

Demographic Differentials and Demographic Integration of Turkish and Kurdish Populations in Turkey

Ismet Koc and Alanur Cavlin

Hacettepe University,

Institute of Population Studies,

06100 Ankara, Turkey

Tel: (90) 312-310 79 06, Fax: (90) 312-311 81 41

E-mails: iskoc@hacettepe.edu.tr, alanurcv@hacettepe.edu.tr

Abstract

The objectives of the study are three-folds: (1) to provide estimates of the total populations and spatial distributions of different language groups in Turkey, (2) to test whether the commonly held belief that Turkish-speaking and Kurdish-speaking populations are "actors" of different demographic regimes is true, and (3) to assess whether a process of integration/assimilation, in the form of inter-marriage of Turkish-speaking and Kurdish-speaking populations and language usage is under way in Turkey. Data comes from the 2003 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS-2003), which collected information on mother tongues of and languages known by women age 15-49, of their husbands, of their parents, and language used between spouses. .

A recent and comprehensive study has shown that the Turkish population comprises some 51 ethnic/language groups. However, there is little quantitative information on the ethnic/language composition of the population and of the spatial distribution of ethnic/language groups. The existing information remains largely speculative and politically driven. Based on the assumption that the mother tongue composition of women is also representative of that of the whole population, the results of the TDHS-2003 imply that of the population of Turkey, 83 percent are Turkish-speaking, 14 percent are Kurdish-speaking, 2 percent are Arabic-speaking and the remaining 1 percent belong to other language groups. The Eastern provinces of the country are dominated by the Kurdish-speaking population, while Turkish-speaking population constitutes significant proportions of the population in all regions. The sample size of the TDHS-2003 disallows meaningful analyses of the demographic characteristics of other language groups.

Turkish-speaking and Kurdish-speaking populations appear to have distinctive demographic characteristics, and easily distinguishable demographic and reproductive health behavior patterns. Higher fertility and childhood mortality among Kurdish-speaking population, as compared with Turkish-speaking population, persists even after the analyses are confined to regions. Our preliminary findings show that Kurdish-speaking women know less of sources for obtaining contraceptive methods, use contraception less than Turkish-speaking women, are more modern method inclined, and fare worse in terms of selected reproductive health indicators. Kurdish-speaking women marry significantly earlier than Turkish-speaking women

do. A third group is composed for this study in order to see the level and demographic consequences of integration/assimilation between Turks and Kurds. This group named as Turkish speaker Kurds and involves women who use Turkish with their spouse while their mother tongue is Kurdish; TDHS-2003 shows that 35 percent of Kurdish women use Turkish with her husband.

Inter-marriage between Turkish and Kurdish-speaking populations is quite uncommon. Ninety-six percent of Turkish-speaking women are married to Turkish-speaking males, while 93 percent of Kurdish-speaking women are in endogamous marriages. These results show that despite strong migration movements and co-residence of different ethnic/language groups in all regions of Turkey, strong demographic differentials exist between Turkish and Kurdish-speaking populations, and that the convergence of the two groups does not appear to be a process under way. In summary, while Turkish and Kurdish language groups appear to be “actors” of different demographic regimes, at different stages of demographic transition processes, a transitional group, namely Turkish speaker Kurds, has experienced integration/assimilation which reflecting transition in their demographic behavior.