect our marriage. My religious knowledge is weak, almost none. My wife is also free to do what she wants." Mrs. Nazlı (married for twenty-three years) stated: "It doesn't affect my marriage. I have efforts for that because we have different beliefs! Very opposite! I try to avoid conflicts. I'm quite religious. My husband is not. Therefore, I don't talk about religion and discuss. He lives his own life." Finally, Mr. Mustafa (married for forty-five years), Mr. Adem (married for forty-two years), Mr. Rıza (married for thirty-six years) and Mrs. Nilüfer (married for twenty years) all mentioned that there was no effect of religion in their marriages.

As oppose to couples who stated that religious beliefs and practices have no effect (at least in a negative way) on the marital life, most of the participants talked about positive effects of their religious approaches on it. Some of them are Mr. Ahmet (married for forty-five years), Mr. Adil and Mrs. Nazan (married for thirty-nine years) and Mr. Metin (married for twenty-two years), and Mrs. Betül (married for twenty years). For instance, Mr. Ahmet revealed that his religious beliefs and practices affected his marriage in a positive manner and continued as follows: "Thanks Allah, we are all Muslims! We pray five-times in a day and fast. I get on well with my wife with this respect. Furthermore, my wife always prays. She is a very good wife!"

Mrs. Fatma who has been married for forty-five years also thinks in a similar way. She listed the positive effects of her religious beliefs on the marriage as follows: "Thanks to Allah. We, as husband and wife, pray five-time in a day and say prayer. When I was little, I learnt

how to read the Koran and pray. Now we hurry up to pray every day.” She also added: “When my husband goes out, I never forget to pray for him. I also pray for my children and grandchildren, too” (Balkanlıoğlu, 2013: 101). Mr. Ferit who has been married for twenty-seven years emphasized the positive effects of his beliefs and practices on his marriage as follows:

Of course religion influences marriage in every aspect. After all, marriage in every culture is based on religion. There are religious wedding ceremonies in every culture. Therefore, it is impossible for religion to be ineffective on marriage. I think that praying together makes us close to each other and gives us spiritual strength. I wouldn't have got on well with a person who did not follow religious duties. I think I would have quarreled every day. There would have been a huge gap between us if I prayed and she didn't. I always agree with my wife with respect to religion. If we feel that one of us is weak on something with regard to religion, we help each other.

Mrs. Meliha who has been married for twenty-seven years mentioned that sharing similar religious beliefs and practices have had some contributions to their marriage:

Thanks Allah, my husband is also a religious person! We pray five times in a day together. We'd like to pray together in special religious days and nights. I believe, these strength ties between us. I'm so lucky with this respect and I thank Allah. I could have been married to a faithless person and had a bad relationship with him. Our commitment to religion makes us closer. Our faith to Allah prevents us from sins, bad and wrong things.

Mr. Levent who has been married for twenty-four years stated that “marriage is based on religious beliefs” and as a natural result beliefs have positive effects on it. Mr. Metin who has been married for twenty-two years, in a similar way, mentioned that religion was one of the central themes of marriage. According to him, harmony with this respect has contributions to marriage as said:

Religious beliefs also affect marriage. It is somewhat the central theme. If spouses don't share similar beliefs, then this creates huge gaps between them. Everyone has his/her belief system that might be different. But, I'm lucky! I wish Allah makes everyone as lucky as I'm.

Mrs. Gamze who has been married for twenty-two years made similar statements. Mrs. Sümeyye who has been married for twenty years was a Christian pre-marriage and converted to Islam post-marriage. During the interview, she mentioned negative influences of religious beliefs and practices on marriage if both spouses have different cultures and religious beliefs. She drew a sigh and continued as follows:

Of course [it affects]! Thanks Allah, our marriage is based on religion. With the help of Allah, we carry out our marriage on the basis of Islam. That's why it is steady as a rock; it would have been difficult otherwise! Two cultures together! It is tough, not an easy thing. For instance, if the wife is Christian, she can go back to her country and get the child Christening. When they come back to Turkey, her husband takes the child to Friday prayer. I don't think that such a marriage is a healthy one. In such a world, there is not coherency in the household. There should be consistency in a marriage and it's impossible without religion.

Mrs. Mehtap who has been married for twenty-three years emphasized the positive impact of religion on her marriage: “Of course, our religious beliefs and practices affect our marriage in a positive way! We come from a religious family.” Mrs. Eda who has been married for thirty-six years talked about harmony between spouses: “We're in harmony with this respect. We pray for each other. I pray to Allah for making us moral people. I hope we don't straggle.”

Finally, Mrs. Emine who has been married for forty-two years, Mrs. Yasemin (thirty-two years), Mr. Mesut (twenty-eight years), Mr. Cemil and Mrs. Nezihe (twenty-three years), and Mr. Sinan (twenty years) all mentioned that religious beliefs and practices have positively contributed to their marriages.

Religion as a Source for Solving Marital Problems

In this study, couples who have been married at least twenty years were asked if religious beliefs and practices could present solutions for marital problems. Findings indicated that some of the couples positively responded to this question by giving references to the Koran and the Sunna. They stated that when they had a problem in their marital life, they made use of the Koran and the Sunna and find a solution. They also developed strategies such as being patient and praying when they had problems. For instance, Mr. Ufuk and his wife Mrs. Nimet who have been married for fifty-two years, stated that religious beliefs and practices had a potential to resolve marital problems. Mr. Ufuk said: “When we encountered a problem, we prayed. Allah could solve problems in mysterious ways.” (Balkanlıoğlu, 2014: 100). Mr. Cemil who has been married for twenty-three years stated that the Sunna is in the center of their life and it protects them from problems before they occur:

Well, I always say that, I also know from what I read; if we follow our Master the Prophet, then there will be no problem as long as we try to know his Sunna from reliable sources. If we follow the Sunna, there won't be any problem. Therefore, that's an exact solution!

In that sense, Mr. Cemil's wife, Mrs. Nezihe emphasized the importance of religious beliefs not only

for a marriage but also for raising a child. In addition, Mr. Adil who has been married for thirty-nine years said: "Absolutely! When you follow Islamic rules, you won't have any problem!" His wife Mrs. Nazan also emphasized the importance of moral and universal values that were encouraged by religion and their impact on a happy marriage:

It might be, because religion recommends us to sacrifice. If I learn what to do in a marriage, I can be happy. Likewise, religion advises us the good. If one considers what religion advises, then he/she becomes happy. Because you become tolerant, forgiver, self-sacrificing, not arrogant! In other words, if you avoid all the bad feelings, there is no reason for being unhappy. Religion could be [a source for solution].

Mr. Metin who has been married for twenty-two years pointed out religious references as a solution for marital problems:

Yes, it could be a solution. When there is a conflict, then there is the Sunna for the solution. A common acquiescence develops. What does it mean? For example, sometimes you disagree with your parents or with your spouse or you have conflicts with them. Well, when you apply to the Koran and the Sunna for the solution, nobody could object to them. They are the sources.

Mr. Hakan who has been married for thirty-six years emphasized the importance of religion in protecting couples from harmful behaviors in marriage: "A hundred percent! [religion could be a source for solution]. Well, if you're really religious, you're afraid of Allah, then you refrain from behaviors that could harm your marriage. It could be a solution with this respect, I can say." Mrs. Yasemin and her husband Mr. Erol, who have been married for thirty-two years believed that religion could offer solutions. Mrs. Yasemin stated: "Of course, of course! Patience for instance! My patience yields from my religious beliefs. I knew I needed to be patient because of my religious beliefs and it always worked. My patience had always good consequences!" Similarly, Mrs. Meliha who has been married for twenty-seven years mentioned positive impacts of religion on her marital life: "When I had problems with my husband, I always survive by praying. I always pray for my husband and my children, as well."

Some other couples, such as Mr. Salih who has been married for thirty-six years, Mr. Akif and his wife Mrs. Serap (twenty-eight years), Mr. Levent and his wife Mrs. Esra (twenty-four years), Mrs. Mehtap (twenty-three years), Mr. Sinan and his wife Mrs. Beyza (twenty years) and Mrs. Nilüfer (twenty years) believed that religious beliefs and practices could create solutions for marital problems.

On the other hand, some couples (which is minority) expressed their negative attitudes. One of them is Mrs. Mürşan who has been married for forty-three years and she said: "I don't believe pressure can solve problems! Without respect, you cannot solve any problem!" Her husband Mr. Kenan responded in a similar way. Mrs. Feride who has been married for forty years believed that religion could not be a settlement for marital problems as responding to the related question in the interview as follows: "I don't think it could be [a solution]." In that sense, Mr. Mehmet who has been married for twenty years said: "I don't think so!" Mr. Fatih who has been married for twenty-three years responded as follows:

It could not be [a solution], why? How come? Marriage is a strange thing. It's based on mutual affection that could develop later. Everything could settle afterwards. Affection develops after the marriage. By understanding each other, everything settles. I don't think it [religion] could be a solution.

Mrs. Nazlı who has been married for twenty-three years stated that if both spouses' religious beliefs and practices are different, religious beliefs and practices could not fix marital problems:

Solution should be mutual. The other party should agree with you. If I consider my marriage, it's not a solution. What kind of influence does it have on me? Well, when I pray I feel peace and calm. I become patient. I praise to Allah. There are such effects on me, [but not on my marriage]!

Discussion and Conclusion

This study discovered practice, perception and attitudes of couples, who have been married for at least twenty years, regarding the relationship between religion and marriage. All participants were Muslim except one who converted to Islam from Christianity after the marriage. It was found that all spouses respect to each other and 92.9% of them defined their marital relationship as happy. Similarly, 83.3% of them stated that they get on well with each other always or almost always. With regards to religious issues, nine-tenths of couples (90.4%) mentioned that they either always or almost always agree with each other.

When couples' religious beliefs and practices are considered, a spectrum of religious practice was found, from couples who do not consider religion in their lives to couples who try to practice religion in every aspect of their lives. Over this spectrum, a list of religious practices can be made from the most common to the least as follows: Pray, sacrifice an animal for Allah, fasting, reading the Koran, alms-giving, performing five time prayer in a day, pilgrimage, umrah, and some other religious social activities.

Findings also indicated that religious beliefs and practices do not influence some of the marriages (at least in a negative manner). This finding implies couples' pluralistic and liberal approach. On the other hand, most of the couples pointed out positive effects of religious beliefs and practices on their marriages. These positive effects resulted in happiness and continuation of marriage.

Another remarkable finding is concerned with the way religious beliefs offer resolutions to marital problems. Most of the couples considered religion as a source for resolving conflicts in marital life, while a few showed an opposing view. Participants who see religion as an option for solving marital problems believed that causes of divorcing such as deceiving and domestic violence could be prevented with the help of religious beliefs and practices. They also added that religious beliefs encourage them to be more patient when encountered with adverse events. On the other hand, couples who did not consider religion as an option for solving marital problems, emphasized that reaching a settlement could only be achieved by mutual respect and efforts for agreement.

This study implies how religion is an important and powerful institution as Berger(1990)and Şentürk (2004) emphasized. Participants of this study made references to values of the Koran and the Sunna to explain how their religious practices helped them to solve their marital problems. Therefore, these findings are in parallel with the findings of studies such as Dollahite and Marks (2009) and Mahoney(2005), which found a connection between religious context and outcomes of marriage. Further studies should investigate the relationship between religion and marriage/family in the context of different cultures and religions. Especially, comparison of effects of beliefs in different religions could provide remarkable findings. As another further study, family-counseling practices could be investigated in the context of religion e.g. family counselors' beliefs and attitudes of the influence of religious practices on solving marital problems.

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