Over the past decades, social scientists have shown a mounting interest in the way that children leave their parental homes. However, relatively fewer studies address the timing of home leaving. Most studies use a dichotomous variable to distinguish persons who have ever left home from those who have not. This dichotomous conceptualisation of the home leaving process implicitly assumes that the predictors of home leaving are independent of the timing of home leaving. In fact, however, the major causes for an adolescent to leave home might be different from those leading a 25- or 30-year-old person to leave home. The direct solution of this problem is to break home-leavers into different groups and compare them. This study is an attempt to address the above issue in the context of Turkey by distinguishing three groups of home-leavers: early, on-time and late. The study goes further and focuses on the links between home leaving and other life-course events (age at entry into labour force, age at family formation and age at first birth) in Turkey.

Data used in the study mainly comes from the 1998 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey. In order to prevent the adverse effects of family disruption due to death of parents on home leaving pattern, the sample is limited to 22,684 usual members whose both parents are alive at the time of the survey. The timing of the home leaving will be analysed by using the three independent variables: gender, type of settlement and region.

Using “the orphanhood-type questions”, a household member whose both parents are alive at the time of the survey is accepted as “home-leaver”, if he is not living with his one or two of the parents in the same household. The home-leavers are classified as follows: early home-leavers, on-time home-leavers and late home-leavers. In keeping with the view that Turkey has a relatively late home-leaving pattern, the upper cut-off point is set at 50. On time home-leavers are defined to be 18 to 24, following the convention used by the Census Bureau. Since 18 is the usual age of high school graduation, those who left home at 17 or younger is considered as early home leavers.

The home leaving rates used in the study to determine the pattern and the timing of home leaving in Turkey are all based on “life table method” which is one of forms of the event history analysis. It is assumed that the age-specific home leaving experiences during 1998 represent the home leaving experience of a whole generation of persons. That is, we assume that a cohort of persons will pass through life experiencing at each age the age-specific home leaving rates for 1998. In other words, home leaving rates used in the study are all based on the period life table that is a mathematical model of the life history of a hypothetical cohort.
Of household members whose both parents are alive, more than one-forth are living without both parents, that are the home leavers. In the results of life-table analysis, the median duration of time for home leaving is found to be 23.6 years. In terms of gender differentials, the study implies that the timing of leaving parental home for males (26.4 years) markedly differs from the timing of leaving parental home for females (21.3 years). This difference may be attributable partly to the early marriage of females, and largely to doubling-up with parental home of husbands rather than setting-up their own households.

Overall, approximately a half of the household members are late home-leavers in Turkey, with almost 44 percent are on-time home-leavers. Remaining 7 percent leaves parental home by age 18 (early home-leavers). There exists substantial gender variation in the timing of home leaving: Approximately two-thirds of the males are the late home-leavers, corresponding figure is only one-fourths for females. Males leave parental home approximately four years later after the entry into labour-force and two years later after initiation of marriage, indicating that pattern of home leaving for males is not strongly associated with the labour-force participation and the partnership formation. On the other hand, pattern of home leaving for females gets along with the pattern of marriage, implying a close relationship between home leaving and marriage patterns. Females, on average, entry into labour-force after the marriage, home leaving and the birth of the first child.

The results of the study suggests that males leave parental home approximately two years later after the initiation of marriage. Considering the median waiting time for the first child in Turkey (1.8 years), it seems to be possible to conclude that the prolonged stay of males is closely related with the waiting for the birth of first child. This finding implies the sequence of life-course events in Turkey: entry into labour-force, marriage, the birth of first child and home leaving. Another result of the study shows that females leave parental home earlier than males in line with marriage. However, the home leaving experiencing by females does not mean a real home leaving in the context of Turkey, it is just a shifting from own parental home to husbands’ parental home. The real home leaving for females takes place with husbands after a prolonged stay in husbands’ parental home.