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INFLUENCE OF ALEVI-SUNNI INTERMARRIAGE ON THE SPOUSES' RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION*

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Abstract

What influence Alevi-Sunni intermarriage has on spouses' individual religious affiliation after marriage was the research question addressed in this study. Since the topic is just starting to be studied, no official or unofficial data exist regarding the Alevi-Sunni intermarriage in Turkey. This study responded to the need to describe extant relationships by using a qualitative approach to gather detailed information from a sample of married couples in Çorum province, Turkey. A case study method was applied to a sample of ten couples. Couples were selected using snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Twenty face-to-face interviews were conducted. Each of the ten husbands and ten wives in Alevi-Sunni intermarriages were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires. Additional demographic and observational data were gathered. Spouses in the Alevi-Sunni intermarriages sampled did not change their religious affiliation after marriage. Further interdisciplinary studies on Alevi-Sunni intermarriage that explore different dimensions of intermarriage are needed.

Key Words: Family, Intermarriage, Alevism, Sunnism, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage formalizes a couple's relationship and brings them closer together as well as their relatives, neighbors, and others (cf. Yinger, 1968, p. 104-107). Couples' backgrounds can be diverse in many ways including age, ethnicity, social class, and religion. Some diversity has more of an impact on the couple's relationship than others. Religious diversity in many ways can have a great deal of influence the couple's interaction (Yinger, 1968, p. 104-107).

Since the early years of the last century, studies have examined intermarriage in American society along many social criteria, including race, faith, and culture, (cf., American Medical Association, 1937, p. 314; Bossard & Bol, 1957, p. 1-50; Bugelski, 1961, p. 148-153; Burchinal & Chancellor, 1962, p. 348-354; Cavan, 1970, p. 311-320; Glick, 1970, p. 292-298; Greenstein & Carlson, 1993, p. 428; Heer, 1967, p. 112-120; Marcson, 1950, p. 75-78; Merton, 1941, p. 361-374; O'Leary & Finnas, 2002, p. 235-254; Peres & Schrift, 1978, p. 428; Schoen, 1986, p. 49; Sherkat, 2004, p. 606-625). Many of these studies focused on interfaith unions. As is the case for most other social criteria, interfaith marriage in America has increased during recent decades. Among American adults,

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about four in ten (37%) participated in religious intermarriage in the United States in 2007 (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008, p. 34). Additionally, in half of these couples (50%), one partner was more likely to change his or her religious affiliation in order to match that of the spouse after marriage (Pew, 2008, p. 35).

However, few studies could be found in the existing literature about intermarriage in Turkey, either in English or Turkish. Because of the lack of national data on intermarriage, knowledge of intermarriage in Turkey is based upon special studies and surveys. Examples include Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits (2002, p. 417-432), who studied Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage, and Çatlı (2008, p. 13-14), who studied Alevi-Sunni intermarriage. To the author's knowledge, Çatlı's is the only study in the present literature examining the Alevi-Sunni intermarriage in Nevşehir and Istanbul, Turkey (2008). Thus, a huge knowledge gap exists about the topic due to the lack of research and publications about the issue.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions for this study are: (a) Does Alevi-Sunni intermarriage have any influence on individual religious affiliation of spouses during the marriage? If so, (b) How does Alevi-Sunni intermarriage affect each member of the couples' religious affiliation preference?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Intermarriage

Family is the core institution in almost every society. Marriage plays a key role in the continuation of families in almost all societies. Therefore, marriage holds a unique position among other social phenomena in society and in many academic disciplines (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005, p. 1-25). People usually tend to marry someone who shares many of the same statuses to them including someone who are from the same social group. However, similarity of status is not the only factor influencing one's choice of spouse; many variables play into this decision (Kalmijn, 1998, p. 395-421). For example, some people seek differences in their potential spouses along such dimensions as race, ethnicity, religion, culture, etc. Marriages of these sorts are collectively referred to as intermarriage or mixed marriage (Landis, 1949, p. 401-407).

Although intermarriage has been one of the main issues in ethnic relation studies, sociology has also dealt with intermarriage issues (Pagnini & Morgan, 1990, p. 405-432; Qian & Lichter, 2007, p. 68-94). According to Bossard (1939), intermarriage is socially a vital issue and should be studied due to the significance of intermarriage as "an index of the assimilative process," "the social distance between distinctive groups," and the "cultural similarities and dissimilarities in marriage" (p. 792). Intermarriage is studied in terms of the amalgamation or assimilation of distinct social groups. Statistical investigations of the ratio of mixed marriages to the total number of marriages have been implemented to measure "the rate of amalgamation of different groups." From a more general and theoretical perspective, anthropological investigations have examined the various blending effects of mixed marriages, as exemplified in the value systems of the spouses themselves, in relation to broader trends of cultural (religious and social) assimilation (Resnik, 1933, p. 94).

Song (2009, p. 331-348) pointed out that intermarriage can effectively decrease the 'social distance' between the majority and various minority groups, thereby restructuring the system of social mores related to the appropriateness of certain relationships. As intermarriage results in less distinctive boundaries between social groups through successive generations, it can provide information of societal change over time (Kalmijn, 1998, p. 395-421).

Sociological research on intermarriage, as Barron stated, has distinguished itself from other approaches by emphasizing "the causal factors," "the patterns of incidence and selection," and "the consequences among the marriage patterns and their children" (1951, p. 249). The term

intermarriage has been used in the literature: (a) to refer to marriage between people of “culturally incompatible groups, subsocieties, or societies,” focusing on the modes of accommodation of each of the spouses in pursuit of a harmonious union, and (b) to capture the attempts of the broader social networks of the spouses to reconcile their differences “without loss of distinctive values” (Cavan, 1970, pp. 311-312). Kalmijn and Tubergen (2010) outline the three general notions according to which researchers most frequently explain intermarriage: “Individual preferences to marry within or outside the group, structural opportunities to meet members of the own group, and the influence of third parties on marriage behavior” (p. 461; Kalmijn, 1998, p. 395-421). According to Kalmijn and Tubergen (2010), the study of intermarriage provides researchers with key insights into the strength of disparate subgroups’ interrelationships by indicating to what degree they consider each other equals. Intermarriage results in a connection not only between the spouses themselves, but also more generally between their respective communities. Intermarriage facilitates inter-cultural blending, thereby blurring ethnic distinctions, and ameliorating systematic prejudice through successive generations, each being less likely to identify with a single group than the last. Widespread intermarriage homogenizes formerly distinctive “ethnic definitions in society” (p. 459).

The many factors affecting intermarriage may vary depending on the people, and by extension, the broader social networks involved (Camazine, 1967, p. 43-63). According to Barnett (1962, p. 191-194), the existence of minority groups, an unbalanced sex ratio, and the acceptance of definite cultural principles promote mixed marriage.

Intermarriage and Interfaith Marriage in Turkey

As mentioned in the introduction, although intermarriage exists, a huge knowledge gap exists regarding intermarriage and interfaith marriage in Turkey. Neither the Turkish Statistical Institute, the Ministry of Interior, nor the Presidency of Religious Affairs collects data about religion, denomination, intermarriage, and interfaith marriage (Turkish Statistical Institute, personal communication, March 25, 2011; Ministry of the Interior, General Directorate of Civil Registration and Nationality, personal communication, March 24, 2011; the Presidency of Religious Affairs, personal communication, March 14, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to carry our studies on these issues in order to fill this gap in knowledge. Only a few studies on intermarriage have been completed in Turkey from which to depart.

Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits studied the Turkish-Kurdish interracial marriage in Turkey. Turks and Kurds are considered to be different races than each other in Turkey (Gündüz-Hoşgör & Smits, 2002, p. 417-432). Though Turks and Kurds have traditionally preferred ethnically homogamous relationships, these groups have more and more frequently intermarried despite the ongoing conflict occurring in Southeastern Turkey. These intermarriages are affected by several factors. More intermarriages of this type take place in metropolitan areas than in rural areas. Education level plays an ethnicity-specific role in that Kurds with high education and Turks with low education levels are more likely to intermarry. Finally, gender differences appear in that Kurdish males and Turkish females are more likely to intermarry (Gündüz-Hoşgör & Smits, 2002, p. 417-432).

The other study about Turkish intermarriage by Çatlı (2008) is the only available Alevi-Sunni intermarriage study. She identified several features affecting Alevi-Sunni intermarriage. In the first place, in urban centers the likelihood of intermarriage increased due to the breakdown of definite ethnic distinctions. Prestige was also an influential factor, in that Sunni status is privileged within Turkish culture. Therefore, the Sunni partner was more likely to exert control over the couples affiliation and behavior. Similarly, the patriarchal nature of Turkish society gives privilege to the male partner. However, in some cases, the woman determined the couple’s affiliation. In these cases financial asymmetries seem to be the root cause (p. 13-14).

In conclusion, a study that explores and examines Alevi-Sunni intermarriage in Çorum province should help fill the knowledge gap. It will build on and extend these two previous Turkish studies, especially the latter one.

METHOD

Research Design

The study followed a qualitative research model. It was cross-sectional and employed the qualitative case study as a research method. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Texas.

Data Collection

Research Setting

The target population was couples of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage in Çorum province, Turkey. Although the population of Çorum province includes followers of different Islamic affiliations, the majority groups are Alevis and Sunnis. Alevis and Sunnis live separately in some districts and together in other districts (Arabacı, 2000, p. 1-65). No official population data on the size or proportion of Alevis and Sunnis in this province exist. However, both Alevi and Sunni populations are high enough in this province to provide a considerable sample pools for studying the Alevism-Sunnism relationship issues (Arabacı, 2000, p. 1-65). Because of the more even distribution of these two groups, Çorum province was chosen as the site for the research.

Two stages of sampling methods were used, snowball and purposive sampling. In this sense, each couple contacted was asked by the researchers for a list of names of other couples who would be eligible to participate in a research (i.e. snowball sampling). Most couples referred other mixed marriage couple(s) for possible inclusion in the research. Then, researchers purposely selected the names on the list of couple who were eligible for the sample and would result in the diversity necessary (i.e. purposive sampling).

Recruitment

Recruiting qualified respondents is a demanding task; therefore, different sources were used during the recruitment process. Firstly, *Imams*, and *Dedes* (socio-religious leaders) were asked to refer Alevi-Sunni intermarriage couples in that province, because both *Imams* and *Dedes* play significant roles as counselors for intermarriage issues. Academicians who work on the Alevism-Sunnism topics were also asked to refer respondents. Friends and other contacts of the author were other sources for finding samples. Finally, the initial respondents were asked to refer other Alevi-Sunni intermarriage couples.

The recruitment process was accomplished after finding the ten eligible couples of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage (totally twenty people) who met the required diversity criteria. One goal was to have an equal number of husbands and wives from each religious group. For this purpose, the final sample consisted of five Sunni husbands married to five Alevi wives and five Alevi husbands married to five Sunni wives.

Interview Process

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of data collection. All data gathered from the respondents were collected with explicit permission and voluntary participation of the respondents. Data were collected through in-depth interview with each respondent and audio-recorded with the permission of each respondent. Each respondent was interviewed individually. The interview with each respondent lasted about thirty minutes.

All twenty interviews were completed in a month. Interviews were conducted in Turkish and the responses were translated to English later by key personnel. Translations to English were checked and double checked by key personnel.

Data from the interview consisted of the completed consent form, background information questionnaire, responses to face-to-face interview, participant observation by researchers, and researchers' notes. Every respondent signed the consent form before the interview started. Then, the respondent filled out the socio-demographic questionnaire followed by the in-depth interview. The researcher asked probing questions in order to explore more relevant and detailed data. Finally, the researcher took observational notes during the each interview. The researcher checked the interview schedule at the end of each interview.

Interview Guide

In order to explore opinions and experiences of the respondents in the sense of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage, a semi-structured interview questionnaire was used. The questionnaire focused on Alevi-Sunni intermarriage in relation to Alevi-Sunni intermarriage and its impact on religious affiliation. In the questionnaire, the first question examined the happiest day of the respondent's life, whereas the second question explored the opinions of the respondents on the subject of family. Question number three covered the characteristics of mate selection process of the intermarriage couples, while fourth and fifth questions asked for elucidation on the religious beliefs of the respondents before and after marriage. More importantly, the sixth and seventh questions concerned the religious affiliation identities of respondents' pre-post marriage. Finally, question number eight asked for clarification Alevi-Sunni intermarriage threats to child rearing.

Data Analysis

Background questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and participant observations were the raw data analyzed in this research. First, ID numbers were given to each of the 20 interviews. Audio-records were transcribed verbatim. Each interview yielded an average about fifteen pages of text. During the qualitative data analysis, the software program (Ethnograph) was used.

As the initial step in the grounded theory method, systematic coding was the first phase of the data analysis. It included three steps: Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding phase, the researcher read through all the transcripts of the completed interviews. Then, the data were coded based on the preliminary characteristics by using the qualitative software program Ethnograph. Initial or open coding yielded twenty seven codes. Some of the codes or categories included "characteristics of dating," "knowledge about Alevism and Sunnism," "the influences of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage on individual religious affiliation preference," "intermarriage and child issues," "perceptions of spouses about religious beliefs," "perceptions of spouses about religious affiliations," "intermarriage and relationships," "intermarriage and society," etc.

After the open coding, the key concepts of the data were selected in the axial coding section. The main goal in this step was to develop and relate categories to each other. For example, codes that were "disregarding the differences between Alevism and Sunnism," "lack of identification to affiliation of origin," and "tolerance and respect of religious affiliation differences" were integrated to the "reasons for maintaining the religious affiliation preference."

The twenty seven open codes were reduced to seventeen codes in the axial coding section. The axial codes that were developed were used to organize the result section. Major headings used in the results section were "the influence of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage on individual religious affiliation preferences of spouses," and "reasons for maintaining the religious affiliation preference."

Selective coding was the last step in the coding process. In this stage, tables and flow charts were created to finalize the proposed theory by linking concrete data to the theoretical ideas.

In addition, completed background information questionnaire and the interviewers' participant observation notes were other data sources, which complemented the results from the interviews. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 16 was used to generate descriptive data from the background information. The results are stated in the descriptive analysis section. Interviewers' observational notes are suitably mentioned throughout the result part.

In conclusion, the researcher compared the similarities and differences between the concepts by constantly over time comparing patterns, themes, and common concept categories. He explored new concepts concerning the Alevi-Sunni intermarriage, which do not emerge in the available literature. The results are presented in the next section.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

The sample for this study consisted of ten Alevi-Sunni intermarriage couples or a total of 20 respondents of which 10 were male and 10 were female. Using information from background questionnaires, the frequency, minimum, maximum, and mean values of the samples were generated and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency, Minimum, Maximum, and Mean of Samples (n = 20), Turkish Alevi-Sunni Intermarriage Couples, 2011

Variable	Frequency	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Gender				
Male	10			
Female	10			
Place of Birth				
Çorum Province	18			
Elsewhere	2			
Age		23	52	32.95
Length of Marriage		3	28	10.60
# of Children		1	2	1.40
Couples with One Child	12			
Two Children	8			
Education		1	3	
1- Elementary School	2			
2- High School	15			
3- University Degree	3			
Income*		0	13	1.90
Affiliation Preference				
Before Intermarriage				
Alevi	10			
Sunni	10			
Affiliation Preference				
After Intermarriage				
Alevi	10			
Sunni	10			

*Annual income measured as: 0= No income; 1= \$1-4,999, 2= \$5,000-9,999,.....13= \$60,000-64,999.

Almost all of the respondents were born in Çorum province (90%), while only 2 were born outside of Çorum province. On average, they were about 33 years old (mean: 32.95). The average length of marriage of the respondents was about 11 years (mean: 10.60). Sixty percent of the respondents had only one child, while 40% of them had two children (mean: 1.40). Three out of four of the respondents (75%) had a high school degree; in contrast, 15% of the respondent had a university degree, and only 10% of the respondents had an elementary school degree. The approximate annual family income of the respondents was between \$5,000-9,999. Finally, ten

respondents were Alevi pre- and post-marriage, whereas ten of them were Sunni pre- and post-marriage; there were no changes in affiliation.

Influence of Alevi-Sunni Inter-marriage on Individual Religious Affiliation Preferences of Spouses

The main goal of this research was to explore whether Alevi-Sunni inter-marriage impacts the religious affiliation preferences of the spouses. In order to satisfy this purpose, two requests were directed to the respondents: "Think for a moment; tell me about your religious affiliation identity before the marriage," and "tell me your religious affiliation identity after the marriage."

Ali, 52, an Alevi husband married for twenty-eight years and father of two, still describes himself as being as much of an Alevi as he was before the marriage. He generally was very talkative and positive during the interview. He mentioned that he has never changed his religious affiliation because he has not needed to do so. He said: "My father was Alevi, and I am Alevi. When people start to talk about Alevism and Alevis somewhere, I say I am Alevi without any hesitation." Another Alevi husband, Zeynel, 50, married twenty-five years and father of two, described himself as Alevi and reported that he was unsure of the meaning of both his and his wife's affiliations. It was noted by the interviewer that he was very neutral about both religious beliefs and affiliations during the interview. He said:

Now, I still describe myself as Alevi, but I do not know why I am Alevi and my wife is Sunni. I do not know how these terms were created. I do not want to know, also, because we are married and have two children.

One of the respondents thinks Alevism and Sunnism are just labels that society gives to a person due to family background in patriarchal Turkish society. Hüseyin, 42, an Alevi husband married fourteen years and father of two, explained the issues in macro-level terms rather than just explaining them in relation to his marriage during the interview. He seemed to be certain about the accuracy of his opinions and said, "Being an Alevi is neither a thing to be proud of nor a reviling thing." He added:

Alevism is not everything. I describe myself as an Alevi because my parents are Alevi. That is the lifestyle of families in Anatolia. If you were born to an Alevi family, you are an Alevi; if you were born to a Sunni family, you are a Sunni, naturally.

Another Alevi husband, Hasan, 30, married six years and father of one, described himself as being proud to be an Alevi pre- and post-marriage. While he was mentioning his Alevi identity, he was showing his obedience to his Alevi identity by putting his right hand on the heart according to the interviewer's observation. He believes that the portion of one's identity stemming from religious affiliation inherently comes from the family. He said:

I was born as an Alevi, and my parents were Alevi. I have never kept my Alevi identity hidden in my work place or in my marriage. I always said I am an Alevi. I wish there were no denominational differences in Turkey. I want it, but I cannot hide my identity.

Aydın, 30, an Alevi husband married four years and father of one, reported that he has been Alevi pre- and post-inter-marriage because being an Alevi is not a shameful thing. Aydın was not being proud of being an Alevi, but also was not embarrassed due to his Alevi identity. He said, "I have described myself as an Alevi. Actually, I have never disregarded my Alevi identity, I do not! It is not an embarrassing thing. Thanks Allah (God). That's it."

Likewise, Sunni husbands reported the continuity of their religious affiliation preference. That is, being in an Alevi-Sunni inter-marriage has not threatened their religious affiliation preferences, either. One of the Sunni husbands, Metin, 35, married thirteen years and father of two, said: "There is no change in my beliefs. I am still a Sunni. I live in a Sunni district with my Alevi

wife." He was very respectful about both affiliations, while he was talking about them. Hakan, 28, a Sunni husband married five years and father of one, and Ufuk, 25, married three years and father of one, reported that they have never changed their religious affiliation preferences since they have not seen any differences between the two Islamic affiliations, Alevism and Sunnism. Also, Arif, 28, a Sunni husband married four years and father of one, reported no change in his religious affiliation preference after his marriage. Finally, "Nothing is changed in my life after the marriage regarding to Alevism and Sunnism," said Mustafa, 24, a Sunni husband married four years and father of one.

Similarly, both Alevi and Sunni wives reported that none of them had changed their religious affiliation preferences due to intermarriage. For example, Eda, 30, married for thirteen years and mother of two, described herself as Alevi. Serap, 24, described herself as an Alevi. She has been married five years and is mother of one. She was very open during the interview and stated, "I am an Alevi. My family of origin is Alevi and my husband is Sunni." Another Alevi wife, Yagmur, 24, married four years and mother of one, did not change her religious affiliation preference because it was meaningless for her to change it. Aslı, 24, an Alevi wife married three years and mother of one, stated that:

Actually, we have a word for the religious affiliation, Alevism, Alevi. This is who I am. I have never changed my affiliation since the marriage. There has been no change. I am who I have been. There is no change in our marriage.

Zeynep, 23, an Alevi wife married four years and mother of one, reported that "[her] beliefs have always been the same. [She] actually did not know what Alevism and Sunnism were. Frankly, [she] do[es] not care about Alevism and Sunnism, but about love." She looked very happy during the interview. When she talked about her identity and husband she was smiling.

Emine, 48, a Sunni married twenty eight years and mother of two, mentioned that she has been Sunni and has not thought of changing her religious affiliation preference because of her Alevi husband. She was not very talkative during the interview. Mehtap, 50, a Sunni married twenty five years and mother of two, explained that intermarriage has never had any impact on her religious affiliation preference. She has not seen any difference between Alevism and Sunnism. In that sense, she said:

Mine [beliefs] are the same as before. There has been no change in my beliefs. How can I say -- I am who I have been. There is no change in my life. What they [Alevi family-in-law] did, did not affect my affiliation choice. No. My direction has been the same. There is no change. Never, never. I am who I am. My husband is who he is. So the worships are the same, the lifestyles are the same. The religions are the same. How can I be an Alevi or he a Sunni? So, the epithet that people give you all is different. The lifestyles are not different. In my husband's lifestyle and family, they believe in the Qur'an, prayer, fasting, what the six pillars of Islam ask you to do. What can you do, additionally? What can he do as a Muslim? What can he do different in order to be a Sunni?

Interestingly, Esra, 39, a Sunni married fourteen years and mother of two, mentioned that since her and her husband's world views are similar, they disregard Alevism and Sunnism. She was very liberal and open minded. There was not any religious figure, picture, or paints in the home implying Alevism or Sunnism affiliation or allegiance. Esra said: "I and my husband do not have knowledge about Alevism and Sunnism. Therefore, our lifestyles are similar, and we did not think of changing our religious affiliations. We do not deal with these issues."

Zuhal, 25, a Sunni married six years and mother of one, and Ayşe, 28, married four years and mother of one, reported that they did not change their religious affiliation preferences. Both of

the respondents disregarded the affiliation differences and focused on the similarities of the affiliations by mentioning the same God, prophet and holy book.

In conclusion, this study reports that Alevi-Sunni intermarriage does not appear to threaten the religious affiliation identity of the spouses regardless of gender, religious affiliation preference before marriage, and length of marriage. Specifically, each member of the couples described herself or himself with the same religious affiliation preference before and after the marriage. Further, they described themselves as holding the same affiliation as their fathers. This may indicate the enduring strength of the traditional and patriarchal characteristics of the Turkish family. Thus, neither Alevi nor Sunni spouses changed their religious affiliation preference because of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage; both of the spouses continue to live with same religious affiliation as before their intermarriage.

From observation of the interviews, it is noted that majority of the respondents were comfortable during the interviews and responded to all the questions directed them. It is anticipated that having interviews in their home created a comfortable situation for them. Majority of the respondents were very friendly and open.

This result brings us to the issue of why none of the spouses changed her/his religious affiliation preference as a result of intermarriage. This contrast with the 50% rate of change reported for mixed marriage in the U.S. (cf., Pew, 2008, p. 35). The possible reasons underlying this trend are outlined in the following section.

Reasons for Maintaining the Religious Affiliation Preference

This section outlines the possible reasons for intermarried spouses not changing or maintaining their religious affiliations after marriage. These reasons may be categorized as (1) disregarding the differences between Alevism and Sunnism, (2) lack of identification to affiliation of origin, and (3) tolerance and respect of religious affiliation differences.

Disregarding the Differences between Alevism and Sunnism

Some of the couples reported that there was no difference between Alevism and Sunnism; hence, they did not think about changing their religious affiliation preference post marriage. This happens in either of two ways: By disregarding the differences between Alevism and Sunnism or accepting both of them as the same. In this regard, Ali, an Alevi married twenty-eight years, believes that there is no difference between Alevism and Sunnism. He prays five times in a day. Also, there were Islamic figures and paintings on the wall in the home showing the couple's religiosity. He reported, "There is no religious difference between us -- all of us read the same Holy Qur'an." He disregarded the differences and said:

In my opinion, there is no difference between them [Alevism and Sunnism]. I mean, in our home there was nothing such as an Alevi or Sunni. Among my closer friends, some of them are Sunnis, and some of them are Alevis. There is no difference among people.

Similarly, Hakan, a Sunni married five years, believes that being human is more important than being an Alevi or Sunni. He was angry with society because of the separation of Alevism and Sunnism from each other. He said: "In my family, there is no Alevi-Sunni differentiation -- in my family." He paused a while and stated the following:

In the society, yes. In the society there are differentiation, but not in my family. I and my wife never distinguish between Alevism and Sunnism. We care about humanity, and it does not matter where she comes from. Kurds are humans, Alevis are humans, Laz are humans. All of them are my friends. If she is human, that is it. I and my wife do not have Alevi-Sunni differentiation. We all believe in the same Allah (God). If you ask me the

prophet, I will say Mohammad. My wife will say the same. We have the same adhan. There is no difference, but people create it.

Ufuk, Sunni, married three years, rejects the differences between Alevism and Sunnism and accepts both of them as one thing. He emphasized the similarities. He said:

To me, there is no Alevism and Sunnism. One time, someone said: 'I am a Sunni,' and another one said: 'I am an Alevi.' The ethnicity is the same; the religion is the same. Everything is the same that we have. I asked, 'Now, how many Allah (God) we have?' One. All of us believe in the same Allah.

Aslı, Alevi, married three years, refused Alevism and Sunnism differences by stating:

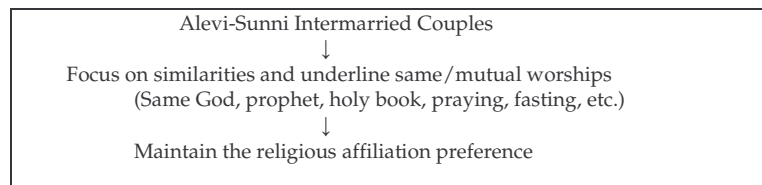
Because my family-in-law is not like a classical Sunni family, and my family of origin is not like a classical Alevi family, I always say we all live on the same ground. There should not be Alevism and Sunnism. I am siding with my words. I have had no problem with Alevism-Sunnism. I have friends from Alevis and Sunnis. For me, all of them are equal.

Sunni wife, Mehtap, married twenty-five years, accepts Alevism and Sunnism as being the same. She reported: "I am married with an Alevi male, but they fast during the Ramadan and pray. Their religious life is not different than mine. I mean, there is no difference; there is no difference in lifestyles."

Zuhal, Sunni, married six years, believes that Alevism and Sunnism are not different because both Alevis and Sunnis believe in Islam and the same Allah. She also rejects Alevi-Sunni differentiation. She said: "To me, there are no Alevi and Sunni phenomena."

In summary, some couples of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage disregard the Alevi-Sunni differentiation. They focus on the similarities of Alevism and Sunnism. In that sense, respondents emphasized believing in same God (Allah), same prophet (Mohammed), same holy book (Qur'an), and same adhan etc. This suggest a meaning that Alevism and Sunnism are two sides of one or same coin. Figure 1 summaries the aspects of these couples.

Figure 1: Disregarding the differences between Alevism and Sunnism



Lack of Identification to Affiliation of Origin

In some cases, Alevi-Sunni couples have only basic introductory information about Alevism and Sunnism. This limited knowledge usually comes from what they have heard from their families of origin and others in society. These couples also do not do any reading or research about both affiliations, Alevism and Sunnism.

The following statements indicate that religious affiliation is unimportant due to the fact that the respondent lacks the detailed knowledge about affiliations and his religious affiliation identity. Explanations of Zeynel, an Alevi married twenty five years, shows that length of marriage does not help to enrich the knowledge of spouses about Alevism and Sunnism. In addition, it also does not affect either the lack of identification to affiliation of origin, or change of religious affiliation preference. He shook his head and said:

I do not know Alevism and Sunnism. No. No. No. I did not research Alevism and Sunnism. I do not like political and denominational issues. I have never dealt with them. In my family, nobody talks about them. I do not like these topics.

We did not think about religious issues. I mean, we did not pray -- we will not. Books, journals, and documentary in television -- I do not watch because I do not like them.

Hüseyin, Alevi, married fourteen years, stated that he has never done any research about Alevism and Sunnism because he and his wife have been liberal. He said: "Both of us are free about religious issues. That is, we do not care about Alevism and Sunnism although it is a social reality in our society. We have done no special research on Alevism and Sunnism."

Sunni husband, Metin, married thirteen years, reported that he has little knowledge of and done no research on Alevism and Sunnism. He believes that "if people fast and pray, they are Sunni, and if they do not, they are Alevi." He also stated that "I had no chance to read something about my and my wife's affiliations because I did not need that." Mustafa's, Sunni, married four years, comment on this issue was:

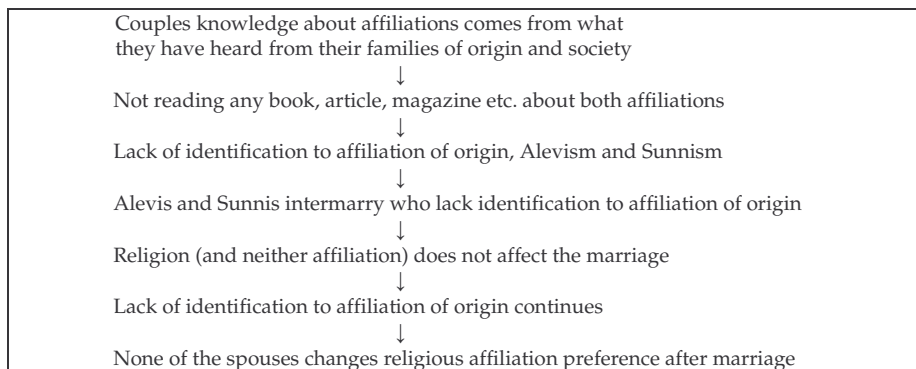
Never -- I have never done any research about Alevism and Sunnism. I heard something about them. Truthfully, Someone said my dad: 'We are Sunnis.' I asked my father what it was. He told me to forget it. There is no difference except for the name. I mean, I learned that at age sixteen. I learned what Alevi meant later from the society.

Mustafa adds that he still does not know about Alevism and Sunnism and stops everyone who starts to talk about this issue.

Serap, an Alevi wife married five years, explained: "My family has always said we are Alevi. I have never done any research on Alevism, and my knowledge is based on what my family has said to me. I had knowledge about Alevism when my family told me." Esra, Sunni, married fourteen years, reported that she had never had good relations with religious issues since her childhood. She also had done no research about Alevism and Sunnism pre- or post-marriage. She said: "Such things as Alevism and Sunnism have not taken a place in my life. I usually look at people's manners. I and my husband did not look at Alevism and Sunnism, but our harmony."

These interview responses indicate that some of Alevi-Sunni couples lack the identification to affiliation of origin. Many of them stated that they do not know what Alevism and Sunnism are and do not need to know them, too. In addition, many of the respondents said that they do not read books, articles, journals, etc. about Alevism and Sunnism. As a confirmation, it was observed that no books, articles, magazines, or related materials about Alevism and Sunnism were seen in the couples' home. As a result, lack of knowledge about Alevism and Sunnism creates lack of identification to affiliation of origin. It is considered as a reason why spouses do not change their religious affiliation preferences. Figure 2 summaries the key aspects for these couples.

Figure 2: Lack of identification to affiliation of origin



Tolerance and Respect of Religious Affiliation Differences

Tolerance and respect of affiliation differences of the spouses are the other main reasons underlying why Alevi-Sunni intermarriage couples do not attempt to change their religious affiliation preferences. Aydın, an Alevi married four years, stated that tolerance and respect must exist in the family, if not this creates big problems within the family. Especially in Alevi-Sunni intermarriage couples should be more tolerant. He said:

In the family, of course, some problems happen -- minor or major problems. There are cultural differences between me and my wife. She entered to the group that she had known them as stranger and bad. People talked about them badly, in general -- especially if the male is Alevi and the female Sunni, the females having really hard problems. In fact, it happens to males, as well. If the family of the groom is not tolerant or thoughtful, there will be big problems. I mean, nobody can say there will not be a problem. There will be divorce in the family. I see that happen in the society. If nobody tolerates the spouse's affiliation difference, she will react to the actions, of course. I think both of the spouses should tolerate each other and their affiliation differences. They should find the middle way.

Yagmur, Alevi, married four years, believes that:

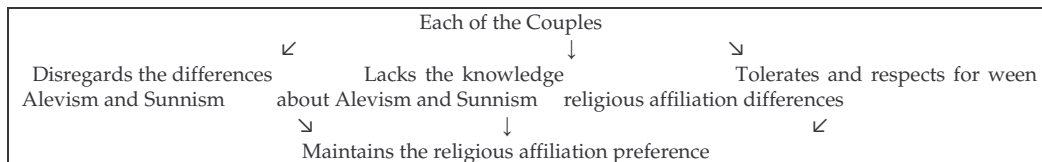
Tolerance is necessary and if couples would like to be happy, they should always tolerate each other. I and my husband are respectful to each other's affiliation preference. Although we have some problems as a family as is normal, we do not see our affiliation differences as a problem.

Mehtap, a Sunni wife married twenty-five years, believes that keeping the continuity of the family is the most important thing for couples. Therefore, tolerance takes a unique place in intermarriages. She said:

I did not consider the different affiliation preference of my husband. Before I married, my elder brother talked to my husband's family and said: 'You are Alevi, and we are Sunni. If you will not be able to tolerate the difference, this marriage should not happen. We tolerate the difference, you should do so.' Our families agreed on it. We married and have no problems.

In conclusion, respect and tolerance in the life of these couples play very significant roles. After the intermarriage, couples learn how to live with other's preferences peacefully. These couples of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage reported that they practiced tolerance in their home and relationships and neither of the spouses changed their religious affiliation preference. Figure 3 summarizes the key components for these couples.

Figure 3: Reasons for maintaining the religious affiliation preference



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given that the results of a qualitative study such as this may or may not agree with the existing theories, developing a new theory or variations on existing theories is often a goal of qualitative research (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p. 12-15). The present findings demonstrated that Alevi-

Sunni intermarriage does not influence the religious affiliation preferences of spouses. The theoretical framework originating from this study's finding is stated below.

Intermarriage studies in the U.S. and elsewhere mainly focus on the intermarriage between the followers of different Christian and Jewish denominations. However, intermarriage among the followers of different Islamic affiliations has not been widely researched, at least not in Turkey.

Alevism and Sunnism in Turkey in regards to religious beliefs system and affiliation structures are different than those of other Islamic sects (i.e. Shi'a) and other religions' denominations. These differences are directly related to the misunderstanding and lack of acceptance of Alevi and Sunnis for each other. This mutual misunderstanding and lack of acceptance influence the characteristics of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage. In this study, none of the spouses changed her or his religious affiliation preference due to Alevi-Sunni intermarriage. This means that neither the Alevi nor Sunni spouses converted to the other affiliation because spouses of intermarriage either disregarded the differences between the two affiliations, lacked an identification with their affiliation of origin, or tolerated and respected the religious affiliation differences.

These results may be better understood by taking into account macro-level social changes. That is looking through the lens of the secularization and pluralism theories along with the impacts of modernization, industrialization, urbanization and technology on the family structure and marriage in Turkish society.

Secularization Theory

Secularization is a theoretical term used to describe religious decline "both on the public scene and in the minds of individuals" due to the modern age (Berger, 1990, p. 25). In this process, modern science and technology have changed the situation of humanity, which has resulted in the "sharp decline of both religious practice and belief" (Berger, 1990, p. 27). In addition, industrialization has been accepted as one reason for increasing secularization and religious decline. For example, churches in one of the British industrialization centers have gradually become empty. Berger argues that the decline was explained by the impact of industrialization on the religious life of the British society during the 19th and 20th centuries. Another factor associated with religious decline in public areas and in the life of individuals was migration and its relation to secularization. Emigration is theorized to influence the religious beliefs and practices of individuals and society directly. But the overarching "reason for secularization . . . is the transforming power of modernity" (Berger, 1990, p. 28).

A relationship between secularization theory and the findings of this study appears possible. It could be stated that there is a link between the first two results of this study and the secularization theory. The Turkish Republic has experienced many changes and developments in many areas, such as in the scientific, technological, industrial, and economic domains, beginning with its establishment. The Turkish Republic accepted secularism as one of its revolutionary goals in contrast to its Islamic heritage, inherited from the Ottoman Empire. To achieve this goal, citizens were strictly forced not to practice religious beliefs regardless of the religion. In addition, industrial developments resulting in emigration have taken a unique place in the history of the Turkish Republic. Industrialization process was the beginning of emigration of Alevi and Sunnis from their rural villages. This effectively ended the long standing Alevi-Sunni segregation because these groups started to live together in urban areas. This migration also marked the beginning of the secularization process of the Alevi and Sunni citizens. Therefore, the role of religion has steadily decreased not only in the public spheres, but also in the daily lives of Alevi and Sunnis. That is, many Alevi-Sunni youths have grown up with a lack of knowledge about their religious affiliation. They have defined themselves with a secular identity although they have not completely rejected

their Alevi and Sunni identities. For them, Alevi and Sunni identities were simply those given by society due to their family backgrounds. These secular Alevis and Sunnis lacked knowledge about their religious affiliations. The knowledge they did have about Alevism and Sunnism mainly came from family and society. Hence, they have only had introductory exposure to the principles underlying their affiliations. For example, intermarried couples usually stressed that both partners believed in the same God, prophet, holy book, etc. Although what they stated is true, it should be noted that Alevism and Sunnism are different affiliations of Islam. Therefore, because of the lack of knowledge about both affiliations and focusing on the similarities of the affiliations, couples tend to not see any differences between Alevism and Sunnism; thus, they do not change their religious affiliation preference after marriage.

Also, lack of knowledge leads couples to identify less with their affiliation of origin. The responses demonstrate that the given identity, as an Alevi or Sunni, was ineffective and meaningless for some of the couples. Since the traditional structure of the Turkish family is patriarchal, the individuals in couples in this study were labeled as Alevi or Sunni based on their father's religious affiliation. However, couples accepted Alevism and Sunnism as an epithet that is given by the society and often considered it as having no influence on the relationship between spouses. Thus, being or being accepted as an Alevi or Sunni by the society tends not to be important for couples of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage.

Pluralism Theory

Pluralism is defined as "the co-existence with a measure of civic peace of different groups in one society" (Berger, 1990, p. 37). Religious pluralism is accepted as one of its dimensions. In addition to the term co-existence, Berger coined another useful term, "cognitive contamination." The term refers to how "the different lifestyles, values, and beliefs begin to mingle." According to Berger, "[c]ities become gigantic and increasingly heterogeneous. More and more, people of widely different cultures are forced to rub elbows all the time... People encounter different cultures and worldviews without ever leaving their place of birth" (Berger, 1990, pp. 38-39).

Turkish society and couples of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage practice pluralism, as well. As part of the process of pluralism, globalization with increasing access to technology (e.g., internet) has contributed to intermarriage increases in Turkish society. People, especially in a patriarchal society, like Turkey, have had a chance to see via migration, travel and media other societies where many different cultures, religions, races, life styles, etc. coexist. This exposure increases the chances that will couples practice pluralism and Turkish society will become more pluralistic. An example of the former occurs when a woman after entering a mixed marriage does not change her affiliation preference because she tries to establish or maintain her own unique secular identity.

Intermarriage and Stability of Affiliation Theory

Based on the study's finding a theory of "*intermarriage and stability of affiliation theory*" is proposed. What is being explained is that intermarriage couples do not change their religious affiliation preference after their marriage. This due to one or more of the following reasons. Spouses of intermarriage either disregard the differences between the two affiliations, have a lack of identification with their affiliation of origin, or are tolerant and respectful of religious affiliation differences. This theory proposes a number of steps leading up to the intermarriage have no impact on religious affiliation.

Firstly, love marriage appears as to be one of the most common types of marriage for intermarriage couples. Thus the consideration of the couples' mutual love is more important than religious affiliation differences. Secularization, pluralism, urbanization, technological and industrial developments, globalization, etc. all negatively influence the power of the family and marriage structure in a patriarchal society. That is, individuals in a society that is becoming less patriarchal

are more likely to make their own decision when they marry and disregard the parent's approval or disapproval. When spouses think that they fit together and love each other, they are likely to decide to marry regardless of religious affiliation differences, family's, relatives' and society's concerns about intermarriage.

In contrast to spouses' marriage decision, consistency and harmony, their families usually disapprove intermarriage due to the religious affiliation difference. Not only families of the couples, but also their relatives and society are likely to disapprove the intermarriage. In this regard, prejudices and biases against to the people of different religious affiliation are highly effective in encouraging disapproval of intermarriage. The social stigma attached to intermarriage should be added as the other major reason for disapproval. Disapproval of intermarriage may lead to punishments, such as threatening the couples by murder or different types of punishments. This is especially the case when familial ties are strong and families are conservative, especially if they still believe in patriarchy.

Interestingly, couples marry with or without getting the approval of the family and regardless of punishments. If both family of bride and groom approve the marriage and no problem appears, the couples tend to marry by having a full wedding ceremony. In contrast, intermarriage, in most cases, happens in the format of elopement without getting the families' approval. In this sense, intermarriage influences the couples' relationships with families and relatives negatively. Strained relationships sometimes become better after a while but some remain strained forever. As the most important thing in the life of the couples, intermarriage does not appear to threaten the marriage, child rearing, life styles, and relationships of couples with each other. Moreover, it is also highly significant that intermarriage does not threaten the religious affiliation preferences of the spouses.

In addition, it should be noted that when couples of intermarriage focus on the similarities in terms of religious affiliation, they disregard the religious affiliation differences. They either accept both affiliations as the same or disregard the differences between two affiliations by focusing on the likeness between them by focusing on the mutual religious symbols, praying, figures, etc. in both affiliations.

Another explanatory for stability of same affiliation of intermarried couples after the marriage is lack of identification with affiliation of origin. The main cause for that seems to be lack of knowledge of couples about their affiliations resulting in lack of identification with the affiliation of origin. Since changing the religious affiliation has no benefit for them or is meaningless (cf. social exchange theory), they keep the same religious affiliation post-marriage.

The final factors for the stability of same affiliation in intermarriage are tolerance and respect of religious affiliation differences between members of the couples. Both spouses know that they do not share the same religious affiliation and talking about the differences will probably create costly marital problems. They tolerate and respect each other for the permanence of the marriage and do not compel each other for conversion on religious issues.

In contrast, it is proposed that some intermarried couples may change their religious affiliation preferences due to different circumstances than those reported in study's sample. When a husband is strict about the religious affiliation identity and forces his wife to change her affiliation, it is likely for the wife to convert to her husband's affiliation, especially in social contexts emphasizing patriarchy. Also, it is more likely for a woman to convert to her husband's affiliation, when she lives with the extended family of her husband. In extended families, traditions and customs are more likely to remain strong. Therefore, the extended family of husband increases the chances of changes in the religious affiliation identity of the wife. Finally, it is also possible for both wife and husband to convert to the other's religious affiliation when matching the affiliation

preference of her or him is considered rewarding or beneficial. In this example, the benefit of the conversion is considered more rewarding than the cost of having different affiliations (cf. social exchange theory).

In conclusion, despite the fact that intermarriage directly influences the intermarried couples, such as affecting their relationships with family and in-laws, quality of the life, etc. it does not have any impact on the religious affiliation preference of the couples. However, it is possible for some couples to convert in some definite situations. Figure 4 summarizes the key components of the Stability of Affiliation Theory at the micro-level, which occur within the larger social context with growing secularism and pluralism. Figure 5 shows the probable reasons for religious affiliation change of couples.

Figure 4: Intermarriage and Affiliation Stability Theory

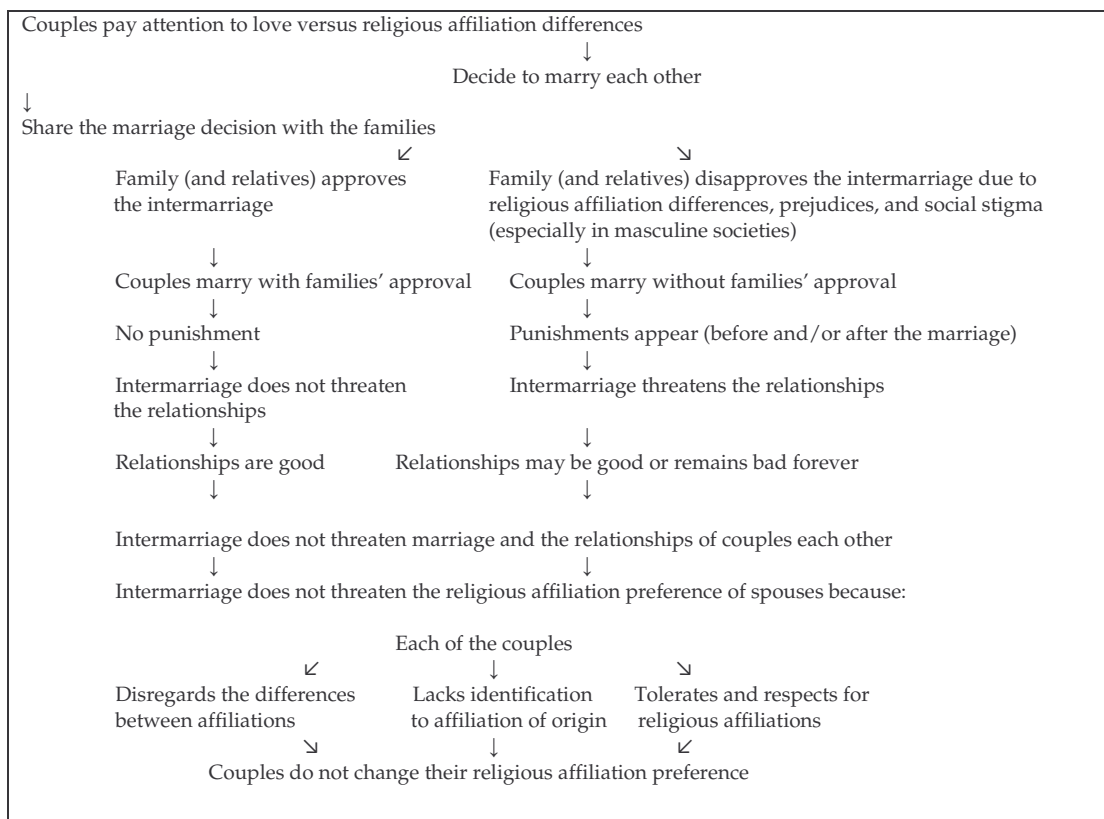


Figure 5: Probable reasons for religious affiliation change of couples

- Husband is strict about religious affiliation identity and forces the wife for changing her affiliation preference (in patriarchal societies)
- Wife lives with the extended family of husband, and family members impress the wife for affiliation change
- Willingness of either of spouses matching the affiliation preference with spouses due to the cost-benefit issues
- Either one of the couples may change the religious affiliation

DISCUSSION

Alevi-Sunni intermarriage is a real and growing phenomenon in Turkish society. As illustrated throughout this study, Alevi-Sunni intermarriage does not appear to influence the affiliation preferences of spouses. However, Alevi-Sunni intermarriage is a complex matter, which includes other issues, such as the perceptions of the couples about religious beliefs, family, type of marriage, relationships of couples with others, punishments, social stigma, etc.

It is certain that there is a strong need for additional research exploring the characteristics of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage in Turkey. Researches focusing on the religious affiliation preferences of couples and offsprings of intermarriage couples are crucial in considering many aspects of the intermarriage and child-rearing. For this purpose, research should focus on the impact of intermarriage on spouses' and offsprings' socio-religious preferences and lifestyles. Parental influences on child-rearing and the religious affiliation preferences of offsprings, such as which parent has more influence on the child, should be examined.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study calls on researchers to focus on this topic and to perform more studies along the above mentioned lines of inquiry. For this purpose, it is certain that there is a strong need for additional research exploring the characteristics of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage in Turkey. Dating characteristics, intermarried couples' marriage style, elopement, and dimensions thereof should be researched in order to explore the main characteristics of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage.

Research pertaining to perceptions of grandparents, couples, and children should be examined to reveal intergenerational perceptions about intermarriage and other dimensions of the intermarriage in relation to intergenerational issues.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This research involves a number of implications for Alevi-Sunni intermarriage. It is crucial that both societies be educated about intermarriage through the provision of beneficial information about intermarriage (i.e., Alevi-Sunni intermarriage). For this goal, institutions, such as universities, NGOs, foundations, etc. should have researches, seminars, conferences, panels, meetings etc. to educate the societies about this issue.

Governmental institutions, like The Presidency of Religious Affairs, The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK), and General Directorate of Family and Social Research should take some actions. To illustrate, The Presidency of Religious Affairs could educate mosque attendees about Alevism-Sunnism, family, and marriage matters. Not only *imams*, but also *dedes* should give speeches to the public on the topic with an aim to annihilate the obstacles in front of the intermarriage threatening the life of couples. TUBITAK and the other mentioned institution should have done some researches and propose funds for intermarriage studies.

CONCLUSION

Alevi-Sunni intermarriage is a multidimensional social reality in Turkey related to the religious, social, cultural, educational, etc. structure of the society. It is important to emphasize that there is no big difference between Alevi and Sunni societies concerning their opinions about intermarriage. That is, cultural factors negatively influence Alevi-Sunni intermarriage; thus, opinions about intermarriage are generally negative.

Although there are some difficulties in the way of intermarriage, it does happen and usually in the form of love marriage. This study revealed that spouses of Alevi-Sunni intermarriage do not consider religious affiliation differences important. Consequently, they do not change their

religious affiliation preferences due to intermarriage. It is imperative that Turkish society normalize intermarriage as it has been in other countries and stop the stigmatization and punishment of the couples.

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