THE ASPECT OF POVERTY IN BROKEN FAMILIES: A CASE OF ELAZIG


Parçalanmış Ailelerde Yoksulluğun Görünümü: Elazığ Örneği

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to address the ways poor families break up, how they fall into poverty and how they try to get rid of it. Furthermore, livelihood strategies of the female householders are examined too. This research shedding light on the poverty of broken families was conducted in 195 households in the province of Elazig. A questionnaire consisting of 77 questions was applied to women who headed the households.

The findings achieved in the research are that female householders can not adequately benefit from job opportunities, they have to work hard labor at low wages, they experience greater social exclusion and poverty as a result of family breakdown. Child labor has been observed to be relatively common in broken families. The rate of receiving alimony and pension have been found to be extremely low. With regard to livelihood strategies, it has been appeared that they have not long-term plans and develop daily strategies. Moreover, it has been seen that the social state mentality developed in recent years alleviates to some degree the poverty of the poor broken families.

Key Words: Broken family, poverty, livelihood strategies

ÖZET


Anahtar Kelimeler: Parçalanmış aile, yoksulluk, geçinme stratejileri

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a comprehensive concept. For this reason, different concepts were put forward considering the ways that poverty is lived and understood. Regardless of what kind of poverty is at issue, in all cases neediness is the matter. Poverty means the lack of meeting the needs. This concept, also, corresponds to one's lack of possession, not getting and deprived of whatever requested. According to Erdoğan, the concept of poverty is generally known with its economic dimension. However, poverty is a social problem more than anything. To him, "poverty is a social..."
Foremost concepts formed related to poverty are the absolute and relative poverties. The both concepts were formed related with poverty rate. Absolute poverty is a circumstance, in which family members or people are lack of minimum subsistence level. While absolute poverty is a concept related to staple food, relative poverty indicates the socio-economic situation of a person and the position of him/her compared to other persons and groups in a society. As Sallan-Gül indicated (2002: 109) relative poverty means "one's lacking of meeting basic infrastructural, social and cultural needs in the society and depriving of a lot of things in order to live humanely."

Another concept related with the poverty rate is humanitarian poverty. Humanitarian poverty concept may be defined as depriving of basic humanitarian capabilities such as literacy, malnutrition, short life span, lack of sanitary conditions of mother and child, catching preventable diseases (DPT, 2007: 1).

Besides the defined ones related to poverty rate, there are also other poverty types. Rural poverty and urban poverty that underline the settlement of the poverty; former and modern poverty that underline the periodical difference of the poverty are some of them.

There are two newly emerging patterns related to poverty. Poverty as a phenomenon reveals modernized appearances in the cities. Secondly, equalization of the secondary needs with the basic ones increases more and more the dependency on money. On the other hand, lack of money causes a problem of “existence” rather than a problem of subsistence. The poor families states that they are recognized as long as they have money and no one regards them when they do not have money. Those who do not have money and always live dependent on others are considered disabled, diseased, dirty, defective and bad even by their close relatives. Although it is hard to say that this perspective towards the poor is something new, it is possible to suggest that such negative thoughts are on the rise in today’s world. In the literature, this situation is called modernized poverty and new poverty (see Rahnema, 2009). The main difference between new poverty and old poverty is that secondary relations take the place of primary relations and the most active element in secondary relations is money.

Modern and urban poverty created a new phenomenon. This phenomenon is the female poverty, which is notable in the last years. Female poverty is related to the gender dimension of poverty. The concept of female poverty or the feminization of poverty emphasizes that poverty increasingly becomes a problem of the women and women with the children under their responsibility are gradually living below the poverty line. Goldberg and Kremen (1990: 2-3), used the concept of feminization of poverty to underline the women who have to maintain themselves and their families become the majority among the poor people. Now, this concept can also be used as attributed to the poverty of all women. However, some factors such as detached families do not make the feminization of poverty as homogenous. According to Alptekin, the women living in poverty is a heterogeneous group and feminization of poverty should be evaluated in multi-dimensional perspective. The bedeviled parts of the poor women are also the household heads (Alptekin, 2014: 16).

Fragmented family means the death of one of the parents or both of them, and divorcement of them. Fragmented family results from death or separation of one of the parents. This type of family has some problems. The most common type of fragmentation of a family results from death. The phenomenon of death traumatizes a family seriously in terms of sociologically and psychologically. As a result of the death of one of the parents, the other one becomes a widow and the children are orphaned. After the death, remarriage is not usually done and the family is damaged materially and spiritually. Women and children become the ones who are mostly damaged. Divorcement is the other type of fragmentation of a family. The phenomena of divorcement means more complicated and problematic process compared to death. The reason for this is that divorcement is more wearing and affects the family negatively.
When viewed from the aspect of diversification and categorization of poverty, it would be true to suggest that most of broken poor families in the world are at the bottom of poverty in terms of absolute and chronic poverty. Also, it can be argued that the recently strengthening sense of social state in developed countries and Turkey has substantially minimized the risk of broken poor families to be driven to absolute poverty.

The difference of poverty in broken families with a female household head from other poverties is that the families who live in a patriarchal society have somehow lost the man, in other words the actual head of household. In social terms, these families have lost their identity and become undefined. Negative implication of this is a cruel struggle for life alone in poverty. In this struggle, women usually do not find support and fall into a socio-economical depression. It is possible to find Hobsbawm’s all three types of poverty in this situation. Hobsbawm underlines that poverty has three meanings: social poverty, misery and moral poverty (as cited in Çiğdem, 2002: 136). That female heads of households are always dependent on others to live is “social poverty”, a significant part of them falls below minimum living standards is “misery” and being considered worthless in the eye of society is “moral poverty”.

All negative situations that apply to the poor can also be expressed for broken poor families. However, the burden of poverty in these families is far more compared with other families. In broken families, the phenomenon of poverty means the projection of all kinds of deprivation, being suffered, underdevelopment and being disparaged. That poverty alone is a social problem and combination of this problem with the brokenness causes the emergence of dramatic life stories. In particular, the gender aspect of poverty and increase in the number of female household heads has led to feminization of poverty.

2. METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

This study aims to analyze the poverty of broken families which represents a more specific situation different from the general poverty. In this context, the study attempts to reveal how poor families are broken, what kind of problems they experience along with the poverty and how they struggle against poverty.

This study is based on the data obtained from a questionnaires held with broken poor families in Elazığ as well as observations made in this respect. The sample on which the questionnaires were conducted was selected using the systematic sampling method. The population of study consists of all poor women living in the city center of Elazığ who divorced, or separated from their husbands for a long time despite they are officially married, have imam marriage or separated from their husband with whom they do not have official marriage or have lost their husband for any reason. The reason for not including the men with the same situation in this population is that their number is very few compared with women and their status of poverty does not represent a significant situation. In Elazığ, the ratio of male headed broken poor families to female headed poor families is about 10%. Results of a preliminary study indicated that they do not have a significant poverty status.

Poor families who are registered with the Mamuret’ül-Aziz Foundation, an Elazığ-based charitable foundation for the poor, and are in the active help list were taken as a basis for the study. The number of these families is 1215. This figure is about one-third of those who are registered with the foundation. Firstly, these families were listed alphabetically. After 1215 families were listed from A to Z, 240 families were selected from among them (the ratio of this figure to the population is about 20%). The selection was made systematically as 1-5-10-15-20-25……..1210-1215. In other words, coefficients of 5 were selected at every five. Not all 240 families were accessed for reasons such as change of address or not being present at home. The number of accessed poor families was 195. Therefore, the number of samples is 195.
A questionnaire consisting of 77 questions was applied to 195 women who headed the households. After the study of questionnaire, the data obtained were analyzed with SPSS 16.0 programme.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND EVALUATION

In broken families, poverty mainly indicates the phenomenon of female poverty. The research clearly revealed especially disadvantageous social status of woman and her figurant roles in the society. The struggle against poverty by women who are in a secondary status under the patriarchal society, have a limited actualization and are under pressure in every aspect has been a very uphill struggle. Women have had to think about their own life while thinking about their children. That women have been left alone in this cruel struggle is one of the important findings of the study. In particular, it is found that the earlier stages of a family breakage are a shock period for women that cannot be forgotten for their entire lifelong. Broken families who experience such a period of which even charitable foundations are not aware in the beginning have started the recovery period very late.

Just like in all types of poverty, lack of education has a very powerful impact on the poverty of broken families as well. In the modern world, the exposure to family breakage by women who have a high level education and a good job does not present a problem economically, but this situation causes very serious problems for women who do not have any assurance and are not educated. The research indicates a serious lack of education in poor women. Over 90% of women could not continue after elementary school. The main reason of this situation has been discrimination against girls in the past. And the most important factor of such discrimination is the rural lifestyle. In this lifestyle, there is a common thought that girls cannot achieve anything by studying and there is no such requirement. Although this understanding is changing in recent years, it still has permanent effects on the current poverty, because being uneducated in urban life means failing to benefit from employment opportunities and to offer necessary help for the education of children, and being ostracized from society.

Moreover, lack of education paves the way for early and incorrect marriages. 35,9% of the poor in the study sample were under 18 years of age when they married first. Women in broken poor families were married with someone whom they have never known before or with consanguineous marriage. These marriages were made with woman’s own will or with the pressure of families who feel themselves obliged to marry their daughter. Although it is difficult to say that all such marriages result in negatively, it is possible to argue that women face with various difficulties. Dominant role of the man always leaves the women behind and issues such as self knowledge, discovering her talents and acting comfortable have been unobtainable and unattainable for women. On the other hand, some problems emerged in the consanguineous marriages. In the Eastern rural culture, marrying your daughter with an outsider is a nonsense. The common approach when an outsider wants to marry with the girl is “you cannot marry to your daughter without asking the relatives first”. The positive aspect of consanguineous marriage is that the partners do not get in the process of knowing each other and having less disharmony problems, while the negative side is that the man imposes his dominant role faster and gets tired of his wife easily after some time. According to finding of the study, consanguineous marriage is more common in family breakages which occur in the form of divorce or separation. On the other hand, it is observed that the level of violence is very high in such types of marriages.

It is found out in many researches that there is more domestic violence in poor families with a low level of culture. For example, according to TUIK’s research, 47% of women who have a low level of welfare have been subjected to violence by their spouse or partner. This rate is 26,7% in women with high level of welfare (www.tuik.gov.tr). In this research, it is especially observed that the case of physical violence is much higher than normal poor families. It is found out that many women have been exposed to violence just like a torture until divorce or separation. The rate of poor women who are subjected to violence by their husbands is about 70%. It is seen that poor
women normalize beating in their minds and what they do not accept is heavy violence cases which sometimes lead to injuring. Separations which occur as women leaves home as a result of heavy violence come fourth among the reasons for separation. Also, it is observed in several poor families that men use violence again during the separation process and even after divorce.

It is one of the important findings of this study that women are extremely helpless against violence to which they are exposed and they cannot mostly show any reaction to it due to the understanding of fatalism which is one of the clear indicators of poverty culture. Almost half of poor women (45.4%) have not shown any reaction to violence. But it is not true to explain this with fatalism only. Normalization of violence in the society and acceptance of this normality by the family of woman has put poor women in a very difficult position. On the other hand, as a result of the impact of this violence on children, their psychological well being is ruined and they learn what the violence is.

According to findings of the study, the percentage of families being broken due to death is 42.1%, divorce is 24.6% and informal separation is 26.7%. Also, the percentage of families being broken due to the conviction factor is 5.6%. Other reasons constitute the remaining 1%. The most important reasons for separation/divorce in families that are broken due to divorce and informal separation are ranked as follows: Cheating at 22.1%, leaving without reason at 19.2%, unemployment, poverty and other financial reasons at 13.5%, domestic violence and pressure at 12.5%, uncontested divorce at 10.6%, alcohol, gambling, substance abuse at 9.6%, conflict and self mistakes at 7.7%, provocation of others at 3.8%, and sexual problems at 1%.

In the study, it is observed that the most important reason for divorce/separation is that the man heading the family is going for another woman and cheating his wife. 22.1% of poor women stated that they left because of this reason. Among the sociological reasons for this situation are dominant roles of the man, men getting bored of his marriage and seeking for new things. Poor women stated that the main reason for why their husbands leave them is that there is another women. In fact, some men sometimes brought another women to their home and disregarded their current wife. In addition, women said that they slightly tolerated a second woman but could not stand socio-economic negligence aspect of this situation. In some cases, women considered themselves guilty and confessed that they acted cold-shouldered to connect the man with the home. However, this situation does not legitimate a man’s act of being with another woman, leaving his home completely and his wife and children to poverty and other dangers.

In the study, it is observed that women who are separated from their husbands do not easily get rid of their husbands and their relatives. They always face with their intervention in their new lives, not to mention living their lives comfortably. Today, this is the reason for most of the female homicides. The man, who takes the divorce as a matter of pride, gets the support of his family and oppresses his former wife in various ways. The last stage of such oppressions is homicide. Actually, what we see here at this point is purely a sociological case. In Turkish society, when we have something we think that we keep it under control and it will always adhere to us. It is never thought that the sense of belonging might be lost. That’s why it is not given mostly the value it actually deserves. But when it is lost, then understood how important it is and tried to win it back. However, it is usually faced with a non-recoverable situation. And there is a similar case here. Especially in families with low level of culture, men see their wives as their property. They do not see them as a spouse or mother. With this perspective, he drinks alcohol, hang out with other women, use violence on his wife and do many other bad things. When the woman who cannot take this anymore leaves her husband or separates from him, the man realizes the reality but do not accept it. This is the case in separations in majority of poor families.

That the marriages end for reasons such as death, divorce, separation and others has left woman completely alone in their struggle for survival together with her children. In this case, poor woman who has a limited capacity and capability could not return to her family most of the time, rejected by her family when they returned and have had to continue her life alone. The percentage
of women who managed to return to her family is 20%. But a significant part of them had to leave their family after some time. Especially in formal and informal divorces, adoption of woman by her family has been considered as a disgrace. Even if the woman is accepted, children is not accepted. However, the sense of motherhood outweighs and thus woman prefers her children even in a severe case like poverty. It is an dramatic finding of the study that men do not accept his children. In general, they have conflicts at the courts about sharing the children and the child is voluntarily left by men to the custody of women in poor families. The main reason of this situation is the high sense of irresponsibility in men as revealed by women in their statements.

It is seen that in case of families that are broken due to death, the men who work without an assurance leave a more difficult poverty and deprivation to their families. Actually, this is a problem that applies to all poor, not only broken families. Working informally and in daily jobs is an indication that leads to poverty. Those who work in this way do not have any health security. They can only benefit from general health insurance. Also, they suffer from a completely poor life in case of an accident, death and other negative developments. The main reason for poverty in families that are broken due to death is undeclared work.

It is also observed that the houses where the poor lives are one of the main indicators of poverty. More than half of families in the study live in unhealthy environments. The houses which clearly indicate that its residents are a poor family when you look from outside are very common. That the poor residing at these houses is an indication of their desperation. Moreover, most of these houses are rental. Calculating that average monthly house rent in the city center of Elazığ varies between 400-800 TL (135-265$), it can be considered that the poor is not capable of paying this rent. Therefore, they have preferred houses with a monthly rent of 150-300 TL (50-100$). It is also observed that these houses have many physical problems. It seems that recent housing developments for the poor will eliminate this problem. As a result of the project carried out by the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ), lucky ones from poor families got healthy houses by paying very low installments.

The research also found that negative situations such as social exclusion, peer pressure, marginalization and denigration affect poor broken families deeply. About 65% of the sample stated that they have been subjected to social exclusion. Poor women and children have not seen any support from others most of the time and subjected to some unfavorable treatments. In particular, the attitude of relatives has been contrary to expectations. Relatives of broken poor families have showed interest from feast to feast while some have not even stopped by.

In the study a specific importance is given to livelihood strategies of broken poor families. The first and most important livelihood strategy is working at a job. 44% of women who are the head of household have worked at least once in a certain period of their lifetime. The percentage of women who actively work is 32%. Although this percentage seems very low, the percentage of working at a job in broken families doubles when compared with other poor women. According to results of the Elazığ Poverty Map Project, the percentage of poor women who have worked at least once in their lifetime is about 21% (www.maziz.net). Also, the percentage of women employment in Turkey is 34,3% (www.tuik.gov.tr). However, it is difficult to suggest that the level of employment in broken families is better than the average figures in Turkey, because countrywide figures just reflect formal workers. However, most of the participants of this study work informally.

It is found out that some women who are obliged to maintain their families are working daily jobs such as cleaning and have to head the household with an insignificant amount of income. More than half of the working poor women have had to work in cleaning jobs. This causes early exhaustion and psychological and physical fatigue in women. It is also observed that women who work in cleaning jobs had to stop working as a result of disorders like herniated disc and rheumatism. In this case, poor women started to live a life depending on aids or children’s income.
Another important livelihood strategy in broken poor families is working children. It is observed that children work in almost one fourth of broken poor families. This percentage is 24.5%. These children generally work on the streets and under difficult conditions. Selling bagels, napkins and desserts is the first job that these children do. Such works causes children meet with the streets very early, fail to benefit from educational opportunities and learn the types of offences at an early age. According to research findings, the percentage of children who work on the streets and sell bagels, napkins, corn, dessert etc. is 28.2%. And the percentage of children who work at a job as an apprentice or waiter is 26.1%. After these jobs, working as a shoeshine boy has the highest percentage with about 20%. Another job, which is working as a carrier at the bazaar, has a percentage of 15.2%.

It is observed that poor women have developed some alternative methods to maintain their households. One of the main alternative is the production of foodstuff. The production of winter foods and breads comes first among the production efforts of women to contribute to household economy. The percentage of families who produces foodstuff like paste, boiled grape juice, canned foods and dried vegetables (pepper, bean, tomato, eggplant, zucchini etc.) is 34.3%. And the percentage of those who make bread at home is 27.1%. On the other hand, it is even difficult to find flour to make bread at home in families where the poverty is very severe. At this point, it is necessary to underline that the flour aid of the philanthropic constitutes a very important means of livelihood for the poor. After the foodstuff, handicrafts like knitting and lacework come with a percentage of 15.8%. Moreover, some women do sewing work at home as well. The percentage of these women is 10.7%. Also, the percentage of poor women who make animal products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt is 5.6%.

Another issue that is observed in broken families is that they have a high level of saving measures. Many saving measures have been seen in these families such as spending money in very restricted amounts, turning off the lights very early at night, cooking outside, skipping meal, not using phone, using stove not only for heating but also for cooking, heating water and drying clothes, not using available natural gas, not buying new clothes, storing meats for a long time after they are given as aid and cooking them in small parts and many others.

Another element which supports livelihood strategies is the social aids. Social aids have eased the burden of broken poor families to some extent. It is observed that the support of food, clothing, meat, stationery goods and money given especially to broken families with restricted facilities by voluntary organizations, particularly Mamuret’ül Aziz Foundation where the sample group is selected, have been very helpful. In addition food, education, health, housing and other monetary aids that are provided by the state play an extremely important role in poverty reduction. In particular, the monthly aid of 250 TL (83$) by the state to women whose husbands died has been seen almost as a treasury by the poor. This assistance has been just like a lifesaver for women whose husband died and have no income. However, failing to provide this aid to women who are informally separated from their husbands did not change their disadvantageous position. In fact, poor women who were working in hard works stated that they stopped working after getting this aid. About 30% of poor families in the sample group benefit from this aid. This indicates that the understanding of social state approach is getting stronger at this point. The fact that the understanding of social state is getting stronger does not mean keeping the poor under control. In the socio-political criticism of aids, it is argued that the poor is enslaved with the aids and their capability is limited this way. The idea that the poor is made lazy or kept under control with the aids is absolutely not true for the broken families. These aids have a vital importance for the broken families. In developed countries, the fight against

The monthly financial aid of 350-630 TL (120-210$) that is provided by the General Directorate of Child Services of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies to families with a special case such as a studying child, informal divorce and conviction has somewhat reduced the burden of poverty (see. sgkrehberi.com). In fact, poor women who were working in hard works stated that they stopped working after getting this aid. About 30% of poor families in the sample group benefit from this aid. This indicates that the understanding of social state approach is getting stronger at this point. The fact that the understanding of social state is getting stronger does not mean keeping the poor under control. In the socio-political criticism of aids, it is argued that the poor is enslaved with the aids and their capability is limited this way. The idea that the poor is made lazy or kept under control with the aids is absolutely not true for the broken families. These aids have a vital importance for the broken families. In developed countries, the fight against
poverty is made with the cooperation between government and civil society. However, significant part of this responsibility is unfortunately laid on the government.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results of this research in which the poverty in broken families is examined, it is believed that the case of poverty can be eliminated with a powerful family bond. The problem of poverty is not seen in broken families only and there is a finding that the bonds between spouses in most of the poor families are getting weaker gradually. From this perspective, having a powerful family bond means elimination of social problems such as divorce, poverty, crime, suicide and social exclusion.

We need to know the families well first in order to reinforce the family structure and eliminate problems in the family. In particular, SYDV and Social Services have made significant efforts in recent years to know poor families better. Assigning a specialist person to each poor family is an important step in the fight against poverty. These individuals who have the opportunity to know the poor families closely are a comforting factor for the poor as they identify problems related to poverty and try to solve them.

In order to have a strong family structure, the problems in families need to be identified fast. To that end, it is believed that the awareness of each family should be raised in all matters and family counseling services should start. In order to raise the awareness of families, topics like basic family problems and the ways to overcome such problems should be covered during the education at the schools. Offering such an education for children, the most important segment on which the problems in families are reflected, will contribute to their future years and play an important factor in helping their mothers and fathers to solve existing problems.

The second stage of awareness-raising is the media. Family problems should be revealed through the media and what needs to be done when such problems are experienced should be told clearly to the society. As a result of this effort, for example, a woman who is subjected to violence by her husband will know how to act and where to apply in case the husband becomes more violent.

Final stage of the awareness-raising process is that specialists in this field should get closer with problematic families, identify their problems and guide them accordingly. For this purpose, family counseling centers should be established in the neighborhoods and these centers should be easily accessible by everyone. On the other hand, it is necessary to raise social awareness, people get closer with each other and know them better. At this point, citizens and non-governmental organizations should be closely interested in families, instead of laying the entire responsibility on the government only.

After taking such measures for the family institution, some recommendations can be made to overcome poverty and other problems which the poverty brings with it. Some of these recommendations are as follows:

First of all, society should accept that poverty is also a problem of social exclusion. It should be known that the poor does not need only money but they also need attention and love. The poor should be integrated with the society.

Social policies should be encouraged and such aids should be provided by facing the poor. The philanthropists should also participate in person in aid efforts. This way the aids will be provided more properly and the number and motivation of philanthropists will increase as well. Besides, aids should be provided based on the needs of each family and cooperation and coordination should be established between charitable organizations. For this purpose, a database should be created within the body of governor’s office in each province and all aids should be recorded.
Poor areas of the cities should be destroyed and new spaces of living should be created by means of urban transformation projects and poor with a suitable status should be given these new houses. Each family in the country must have a house. At this point, positive discrimination should be made for the poor to make sure they have a house with low installments and long-term payments.

Awareness of the poor should be raised in family planning and they should be equipped with the ability to make a preference when determining the number of children. When offering this training, the man and woman should not be separated. On the other hand, social and psychological problems of children should be identified and solutions should be developed for these problems. In particular, the problem of child labor should be eliminated completely and poor families with children should be supported more.

Some measures should be taken against social insecurity. Policies and sanctions should be available to prevent working without security. Also, insurance of women whose husband does not work with insurance should be met by the government.

Occupational, social and cultural trainings should be offered for the poor at public training centers. This is extremely important to make sure the poor does not fail to deal with the problems. In particular, proper jobs should be given to those who are able to work at houses. Also, the scope of current microcredit projects should be expanded.

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