

Barriers Against Women's Entry to Decent Work: A Qualitative Analysis on Bursa and Konya

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Öz: Bu makalede Türkiye işgücü piyasalarında kadına yönelik ayrımcılık Konya ve Bursa kentlerinde gerçekleştirilen nitel araştırma bulguları ışığında incelenmektedir. İşsiz kadınlar için çalışmanın anlamı, kadınların çalışmasının önündeki engeller, eş ve ailenin kadının çalışmasına bakış açısı ve kadınların işgücü piyasasındaki konumları derinlemesine yüz yüze görüşmeler ve odak grup görüşmeleri ile incelenmiştir. Veriler, her iki şehirde de işsiz kadın ve erkeklerle ve kadın hakları konusunda çalışan STK'ların temsilcileriyle görüşülerek toplanmıştır. Bulgularımız, kadınların insana yakışır işlere girişinin önündeki engellerin, farklı ataerkil normlara ve kentsel işgücü piyasasının özelliklerine göre kentten kente farklılık gösterdiğini gözler önüne sermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kadın İstihdamı, Kadın Emeği, Kadın İşsizliği, Cinsiyete Dayalı Ayrımcılık, Ataerki

Kadınların İnsan Onuruna Yakışır İşlere Erişimlerinin Önündeki Engeller: Bursa ve Konya Üzerine Nitel Bir Analiz

Abstract: In this article, the discrimination against women in Turkish labour market is examined in the light of the qualitative research findings conducted in two cities, Konya and Bursa. The meaning of the work for unemployed women, the obstacles to women's work, the perspective of the spouse and the family on the work of women, and women's positions in the labour market are examined via in-depth face-to-face interviews and focus groups. The data is collected by interviewing with unemployed women and men and representatives from NGO's working on women's rights in both

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cities. Our findings suggest that barriers against women's entry to decent jobs vary across cities according to different patriarchal norms and characteristics of the city's labour market.

Keywords: Women's Employment, Female Labour, Women's Unemployment, Gender Based Discrimination, Patriarchy

Introduction

The aim of this study is to determine the main obstacles that women face to entry to decent jobs. These obstacles are numerous and complex, arising from both demand and supply side of labour market dynamics. Factors affecting the demand side are related to macro policies concerning urbanization, agriculture, growth, employment, education, public care as well as the conservative ideological environment. Factors affecting the supply side are caused by socio-economic and cultural structures, traditional values, domestic responsibilities, lack of education, lack of self-confidence, working conditions, inequalities within the family and in the labor market etc. In this context, being married, having small children, controlling male family members in decisions about women's employment, and seeing men as the sole responsibility for earning bread are important obstacles defined in the relevant literature (Budak et al., 2007; Dayıoğlu and Kırdar; 2010; Dedeoğlu, 2000; Eyüboğlu, Özar, Tufan- Tanrıöver, 1998; İlkkaracan, 1998; Toksöz, 2009). Some features such as patience, submissiveness and obedience attributed to women lead them to concentrate on unskilled, low-wage, labour-intensive, routine, boring and attention-seeking work. In accordance with gender roles, jobs that require a smiling face, dexterity, sexual attraction, or jobs which are seen as an extension of women's domestic responsibilities outside home, are conventionally "women's jobs".

In the light of the existing literature, this study searched for the barriers against women's entry to decent jobs. The study employs qualitative research methods, in-depth interviews and focus groups in Konya and Bursa with unemployed women and men. These cities are chosen because of their different characters in terms of labour, gender equality and socio-economic and cultural structures. On the gender equality index, which includes employment, education, violence, health, equality mechanisms, specialized services, and municipal services, Bursa is ranked 26th while Konya is ranked 65th among Turkish cities (TOBB/ TSKB/ TEPAV , 2020). Bursa is the fourth and Konya is the 7th biggest city of Turkey. After sharing information concerning women's employment in these cities, the findings of the study will be analyzed under the following headings: Women's Employment in Bursa and Konya, Methodology and Findings on Unemployed Women in Konya and Bursa. After giving an information on Bursa and Konya in which our field study took place, the methodology of the study will be shared. Afterwards, the main findings of the study will be discussed. The findings will

focus on the working decision of women, patriarchal barriers in front of women's employment, gender wage gap, problems concerning balancing work and family lives, age-based discrimination, sexual harassment of women at the workplace and workplaces as spaces belonging to male workers.

The Reasons of Women's Unemployment and Low Activity Rate in Turkey

The low rate of female labour force participation in Turkey is associated with both macro-economic policies and socio-cultural reasons. Macroeconomic factors refer to the development strategy followed in that country, its place in the world economy in the context of international division of labour, and the level of labour demand depending on the stage of the industrialization process (Toksöz, 2016a: 112).

Although women's role within Turkey's workforce has improved over the years both in terms of quality and quantity, the female labour force participation rate aged 15 to 64 is still so low (32%) and female unemployment rate is dramatically high (15,6%) (TURKSTAT, 2021). The female workforce participation rate, which has risen to 35% over the years, has dropped dramatically with the covid-19 pandemic. As it is also valid during the economic crisis we are going through, especially the periods of economic contraction are the periods in which the female workforce has been the most involved both in the reserve army of the unemployed and among the masses of low wage and precarious workers. Another factor that plays a role in the rise of women's unemployment is rapid urbanization and de-ruralisation as mentioned above (Dayıoğlu and Kırdar, 2010). Neoliberal agricultural policies have led to a steady decline in the number of animals and agricultural production areas through the elimination of small peasant economy. The wave of immigration to the city, results in the fact that women who have previously participated in agricultural employment cannot easily access urban employment opportunities and become housewife or work in informal jobs in the city. In Turkey, the problem of women's employment is stuck between the established patriarchal patterns reinforced by the existing conservative perspective and the irregularity and precariousness of the labour market. While the neo-liberal labour market positions women as part-time, informal and cheap labour or members of reserve army of labour, the conservative-patriarchal point of view positions the woman as "mother with many children" and "unpaid domestic worker". Indeed, the most important reason of women not to enter the labour force is the unpaid care work for the household (Özar and Günlük-Şenesen, 1998; Palaz, 2005).

In the development economics literature, it is widely accepted that there is a U-shaped trend in the labour force participation rate of women in the urbanization process. During the transition from an agricultural society in which production and reproduction take place together to an industry and service-based

society where wage employment and reproduction are spatially separated, female labour force participation rates initially decline. However, in later stages of development, women's labour force participation increases. But the trend does not fulfill these statements in Turkey (Dildar, 2015). In Turkish economy with low investment and growth rates, export-oriented industrialization did not automatically bring about the feminization of the workforce. The changing female (and male) labour demand structure of other emerging economies with export-led growth have been only partially parallel with Turkey. However, the demand for highly educated female workers in the service sub-sectors played a stronger role in increasing female employment, rather than the demand for less educated female labour in the export-based production (İlkkaracan, 2012: 11). In the manufacturing industry, the rate of informality in three sectors (textile, food, chemistry) where women work intensely is significantly higher than in other industries. Besides patriarchal norms, inadequate industrialization process in Turkey did not allow women to work outside the *traditional women's businesses* and many women in low-tech, small-scale enterprises are employed informally to reduce labour costs (Toksöz and Memiş, 2016). The transition from agriculture and industry to services seen in developed economies (Fuchs, 1968) has not been fully experienced in Turkey. Due to, failure to adequately experience industrialization in Turkey, the unskilled workforce that remains idle from the agriculture sector has turned to services sector employment in urban areas. Wholesale and retail trade, accommodation and food services, cleaning services, human health and social work activities are potential sectors where women are employed in the services sector. Education and health sectors are important fields of activity in which qualified women are employed (Durusoy Öztepe, 2018). The main feature of the services sector is that it has the ability to simultaneously employ both low- and high-skilled women..In this sense, it is possible to see both full-time, high-paid and secured groups and part-time, low-paid, vulnerable groups together in the services sector.

As well as the macroeconomic factors which are mentioned above, sociocultural factors also play an important role in women's employment. Sociocultural factors refer to the power of private and public patriarchy and to their influence on the female labour supply and demand. The consensus between patriarchy and capitalism in Turkey is on the exclusion of married women from the labour market. In the industry, women's employment is considered temporary. Employers usually prefer single young women and married women workers leave their jobs, especially when they have children, due to heavy working conditions (Toksöz, 2016a: 114). The burden of reproduction is an important component that encourages married women to leave their jobs or discourages women from entering paid work. Overtime work which is a norm in the Turkish private sector is another problem for the female workers (Toksöz, 2016a: 118). The prolongation of working time makes it difficult to fulfill reproduction responsibilities and is seen

as a constraint for safety. Participants of O’Neil and Çarkoğlu’s research (2020:52) stated that it is not safe for adult women to be on the street alone after 9-10 in the evening. Only 15% of women and 18% of men agreed with the view that women can safely walk around the street at all hours of the day. According to the research conducted with 32 women participant by Santaş Eldem (2016), if the job requires leaving late, staying on the night shift (25 young women), if the number of male employees in the workplace is higher than the number of women, or if there is a one-on-one job with a man (21 young women), business trips or the work requires continuous travel during the day (19 young women), if the job is far from home (14 young women), if the job is uninsured (12 young women), if the wage is low (5 young women), young women are not willing to apply for or accept such jobs. Similarly, according to the results of the Turkey Demographic and Health Survey, 11% of the women are not allowed to work outside the home by their husbands or other family members. One of the main reasons cited by women for this disallowance is the potential of harassment in formal sector jobs (HIPS, 2018: 182). A safe place to work is very important for women who work in the organized sector (Çınar, 1994: 378).

After the 2000s, conservative-patriarchal barriers to women’s economic participation were reinforced with the labour market structure. Persistently high unemployment problems since the 2000–2001 economic crisis and decreasing employment security have created an inaccessible labour market for women. Besides the family-oriented ideology of the ruling party promotes a traditional gender division of labour and undermines egalitarian employment policy goals. In the light of conservative values, the government supports women’s employment simply as an economic activity to secure supplementary income for the household but does not describe it as an emancipatory process (Kongar and Memis, 2017: 6; Izdes Terkoğlu, 2020: 100).

Women’s Employment in Bursa and Konya

Neither city has a homogenous structure in terms of gender equality, which is related to the socio-economic and cultural structures in them. The historical dynamics that affected their development has been dissimilar. Thanks to its geographical location in Western Anatolia and rich natural resources, Bursa has been in commercial contact with Europe (Kulaksız, 2008: 25). As a result, the region has been more developed economically and socially than other regions of the country. On top of its geographic location and trade ties, Bursa is also an industrial city. The major source of employment within TR41 (Bursa-Eskişehir-Bilecik) region, has been industrial and service sectors (Toksöz, 2016b); while in TR 52 (Konya-Karaman) region industry has been relatively small source of employment compared to services (Karadeniz, 2015). Moreover, the cultural differences between the cities have also contributed to the formation of dissimilar

economic and social activities in both. Migrants from the Balkans have influenced the transformation of traditional gender structure in Bursa. The migrant women from the Balkans constitute the main source of female labour supply for Bursa's industrial sector.

Women's positions and conditions within the labour market differ in Konya, a traditionally agricultural city that began to industrialize and integrate to global markets in 1990s, and Bursa, a historically industrial-commercial city, where women has traditionally been employed by the textile industry. According to the regional data, female labour force participation rate is 30.8% in TR41 region (Bursa- Eskişehir-Bilecik) and 27, 9%in TR52 region (Konya-Karaman). For men the same figures are 67.7% in TR41 and 70.1% in TR52 (TURKSTAT, 2020). Female unemployment rate is 11% in TR41 (Bursa-Eskişehir-Bilecik) and 9.8% in TR52 (Konya-Karaman). Unemployment rates for women are lower than Turkey's (15.3%) average in both regions. Unemployment rate of men is 9% TR41 (Bursa-Eskişehir-Bilecik) and 7.2% in TR52 (Konya-Karaman) (TURKSTAT, 2020).

In recent years, female employment in the services sector in Konya has reached a striking level (49,1 %). However, a few of the women in employment in Konya are in the industrial sector (15,4 %). Despite the shrinking of the sector, 35, 4% of the female workforce is still employed in agriculture in Konya and Karaman (TÜİK, 2020). It is possible to talk about the feminization of agriculture in Konya, which has large agricultural areas. Increasing demand for labour-intensive industrial crops –such as sugar beets- have also increased the demand for female agricultural labour as well (Toksöz, 2009: 53). Bursa, on the other hand, is an industrial city, where automotive, machinery, textile, and food processing industries are concentrated (Ecevit, 1991; Toksöz, 2016). In Bursa, 31.9% of employed women work in the manufacturing industry. While 56.7% of employed women work in services, only 11.7% of them work in agriculture. Despite technological developments, the gendered division between hard work and light-work Ecevit identified in 1991 still prevails. In the industrial sector, shift work is quite common, while wage increases are rare. In the automotive sector wages increase according to seniority, while in textile manufacture, seniority does not always result in wage increase. Because of integration to global markets, gender based sectorial and professional divisions lead to women being trapped in sectors with worse working conditions. The firms operating within the automobile industry, which has become the main industry in Bursa are examples of “producer-driven global commodity chains”³. In these factories, where men comprise the majority of workers, unionization and wage levels are high and informal employment is low. Whereas the firms that mostly employ women producing textiles or shoes are examples of

³ For more information regarding global commodity chains see Gary Gereffi (2001) Shifting Governance Structures in Global Commodity Chains, With Special Reference to the Internet., *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44 (10), 1617-1637.

“buyer- driven global commodity chains”. Most of the companies in these fields usually have long workhours, lower wages, and higher levels of informal employment.

Childcare is the major obstacle women face when they are entering work life; consequently, provision of childcare services is the most essential demand of unemployed women.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to analyze the labor markets in Konya and Bursa provinces within the context of gender. The data is collected during 2015 and 2016 by interviewing with unemployed women and men⁴. The study employs qualitative research methods in-depth interviews and focus groups. This study encompasses in-depth interviews with 44 unemployed women, who had applied to Work and Employment Agency (ISKUR) provincial directorates in Konya and Bursa, in to be registered as seeking employment. The findings of these interviews are supported by 4 focus group meetings –2 in each city-, with the participation of 26 women -12 in Konya, 14 in Bursa. In order to further understand the gender inequality and social barriers against women’s entry to work life, in-depth interviews and focus group meetings were carried out with 8 unemployed men applying to ISKUR in Konya and Bursa. To better analyze the gender dynamics in these cities, interviews were carried with representatives of several NGOs working on women’s rights -5 in Konya, 2 in Bursa-. The findings of in-depth interviews and focus group meetings were assessed under several categories: the decision to work, the obstacles they face when entering work life, the work conditions, and the expectations from work life. The interviews are particularly valuable to understand the subjective experiences of the women.

These cities are chosen because of their different socio-economic structure as stated above. However, there are significant differences between the two selected cities in terms of religious conservatism. This situation differentiates women's participation in urban labor markets in both cities. In Bursa traditionalist attitudes towards women working have eroded considerably, in part due to immigrants from the Balkans that settled in Bursa. Therefore, many women can be employed in the textile sector in Bursa. However, for most women in Konya working at industry is the least desirable form of employment, since the male dominant nature of industrial sector is regarded as unsuitable for women. Women’s entry to the work life mainly depends on the permission and control of their husbands or their family. Gender roles that limit women’s lives to the private sphere and fear of sexual harassment at work are the major obstacles against women’s employment in Konya.

⁴ This study conducted as part of “More and Better Jobs for Women: Women’s Empowerment Through Decent Work in Turkey”, an ILO and ISKUR joint project.

Findings on Unemployed Women in Konya and Bursa

Demographics

The unemployed women interviewed in Konya and Bursa has very similar demographics. The most distinct characteristic of the women interviewed is their level of education. Most of the unemployed women has high school degree or less than high school degree. Unemployed women with elementary school degrees are particularly numerous. Predictably, these findings agree with previous studies that show the positive correlation between women's level of education and their entry to work life. These studies demonstrate that women's limited access to education is one of the major obstacles to their entry to work life and increase in the level of education results in higher chances for women to participate in the work life (Ecevit, 1998; Özbay, 1993; TÜSİAD, 2000; Kadın Emeği Platformu Komisyon Raporu, 2005; TÜRKONFED, 2007; Dünya Bankası, 2009). Very few among unemployed women have degrees from vocational high schools.

Age of unemployed women is another significant demographic indicator. Majority of the interviewed women are aged between 25 and 35. The interviews demonstrate that in both cities a significant number of the women in this age group has never worked or left work due to marriage, birth, or child rearing responsibilities. The findings also show that unlike those in Konya, women in Bursa aged of 36 and 50 have the opportunity to enter work life once their child raising responsibilities are over. Women in Konya cannot enter work life even after their child rearing responsibilities are over, primarily because of limited employment opportunities in the city. Moreover, women of this age group are not hired either because they cannot answer the need for qualified young workers or employers' belief that their domestic responsibilities would result in absences.

Working Decision

In İlkaracan's (2012) study, when women were asked about their preferences for participation in the labour force, approximately two-thirds said that they wanted to work in a paid job, while one-third stated that they did not. The most frequently cited reason for deciding to work was the desire to access their own income and autonomy. Personal satisfaction has also been suggested as an important source of motivation to work. Participants stated that working "gives them an identity" and "they feel more valuable when they work". However, in our study most of the interviewees describe the reason of their working decision with an economic necessity. The main goals of women, who work for economic reasons, are contributing to household income and supporting their husbands. The needs of their children, education expenses, paying household debts, the desire to own their homes or spouse's inability to work are described as the reason behind economic meanings attributed to work:

“All of us in the family were working in the farm. We raise chicken, work in the garden, pick fruits, we did it all. When these did not cover our needs anymore and we began to feel the strain, there are household expenses, so I had better work to help cover those. Also, because my children have grown up now, my daughter is 28, my son 25.” (K13)

Commitment to work also varies between women with previous work experience and women who never worked before. For women employed in the past, work is very important for having access to social security benefits like a pension. For an interviewee in Bursa, who had to give most of her wages to nannies for her children for years, work means something different from earning income, affecting her commitment to it.

“For years I gave more than half of my income to nannies, two months ago I gave her 70% of it because she raised her rate. I was left with very little; rather than money, I was working to keep paying for my insurance. I must work for 1500 more days, about 4-5 years more. Therefore, I must start working within 3-4 months; otherwise, I am worried that I would not feel like working anymore – like my neighbors. That’s why I want to continue working without a break.” (B19)

While working improves women’s position within society in Bursa, it primarily affects their position within the household in Konya. The existing social structure in Konya necessitates women fighting against the power dynamics within the family before they can enter the public sphere. For women in Konya, work is an important tool for empowerment within the family.

“There are many women that are forced to stay home but want to work. I do not know how to put it; you are confined at home, suppressed by your husband... I think men treat working women better, otherwise he thinks that you have no other choice and treat you badly, he thinks what she can do if I leave her. I lived all of these. As soon as my husband left, he cut my electricity, water, gas, so that I would be left in the street. Once you start making a little money, he makes an effort to make the marriage work.” (K18)

Men, who previously would not allow their wives to work, would agree to it when they face the economic difficulties:

“To tell you the truth, we have mortgage payments, we have children, once our expenses increased, we decided together on this issue...” (E1)

“We have two children going to university and one going to high school... we needed (her). Up until then she did not work, but when she realized I can’t provide by myself, and then we thought maybe we can find a job for her, because we don’t have enough”. (E4)

“Because my husband has a heart condition, he is disabled. One of us has to work, we have 3 children plus life has become more expensive. So, either he or I, one of us has to work.” (K6)

“Women should only work when they face dire financial difficulties” is a widely held belief in Konya, which is internalized by many women, who does not work. Facing pressure due to these conservative values, even highly educated women stay at home and do only housework. A participant, who previously worked in Konya Women’s Platform and other NGOs, describes the situation as *“In Konya there are crystal women and there are melamine women”*. *Crystal women are highly educated and live in wealth, while melamine women enter the labour market due to poverty and work under hard conditions for little pay. According to the prevailing beliefs in Konya, the only reason for unskilled women to work can be economic hardship”*.

Patriarchal Barriers

Gender refers to the disparities between men and women that are rooted not in biology but in socially constructed roles and learned behavior patterns. In this sense, the use of gender as an analytical concept has become more common since 1970s. Gender is different from biological sex and is primarily a product of historical processes that fall into the purview of social sciences (Ostergaard, 1992). The constructed nature of gender allows us to identify and examine in which social spheres gender-based inequalities are spread and their intensity in these distinct areas. Originally based on the secondary position of women within the family, gender inequalities are being reproduced in numerous dimensions of women’s employment and work relations. Hartman (2008) defines patriarchy as a set of social relations between men that create solidarity and interdependence that will enable them to dominate over women. The material basis on which patriarchy rests is most fundamentally in men's control over women's labor force. Men maintain this control by denying women’s access to certain resources (for example, jobs that provide wages) and limiting women's sexuality. In support of Hartman's statements, one of the major factors affecting female labour supply in Turkey is family. Especially in traditional cities like Konya, women’s entry into work life is predicated on their fathers’ or spouses’ approval. Family’s control over female labour is not limited to its entry into the market, but also dictates the conditions of women’s work and the decision to leave work. Many male individuals, including parents, siblings, relatives, and even neighbors, can have a say in controlling female labour (Kandiyoti, 2007:80).

In Bursa shorter working-hours increase the male support for women's working. As long as the work is from 8 to 5, or 6 without night shifts any kind of work is deemed appropriate for women. According to the research conducted by Sarıtaş Eldem (2016) if the working hours allow the woman to be at home before her husband, if the woman will be at home on the weekend, if there are not many men in the working environment, if there are no or a few business trips, or if

working conditions do not interfere with the woman's household and care responsibilities, it is deemed appropriate by her husband. Similarly, in this study the main concern about work-hours is women's ability to attend household responsibilities:

“(Women) working during day time is normal. When she arrives home, she has to take care of the family. Laundry, ironing etc... if she is married, she should take care of children, if she is working at night, she would be neglecting her children, she can't take care of little children for example. It might be financially challenging but her working during the day is always better.” (E6)

Especially women with school-aged children want jobs that allow them to leave home with their children in the morning and end at 5 or 6 pm:

“A person should not work after the evening call to prayer, I mean after 5, let's say 6 at the latest, but I think even that is not suitable for a woman.”

“If I leave home at 8 in the morning and come back after my husband, of course he would not want me to work. However, he would accept me working in an institution with clear working hours or shifts. I mean if I leave at 8 and come back at 5 one week and from 9 to 6 the other week, he would be fine with that.” (K17)

Although impoverishment makes it easier for women to enter work life, there are spouses who disapprove of their wife working even if they are unemployed themselves. One male interviewee in Konya, who says working is a form of worship, also justifies his objection to his wife's working by religious beliefs. Same interviewee explains that working next to others would change the woman's attitudes towards her husband; so that he would never let his wife work:

“Working is a worship, for a man it might be a religious duty, but my wife is not beholden to the same duty. For her, household duties are worship, greeting her husband with a smile, preparing food are worship for her... Even when children grow up, she can't work, I am against her working under any condition. When a woman works she decides that her husband is lacking, but a man cannot have all the qualities she sees in other men. .. Divorces take place after that.” (E2)

The worldview that objects to men and women inhabiting the same spaces begins to form in childhood and in school, eventually preventing women from participating in work life. The conservative cycle naturalizes women not working or only working in areas designated as “women's work”, thus resulting in the organization of most workplaces for men. This way it solidifies women exclusion from certain professions or from the labour market altogether (Buğra, 2010). For

most women in Konya, industrial workplaces represent the last places to work. This is not because of hard working conditions but the male dominated environment of industry is regarded as unsuitable for women to work in.

The traditional structure in Konya is the key factor that shapes female employment patterns. For years, equating women working with men's deficiency, or worries about women "losing their innocence" because of work, have prevented many women from entering work life. A significant number of men in Konya choose to agree with the traditional prejudices that prevent women from working. Like what Dildar found in her 2015 study, internalizing patriarchal norms has a negative impact on women's labour force participation decision. One of the unemployed men interviewed explains the socio-cultural attitudes towards women working in Konya:

"There is no equality between men and women in Konya. Women working is usually frowned upon here. At least in rural areas. ...here even if a woman walks alone at a late hour, there would be catcalling or honking...In Konya I can't trust and let her go anywhere" (E1)

In Konya, the major demand of husbands, families, and the women regarding work is that it is not in the manufacturing industry. Among jobs at the manufacturing industry, areas with less male dominance, such as textiles, are preferred over others:

"My spouse knows Konya shop owners...The bosses look down on their employees...So, my husband does not want me to work in such a place. I leave work at 8 and arrive home later than him, he would be right not wanting me to work there." (K17)

As mentioned previously the harassment cases in industry, lead women and their spouses to prefer workplaces that are outside the industrial areas, located centrally, safe, and with family environments. While safe workplace means a decent workplace in Bursa, in Konya it mainly refers to workplaces where mostly women are employed, where there is no sexual harassment or vulgarity.

Wages

The overall low wages unskilled workers receive in Turkey becomes more troublesome when it comes to working women. Gender based wage gap is one of the main problems associated with female employment around the world as it is in Turkey. Wage gap is the difference between men's and women's wages that cannot be explained by human capital, individual differences, professional, sectorial, or workplace related differences (Eurostat, 2009:7) Although gender-based wage differentiation is banned by international and national laws, in practice it is prevalent and mainly disadvantages unskilled female labour. Past studies found wage gap figures against women differing from 4% to 35% (Dayıoğlu and

Kasnakoğlu, 1997; İlkaracan and Selim, 2007; Aktaş and Uysal, 2016; ILO and TURKSTAT, 2020).

In a study with 150 workers –men and women- in 3 textile factories in Bursa, Duruoğlu (2007) found that women workers not only receive less than their male counterparts but they also receive less than the minimum wage. Our work in Bursa shows that minimum wage is regarded as the maximum amount women can receive, and asking for minimum wage alone can lead to women being laid off:

“Let me put it this way, there was a woman taking care of cleaning and cooking, for 2 years she has been working for 700 a month, they told her that was the minimum wage. Of course, when I went there, things changed, I said I have children so for a year they paid me 900 for two kids. When I asked for a raise, the woman working with me asked for a raise too. I guess they did not like it so I was let go.” (Konya Focus Group 681)

In their study, Ercan et al. (2010: 33) also point out low wages, long work hours, and inability to cover childcare expenses result in lowering women’s participation in the workforce. As these studies suggest the female workers, who were already concentrated in low paying jobs, were earning less than men within the sectors they are employed in. Since there is little or no childcare services offered by businesses or the government, it is very hard for working women to pay for childcare services. As this increases the reservation fees of women, their tendency to participate in the Labour force decreases and their probability of being unemployed increases (Dildar, 2015; Saritaş Eldem, 2015).

Sometimes, low wages can lead to avoidance of insurance payments:

“The pay was minimum wage, I received it regularly, but I worked without insurance. I worked for 6 years, never had insurance. Because we had kids going to school, we did not pay for it.” (B3)

Another problem voiced by the interviewees, is irregular and/or partial payment of wages and other monies.

“It was not a problem for me but for others it was, not being appreciated for the work you do is one thing but sometimes they do not give them their wages with or without reason. I heard this from friends in buses, someone does something small wrong, but they are laid off without getting the wages they have earned. Especially those without social security, I heard they experience such things.” (K13)

“Some friends used to say, they worked in textiles during summer, I never experienced but they get paid one month then not paid for two. If you do not know the work, they give you only 600 liras. This was the complaint of all in Bursa.” (B18)

“I heard from friends that they were not given their wages or they had to work overtime, but I never complained because I was always getting what I earned for my work.” (B11)

This is not a problem for female workers only, but a common issue in the informal labour market. Dedeoğlu (2012), found that Azeri textile workers in Istanbul were unable to get their wages; Buğra’s (2010) study shows that workers in Denizli were not paid for the first 3 months and after that they were always paid 3 months behind. Since “earning the bread for the house” is an integral element of masculine identity, such abuses rarely result in men leaving work life; but in the case of women, whose primary responsibility is household duties, such practices lead to decreased levels of employment. In Konya, not getting raises on seniority is a major problem for women as well as low wages. However, since women are not thought to be the primary wage earner of the house, wages are a secondary factor in workplace choices; as one participant explicitly stated, “If work hours are from 8 to 5, the pay doesn’t matter, as long as I contribute some (to the family income)”. If all they receive and ever expect to receive is minimum wage, men are willing to leave jobs they worked at for a long time, even for a small raise. For women in Konya and Bursa safety in workplace is the most important factor affecting employment decisions; most women are willing to work for minimum wage as long as they feel safe at work. In this regard, lower turnover rates among women workers are to be expected. Participants in Konya and Bursa explain this situation:

“I can’t think of myself working 3 days in one place then 5 days in another, as a woman it feels wrong to me. I would like to start working somewhere and stay there.” (K18)

“I wish god would let me find a safe place, meet good people. If I were working with good, decent people why wouldn’t I retire from that place? Not so much in big companies but small businesses wear you out. Other than being safe, if I get paid regularly and my insurance payments are made, I would not want anything else.” (K20)

Both skilled and unskilled women in Bursa and Konya have changed jobs often. The major reasons for changing jobs in both cities are low wages, unpredictable working hours, heavy workload, and work without insurance. Women in Bursa report leaving jobs because of long commutes and lack of employer provided transportation, while women in Konya report leaving jobs because of harassment they faced at the workplace. Along with short-term job changes, many women have taken long breaks from work; marriage, pregnancy, and child rearing are the primary reasons behind these long breaks.

Balancing Work and Family Lives

Undoubtedly, another factor that hampers women's participation in the labour market is unequal division of household duties and child rearing. More than half of the unemployed women interviewed are married, verifying that women can enter work life before getting married or after they are divorced (Dedeoğlu, 2012; Toksöz, 2015). HIPS (2018: 182) study stated that the reason of the 21% of women who do not work was to take care of children. 47% of women who do not participate in the labour force do not participate because they are housewives (TURKSTAT, 2021). There is still a large gap in accessible, public care services. Care responsibility is also not undertaken by employers. Since the provisions of the regulation are insufficient and limited, a small number of employers comply with the regulation on opening a childcare center (KEİG, 2015). According to the study of O'Neil and Çarkoğlu (2020: 52) 44% of the women who have stopped working stated that they quit their job due to lack of support for family leave or care responsibilities.

According to the TURKSTAT (2018), only 16.6% of women in employment benefits from professional childcare services. 52.2% of women who did not receive childcare services carry out caring responsibilities together with their spouses; 15% of women receive grandparents' support, and 12.2% of women found care service expensive (TURKSTAT, 2018). So now there are almost no legal or institutional mechanisms for the work-family reconciliation in Turkey. The Turkish State assumes no legal responsibility for provision or subsidy of childcare or preschool education. The starting age for primary school education has been decreased from age 6 to 5 with recent efforts to extend pre-primary classes to 5-year-olds. This situation affects not only women's labour force participation but also women's commitment to work (İlkkaracan et al., 2015).

More than half of the unemployed women interviewed have children. Having children that need to be taken care of is one of the most important obstacles to women's entry into work life especially in Bursa. Women with children who work rely on the support of their families or social circles. Therefore, most women in Bursa want more workplaces providing childcare. In Konya, on the other hand, women internalized the belief that it is the mother's duty to raise children. Most women decide to work only after their children have grown up, reflected in less demand for childcare services at work. As many interviewees explain, most employers do not prefer hiring women because of her household duties:

“It is hard for married women, especially for those with children. There is nobody to take care of her children; they get sick you have to ask for a day off, what happens in the end, they let you go...The employers do not like it. But what can you do, are you going to pick your job or your child?” (B9)

“The reason is there are so few workplaces with childcare. For example, it can be made mandatory for enterprises with so many employees to provide childcare. Alternatively, the state or the employer can pay for nannies, this would be better for us; we would have less problems I guess.” (B19)

Lack of public childcare services for children between 0 and 3, part time education in public schools, and no childcare facilities at the workplace prevent women from entering work life or force them to postpone working. In particular, women with low education make a choice between opportunities to work in a paid and insured job and the cost of obtaining household and care services from the market, and usually they prefer to stay at home in the face of heavy and difficult working conditions of Turkish labour market (İlkkaracan et al.; 2015). Most of the women with children, who enter work life, can do so because of division of labour in their families, they are able to work as long as they can receive family members’ support.

Double burden of women’s work is a striking factor of low female labour supply. In Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu’s (2013) study 14% men report doing cleaning always or often, while 86% of women do so; 83% of women reported always or often cooking, whereas only 14% men did. Only 2% of women stated that they have never felt tired at work because of household duties, while the ratio is 27% for men. A woman interviewee in Bursa expresses this problem:

“Go to work you get tired, then come home and do work... I go to work but my mind is at home. I think to myself how long I am going to take care of these. At work you work, at home you work again... It is very hard for women to work.” (B4)

The responsibilities of childcare and helping older children with their schoolwork are among the major problems women face when balancing their work and family lives. Businesses can alleviate this problem by offering childcare and nursing rooms. In one of our focus groups one participant reported having to leaving work because of her baby, in contrast another participant, who works in one of Bursa’s prominent textile companies that provide childcare, expressed how comfortable she was after maternity leave since she was able to leave her baby at the nursery and could go there to breastfeed during the day. Having childcare at the workplace was crucial for her to avoid conflict between her work life and family life. Unemployed women with children in Bursa repeatedly stressed the necessity of having childcare facilities at work:

“If there were free childcare services employment would definitely increase. The amount of money you have to give for hiring a nanny is nearly same as the amount you make. When that is the case women say, “why should I work, I can stay home and take care of my children”

Previously there were many kindergartens here, they had one at TOFAS, one at Renault... now there are not many, very rarely. Just because of this I can't consider having a second child.” (Bursa Focus Group)

Increasing work hours makes it even harder for women to negotiate family and work lives, resulting in many to leave work:

“I didn't have a serious problem but... I could not go home on time... you mention your child, say, you cannot stay but...the boss takes no excuses. That is why I left work, there was too much overtime, I was getting paid for it but working from 8 to 12. They said it was only for 2 months, but it never ended, including calls on Sundays. They accepted no excuses that is why I left. (B6)

Among interviewed women, those working in food services, sales, and offices of small businesses were the ones complained most about irregular and long working hours:

“In cafes, patisseries they ask you to work from 12 (noon) to 12 (midnight). Working like that is hard, and I have children. All these jobs are without insurance anyway.” (B18)

Although employers pointed out pregnancy and maternity leaves as major impediments to employing women, unemployed women did not mention them as obstacles to employment. Women in Konya cite their husbands' disapproval as the primary reason for not working, while in Bursa the burden of childcare is emphasized as the main reason. A manager of an NGO in Bursa explained that since Bursa has a large migrant population with their families living elsewhere, receiving help from family for childcare is not an option for many women.

Sexual Harassment at the Workplace

Whether they are labeled as such or not, many female workers experience behaviors that constitute sexual harassment such as sexist hassles (e.g., being referred to as honey, overhearing condescending, sexist jokes), sexual innuendo, sexist remarks, and sexual abuse at the workplace (Gordon et al., 2005: 47). Research conducted with 353 women working in different sectors in Turkey by Toker (2016: 4), showed that 11% of women exposed to sexual harassment, 38% of women physical sexual harassment, 43% of women behaviors involving sexual hostility at least one time. Research conducted in 1999 among women workers of Bursa's manufacture sector, found out that 28% of the participants had faced harassment, humiliation, and ill-treatment based on their gender; 60% of the complaints were from single women (Aytac, 2001:118). Sexual harassment at the workplace results in involuntary job loss for women. Moreover, sexual harassment and job cuts in early career periods cause financial stress for women in the long term (McLaughlin et al.; 2017).

In our research although women in Konya had often reported experiencing sexual harassment, it was a rare experience among women in Bursa. In both cities, either women that experienced sexual harassment did not file any complaints and tried to manage it by themselves, or they have shared their experience with their employers. However, most employers reacted by laying off the victims of sexual harassment:

“For example, there were a lot of men in my workplace. Steel production. It happens more often in places like that. I told my boss, he said figure it out among yourself, we could not. Both of us got fired, first I was fired, then I learned he got fired.” (B9)

Most of the participants have voiced the worry that having to leave work late at night could increase the possibility of being sexually assaulted or even murdered. The spatial disconnect between Bursa’s industrial zone and working-class neighborhoods, was often pointed out by the participants. Although, employee transports provided by large companies reach widespread areas of the city, employee service busses drop their passengers at major arteries resulting in women living in back streets remaining hesitant to work in firms located far from residential zones. On the other hand, the sensationalist and masculine tone of the media coverage of women’s murders have further increased the sense of being unsafe among women. During focus groups in Bursa, unemployed men gave incidents of violence against women as a major reason for not wanting their spouses or daughters to work:

“I wouldn’t allow my wife to work. If they were all women, working together that would have been fine. However, regardless of how dedicated a woman is to her husband and family, other men can easily seduce them. If we could have walked together in these streets you would have seen for yourself what happens. Things are getting worse... every day women die, are assaulted, harassed... It is the fault of women and men both, they do not dress appropriately, and when men see her, they start to tail her. What happens then?” (BE1)

The interviews sampled above clearly show that it is impossible to ensure equality of employment unless gender equality on a larger scale is achieved. Violence against women must be prevented, and the notion of gender equality must be included in planning and public policies in every field, from education to employment, media to municipal services. Because all of them are pieces of a larger structure; for example, regulation of municipal services in a gender sensitive fashion, improving lighting of streets and bus stops and expansion of public transportation network, would also result in increased female employment.

In Konya the notion that a women’s place is her home is widespread and exist in every dimension of social relations. Nearly all interviewed women have reported incidents of sexual harassment at the workplace:

“I was working as a secretary for a while. My boss there was sixty or seventy years old. Nevertheless, he was constantly saying that he couldn’t take his eyes away from me, that he fell in love with me and didn’t know what to do... I was noticing that his was coming closer, I go to the canteen he would follow me, telling things to me. I pretended not to hear him, ignored him and tried to focus on my work. After a while, he came and opened to me. I rejected him but I realized I could not work with this man; otherwise, I would lose my virtue. For thirty years I had nobody talk bad about my and my family’s honor, and I would not let them for your sake.” (K2)

This interviewee explained that when started another job, she was subjected to similar advances by a colleague going through a divorce and had to leave that job for this reason too. Sexual harassment is not only a workplace problem for Konya women, but also an experience they encounter in every area of daily life. This results in women feeling conscious about their behavior and outfit even when they are simply walking in the street.

Some women like the interviewee above, experience sexual harassment first hand. While many others become hesitant to work, especially in the industry, because of experiences of other women related to them. The traditional structure in Konya is the key factor that shapes female employment patterns. A significant number of men in Konya choose to agree with the traditional prejudices that prevent women from working.

Struggle to Exist in Workplaces “Belonging” to Men

Even when women enter work life, men outnumbering them result in organization of workplaces and regulation of work rules according to men. For example, a women interviewee, who previously worked in a retail chain, relates her experience that during Friday prayer hours the store being shut down completely and while men were able to go to mosque women were not allowed going and seeing their children. Without lights, the warehouse of the store would be completely dark and quite unsafe for women.

A study by Özçatal (2011) in businesses in Tokat, reports similar cases. Men would eat lunch first in the dining hall, followed by women. While men could go outside during lunch break to smoke and drink tea, women were not allowed to go out to the yard.

One participant pointed out that unless workplaces and cities are reorganized with women’s needs in mind, equal treatment at work would not be possible:

“For example, they (male workers) used to say, since we stay for the night shift, women should too. Nevertheless, women did not stay there for the night, but men made such a big deal out of this: if we stay then

they must stay too. But if there is no employee transport, how could a woman go home in the middle of night, they would not consider it. You should have known before you began working, they used to say to us.” (K10)

In Bursa, besides childcare facilities, short distance commute, availability of means of transportation, and a safe work environment are criteria for desirable work. Safe workplace refers to working environments with few men, and where there is no exploitation. Moreover, being insured and being paid a satisfactory wage are other desired factors. In Konya, the major demand of husbands, families, and the women regarding work is that it is not at the industry. Among jobs at the industry, areas with less male dominance, such as textiles, are preferred over others:

“For example, they called me, they were going to give me a car, I was going to do presentations at the industrial zone. My father rejected it because of all the men there. The job was only presentation, but he said no. He said there you would have to ingratiate yourself, it would not be appropriate for you. I say no to presentation jobs.” (K5)

In Konya, manufacture is the industrial sector that creates the highest level of benefit and is most open to development. It is also regarded as an area of work exclusive to men. For women, industry is primarily associated with automobile mechanics and working in industry is identified as working in dirt and grime. Many women state that their husbands or fathers would never allow them to work at industry because of the worry that women working in industrial jobs would be look down on, and that she would not be comfortable among all the men, and fears of sexual harassment. Although interviewees have negative opinions about working on the factory floor, some state they have a positive opinion of cooking or running the tea canteen in a factory. In some industrial workplaces, the female employees are the ones preparing food or running the tea canteen. These findings are completely in line with the findings of Toksöz’s study (2009:55) in Konya after the economic crisis of 2008. The changes in the socio-economic conditions during the last 6 years did not have any effect on the negative attitudes on women’s employment in industrial establishments. For this reason, most of the unemployed women interviewed for this study state that they wanted to work outside the industrial sector:

“Especially (I want) jobs in places like markets, stores, but I don’t want to work in industry. My father does not allow me, they treat women differently, and there is a lot of cursing and vulgarity.” (K14)

There are mostly men working in industry, I want a place where mostly women work. I used to work in an underwear store, with only women it was good there, it can also be somewhere like a market.” (K15)

Conclusion

In this study, we searched the barriers that women face at the entrance to the decent works in the two developed cities of Turkey, Bursa and Konya. In Bursa significant numbers of women identified raising children and domestic responsibilities as the primary obstacle against their participation in work life. Moreover, hard working conditions, long work hours, and spatial problems are other major impediments to women's employment. Traditionalist attitudes towards women working have eroded considerably, in part due to immigrants from the Balkans that settled in Bursa. Women's decision to work is mostly based upon practical concerns such as availability of childcare, length of commute, and employers' providing service buses.

For most women in Konya working at industry is the least desirable form of employment, since the male dominant nature of industrial sector is regarded as unsuitable for women. Industry is explained by the participant women as primarily associated with automobile mechanics and working in industry is identified as working in dirt and grime. The harassment cases in industry, also lead women and their spouses to prefer workplaces that are outside the industrial areas, located centrally, safe, and with family environments. Women's entry to the work life mainly depends on the permission and control of their husbands or their family. Gender roles that limit women's lives to the private sphere and fear of sexual harassment at work are the major obstacles against women's employment in Konya. While, safe workplace mainly refers to workplaces where mostly women are employed, where there is no sexual harassment or vulgarity in Konya, in Bursa it refers to a decent working environment with daytime working hours, social security benefits, and high wages.

On top of marital and familial responsibilities, lack of self-confidence and consciousness, low education levels, and the notion that not working might be women's personal choice, are other major hindrances against women's employment in both Bursa and Konya.

In both Bursa and Konya, one of the primary reasons for women to enter work life is increased family expenses and poverty. Education expenses, having out of town children at school, mortgage and consumer credit payments, and spouses being too sick to work are factors increasing women's participation in the workforce.

Significant numbers of unemployed women in Konya are unwilling to work in shifts arguing that it would make it impossible to carry on their domestic duties. In Bursa, some participants reject the idea of shift work, while others find it acceptable, as it would allow them to attend their domestic responsibilities during daytime.

The findings of this study show parallels to the findings of other researches on barriers in front of women's participation in work life. Marriage and childbirth

force women to take long breaks from working; this results in women entering work life either before having children (between ages 18 and 24) or after their childrearing responsibilities are over (between ages 35 and 50). Low wages, lack of social security benefits and means of commuting lead to women changing jobs often. In both cities, basic and vocational education levels among unemployed women are quite low, resulting in their employment in atypical jobs with low-wages and no security.

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