

Chapter 93

The Outlook of Female Labor in Turkey in the Context of Social Gender Perception from a Global Perspective

Eda Kılıç
Uludağ University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Women have been seen as cheap labor and have participated in the economic life less than their male counterparts since the Industrial Revolution, where they joined the waged labor pool. Though the reasons for the women's low participation in the workforce are various; Turkey's current social structure in particular and the social gender perception which acts as the base of this structure emerge as key determinants. For this reason, establishing the general status of female labor in Turkey and comparing the international and national statistical data from a global perspective around the social gender inequality and the distribution of labor based on social gender is the purpose of this study.

INTRODUCTION

The biological differences between man and woman from the beginning of humanity have always rooted together with socialization and have surrounded every aspect of the lives of both genders. For this reason, especially women, have been struggling to take a place in the society they live in without being able to shed their gender identity, formed by the social gender perception. Unfortunately, the quantitative equality between men and women has not been actualized at the point of participation to the social and economic life. Women have constantly been struggling to bring themselves and their rights into view in every corner of the world. While this struggle has resulted in great achievements in some societies, women still keep their secondary status in others. Explaining the women's low labor force participation and high unemployment levels with reasons like economic growth, development level, economic resources or political regimes would not be enough, particularly in the labor market – the fundament

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of the economy which is one of the primary constituents of the society. In Turkey, women's labor force participation rates are increasing, but this increase is far from meeting the expectations compared with other OECD countries.

For this reason, establishing the general status of female labor in Turkey and comparing the international and national statistical data from a global perspective around the social gender inequality and the distribution of labor based on social gender is the purpose of this chapter.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE LABOR IN THE WORLD AND TURKEY

Women have been participating in the economic production throughout the ages. They had worked together with men and maintained their lives both in the hunter/gatherer and agricultural societies.

But the women's participation in waged labor, which means the sale of their labor, was actualized with the Industrial Revolution, which is considered a global revolution. In other words, it was possible in this period for the women, being finally considered as workers, to be paid in return for their labor. Substantial developments like the invention of the steam engine, the ease of transportation made possible by the use of these engines in ships and locomotives and similarly, the mechanization of the textile production starting from second half of the 1800s, brought a need for the mass workforce.

This mass workforce wasn't limited to the male population, as it included female and child labor to satisfy the emerging needs. In particular, the use of machines simplifying the production techniques, labor division, specialization and the developments in the textile sector have increased the need for women's labor (Altan & Ersöz, 1994, p. 21). While the small wages paid in return for the working times up to 20 hours worsened the living conditions of all the workers, women and children were the most heavily affected; for these participated in working life for wages even less than the men were being paid.

Women have entered the labor market with industrialization; but even though the conditions were improved due to the social policies, protective laws, and regulation mechanisms over the course of time, the secondary status of ill-paid labor under heavy working conditions still remains to this day.

In female labor has seen a decrease with the industrial production focusing on chemicals and heavy metals starting from the 19th century. The Second World War years, though, were the breaking point in the labor history of women. Until this period, women were in a 'reserved labor' position and did not enter the labor market unless it was unavoidable. The employment of a married woman was an indication that her husband was not able to take care of her properly, particularly in England. However, when the Second World War erupted, a serious labor vacancy came with the conscription of the men, resulting in the women getting back to the workforce. The increase in female labor was not only the result of the decrease in male labor due to men going to the war; it was also because the housework had decreased and women were responsible for providing for their families. When the war ended, many women chose not to withdraw from the labor market.

Following this period, female labor participation rates have increased all over the world, and with this increase, the female labor rate caught up to the male labor rate in the developed countries (Mincer, 1958, pp. 288-300).

Starting from the 1950s, the female labor participation rate kept increasing. Though the Second World War is considered as the breaking point, it can be said that many factors like the increase in female

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