

# **A hidden secret in Turkey : Incest**

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**The film 'Merry go round' by İlksen Başarır has brought a secret fact of Turkey to the surface, incest, and the number of victims is not small by any count.**

According to studies in most incest cases the victims are female and incest can be seen in any neighborhood.

A new Turkish film has put a spotlight on one of the country's taboo subjects : incest. Shedding light on the subject is a difficult task, but scriptwriter for "Merry go round", Mert Firat said they sought to turn a piece of conventional wisdom upside down in their film.

Many people believe incest happens in low-income families, but recent research has shown that incest can happen in any family at any level of society.

"There are two main characters in the family, but nobody knows what their job is. When the incidents take place is unclear. Likewise, which town it is. We thought it would be wrong to emphasize any of these. From the most illiterate to the most educated, incest can be seen in any part of society. So, we preferred to focus on a middle-class family," Firat said.

The film "Merry go round," by director İlksen Başarır, recently hit theaters in Turkey. It comes following a wave of research on incest in Turkey.

One such report, titled "Understanding the Question of Molestation in Turkey" prepared for the Demography Association by Alanur Çavlin Bozbeyoğlu in 2009, features many examples of incest in the country.

One excerpt tells the story of a young girl and her grandfather. "There was a girl, 11 or 12 years old. She was sent to a village and she stayed there for a while. Her grandfather was in the village. He molested the girl. He was 65 or 70 years old. At 13 or 14, she finally told her family about the situation. It was covered and she was forced to get married through a religious wedding of course. But the grandfather continued molesting her even after her marriage. She got pregnant from the grandfather. The girl couldn't say no out of respect for he is the eldest in the family and so everyone should have respect for him in the family."

Another excerpt tells about a father's serial behavior. "A person had five daughters. He started to molest them when they were 3 or 4 years old. He stopped when each reached 9 or 10 and developed a notion of sexuality and continues with the others so on so forth. Therefore, he molested all five of them."

Bozbeyoğlu's report was prepared based on countrywide face-to-face interviews with 89 participants including school counselors, forensic experts, police officers, prosecutors and psychologists who have experience in incest cases. The report emphasized that all the while incest has existed, it has been denied.

Studies like this one have shown time and again that in most incest cases the victims are female. As well, incest can be seen in any neighborhood. The reason behind the misperception of incest being rarely seen in upper-level social cultural circles is that such circles are better at covering up the incest cases.

Scriptwriter Firat, who also plays a role in "Merry go round," in an interview with daily Hürriyet, said the cast took special effort to avoid making generalizations in the film.

"We did not want to give anyone any ideas about people who sexually abuse their children having such-and-such occupation or belonging to such-and-such social class or adopting such-and-such political

views. Because, through research and studies, we've realized that there are millions of reasons for incest ; like desire for power, impotency, hating his/her partner in a marriage, or suicidal tendencies. The only real data is that 70 percent of these men were sexually abused when they were children. In other words, this is a deadlock. Abuse causes abuse. The responsibility of the state is to break the deadlock," Fırat said.

### **Lack of post-trauma response**

Lawyer Seda Akço said in Turkey, both legal regulations and works on the subject are quite insufficient. "There are no foster homes to protect children against threats, and treatment services are very poor. These are situations that trigger psychological problems along with the original problem. However, we don't have enough psychiatrists who specialize in adults, and the number of inpatient clinics is very few. The post-trauma response is insufficient, let alone preventive measures."

Akço said it was wrong that the police are the address to which incest can be reported. "This is the real problem, for the abused needs psychological help before facing the police forces. An aggrieved person desperately needs someone who will listen and understand before meeting a police officer. Such a system, however, doesn't exist in Turkey."

### **Figures around the world**

According to a common definition, incest is sexual intercourse or any verbal, physical, visual or non-verbal erotic acts between two persons commonly regarded as too closely related to marry. According to the law, the definition of incest is restricted to "sexual intercourse between relatives who have blood relation."

In Turkey, there is no special regulation for incest. Lawyer Akço said : "Incest is being regulated as part of sexual offences in the Penal Code. A family member being the offender only increases the amount of punishment." He said incest is different from other kinds of sexual abuse and should therefore be regulated separately as an offense.

"Nowadays, there will be changes in the bill on sexual offences, but that doesn't include any special regulation on incest. In many countries, there are special regulations for incest. For instance, incest is a separate offense in the German Penal Code," Akço said.

What is common in incest cases is that the culprits always try to cover up their actions. An incident taking place before the naked eye is pushed under the rug most of the time in order to protect "family fundamentals." However, incest is a "social taboo," an issue that couldn't be resolved if it is not talked about openly. According to a World Health Organization, or WHO, report in 2002, 150 million girls and 73 million boys are forced into sexual intercourse or other kinds of sexual abuse before they reach 18. One of eight women before they are 14 and one of six women before they are 18 are subjected to abuse.

### **Figures from Turkey**

Incest cases in Turkey are mostly swept under the rug, so there are not many official records. Reaching out to some data or giving a figure precisely is very difficult.

However, Associate Professor Ayşen Ufuk Sezgin from the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Istanbul University in her thesis in 2003 on incest findings said the most frequent case is father-daughter incest. Among incest cases taken to court, 39 percent involved a father and daughter, 15 percent brother-sister, 17 percent close relatives and 28 percent distant relatives. According to the study, 50 percent of the victims say other family members are also subjected to sexual abuse, 40 percent of whom or either younger or older sisters.

Incest usually begins as early as at baby age and can continue for years. Fifty-five percent of sexually abused children are 5-10 years old and 40 percent 10-16 years old. The average age for when it starts is 9. Boys who are victimized are usually older than girls.

The number of exploiters who are submitted to the court and who are under psychological treatment is very few in Turkey. The most recent data belongs to 2008. According to the data, a total of 6,448 people were put before a judge for sexual abuse in 2008, 2,621 of whom were sentenced.

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## **Sources**

Source : Radikal, Sunday, April 24, 2011