

**WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION GAP IN TRADE UNION MANAGEMENT: A CASE OF A
PUBLIC SECTOR UNION****Mustafa Yasin ASAN*** **Asst. Prof. Onur METİN (Ph.D.)**** **Res. Asst. Akın ÖZDEMİR (Ph.D.)***** **ABSTRACT**

Regarding the progressive decline of the social influence of the trade union movement, it is emphasized that women workers should be a potential source of members and managers in the discussions on strategies to revitalize trade unionism. However, women's access to positions such as management or leadership and their representation in these positions are severely limited due to the pervasive effects of the employment relations regime and patriarchal culture in various organizations of working life. This article aims to examine the representation gap of women in trade union management in a public workplace in the light of interviews with union member women. Consequently, this study identifies the distinctive political and legal dynamics specific to the Turkish public sector, along with the enduring unequal gender dynamics entrenched in societal structures, as significant impediments to women's representation in leadership roles within trade unions.

Keywords: Trade Union, Gender Inequality, Women Representation Gap, Public Sector.

Jel Classification Codes: J51, J16, J45.

**SENDİKA YÖNETİMLERİNDE KADINLARIN TEMSİL AÇIĞI: KAMU GÖREVLİLERİ
SENDİKALARINA YÖNELİK BİR VAKA İNCELEMESİ**

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yürütülen görüşmeler ışığında irdelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Sonuç olarak Türkiye kamu sektörünün kendine özgü politik, yasal dinamikleri ve ayrıca toplumsal yaşamda yapılaşmış olan eşitsiz toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkilerinin varlığı kadınların yönetim kadrolarında temsilini engelleyen önemli unsurlar olarak tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sendika, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitsizliği, Kadın Temsil Açığı, Kamu Sektörü.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In academic studies focused on gender inequality, there is often a discussion of the division of gender-based social roles between men and women (Freedman et al., 1981). Contributions from scholars like Sen (1982) and Nussbaum (1999) have emphasized the significance of structural inequalities stemming from gender roles and the lack of awareness, forming the basis for theoretical and empirical work on the subject within the framework of the capability approach over the last quarter-century. Despite the progress made, barriers to women's participation in labour markets persist, including both implicit and direct discrimination. It is argued that even women who are already part of the workforce may face gender inequality concerning their representation in organizational management roles (Bayat and Baykal, 2021). On the other hand, there is a need for empirical research specific to the public sector, which can be considered a relatively protected environment for women within the Turkish labour market, with its unique characteristics. This current study addresses this need by investigating the representation gap of women in managerial positions within public employee unions. Thus, our research is motivated by the question: "Why are women inadequately represented in management roles in the context of public sector unionism?"

When examining the relevant literature within the framework of this research question, it becomes evident that significant representation gaps exist in women's participation in the labour market, their status within it, and their representation in managerial positions, even when they are employed. Similar challenges exist when it comes to women's involvement in labour unions or taking on leadership roles within them. Although the increasing number of women employees is viewed as an essential resource for expanding trade union membership, it is a development that needs to be applied in the context of rejuvenating unionism. However, labour relations regimes and gender-based inequalities continue to hinder women from attaining influential positions within trade unions.

Through in-depth interviews conducted with women union members affiliated with a public organization, particularly within their own workplace, this study sheds light on these issues. It has been observed that women's responsibilities in household care and the reinforcing of male privilege within the unions themselves limit opportunities for women to pursue careers in unions. Consequently, women are underrepresented in high-level positions, such as union managers, and often lack aspirations to attain such roles. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical insights

specifically focused on women who are members of public sector trade unions. The research is structured under three main phases.

Figure 1. Research Design

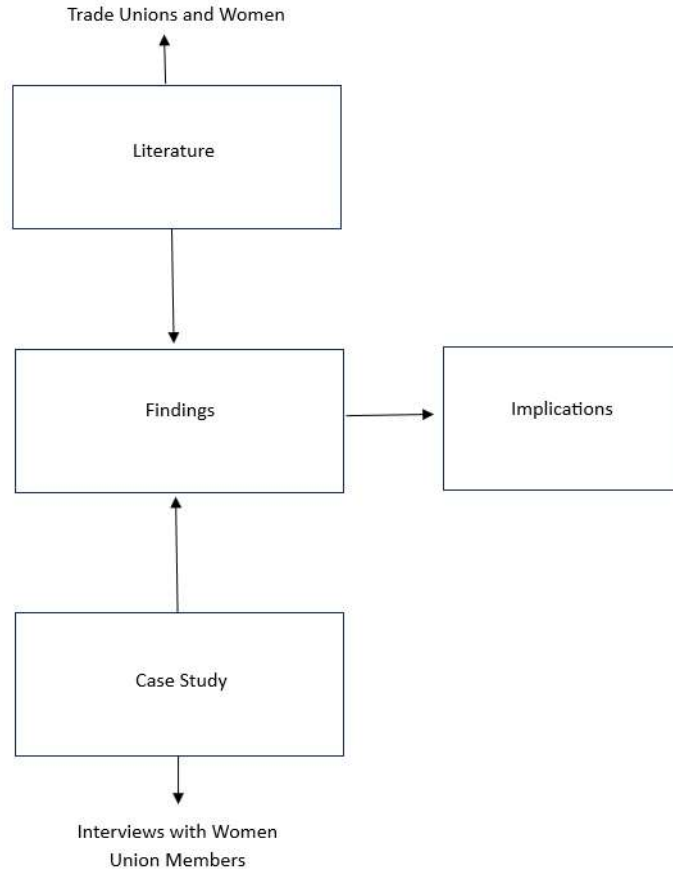


Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the literature review in this study, which primarily focuses on examining the role of women within the context of trade unionism. This section aims to delve into gender roles and the marginalized status of women within the labour market, establishing the rationale for conducting original field research within the framework of the research question. In the second part, the researchers justify their methodological choices in thorough detail and outline the processes involved in developing the findings based on these methodological preferences. Finally, the study concludes by discussing the research questions and providing insights drawn from both the theoretical and empirical phases of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In light of the declining social influence of the trade union movement, both in terms of quantity and quality, over the past few decades, there has been a growing emphasis on the potential role of women workers as a source of members and leaders in discussions surrounding new forms of union organization (Briskin, 2002; Kirton and Healy, 2013). Existing literature widely acknowledges the severe limitations

women face in terms of access to and representation in managerial, leadership, or strategic positions across various industries and sectors, be it public, private, or third sector. These limitations are attributed to the enduring influence of patriarchal culture within organizational environments (Adler, 1993; Carvalho and Diogo, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2018; Kalaitzi et al., 2017; Muhr, 2011; Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Xie and Pang, 2018).

A study conducted by Amini et al. (2018) focusing on women union leaders within global labour organizations, revealed that despite a proportional increase in the membership of women in unions, significant representation gaps persist on the management level of these unions. These gaps are not isolated incidents but are deeply ingrained systemic and institutional issues. These barriers to achieving equal representation continue to exist within a broader context where the neoliberal economic model has weakened organized labour movements. Excluding women from leadership positions is just one symptom of a larger set of underlying problems related to structural barriers maintained by both trade unions and employers, as well as the pervasive influence of a patriarchal culture that permeates these organizations.

Cooper (2012) highlighted that although numerous studies in the 1990s and 2000s explored new strategies for trade union organizing with a focus on diversifying the workforce in favor of women, very few of them delved into the gender-based dynamics within trade unions. These studies not only examined the intersection of gender and trade unionism but also considered the potential for revitalizing trade unions in a neoliberal environment. In this context, Cooper (2012: 135-136) summarized the findings from the literature related to the representation of women in trade union hierarchies under four key themes:

i. Underrepresentation of Women in Leadership Roles: Studies conducted in the US, UK, Europe, and Australia, even in cases where women make up the majority of union members, consistently found that there are fewer women than men in paid official trade union positions. Women are less likely than men to be chosen or appointed for career advancement opportunities or senior leadership roles.

ii. Challenges within Union Structures: This set of findings highlights both non-union and intra-union factors that impact women's participation within union hierarchies. Beyond the prevalence of women taking on caregiving responsibilities at home and holding precarious positions in the labour market, trade unions themselves often replicate, reinforce, and leverage male privilege. This situation limits women's capacity to assume roles within trade unions, including honorary positions.

iii. Consequences of Underrepresentation: Although underrepresentation of women in senior positions, such as union leadership, has significant consequences, studies have not extensively explored this issue. Researchers often suggest that unions do not adequately reflect women's concerns in their agendas and priorities.

iv. Alternative Agendas: The fourth theme identified in relevant findings seeks to propose alternative solutions to the problem of women's limited presence in trade union hierarchies. This includes integrating women into mainstream union organizing strategies and advocating for separate organizations like women's trade unions. Additionally, studies in this category reveal that focusing solely on women who have managed to attain leadership positions in trade unions may inadvertently overlook the experiences of women who have not been able to penetrate full-time wage hierarchical structures in unions or assume leadership roles, thus rendering their situations 'invisible'.

In summary, while there have been efforts to explore strategies for increasing women's participation in trade unions, the gender-based dynamics within these organizations remain complex and multifaceted, impacting women's representation in leadership positions and the overall direction of trade unions' agendas and priorities.

Similar themes are also evident in the Turkish literature on trade unions and gender dynamics. Toksöz (1994) asserts that to comprehend the challenges faced by women in their engagement with trade unions, it is essential to first examine the gender-based inequalities that are ingrained in a male-dominated framework. These inequalities exclude women from paid employment and impose specific social roles on them. Additionally, Toksöz highlights the insensitivity of trade unions as institutions when it comes to matters concerning women. Urhan (2009) takes a parallel approach by problematizing the male-dominated functioning of traditional trade unions in Turkey. She emphasizes the need to incorporate the issue of gender equality into the broader discourse on democracy within trade unions. Urhan points to alternative forms of organization, such as women's unions and non-trade union social associations, as potential solutions to this problem. Ünlütürk-Ulutaş and Pala (2012) delve into the topic of gender-based inequalities within trade unions and discuss the emergence of women's units and alternative organizational structures within some unions. These initiatives hold the potential to transform the male-dominated trade union landscape. Urhan (2017: 56) also identifies indicators of the ongoing gender representation gap within trade unions in Turkey. This gap is viewed as an intra-organizational democracy issue. Key indicators include low union membership rates among women, their limited representation in managerial structures, the superficial nature of existing women's units, and their activities being confined to specific days and events. Recent field studies support the notion that trade union organizations in Turkey continue to operate with a male-dominated structure, effectively curbing women's participation in these unions (Keleş, 2018; Toprakçı Alp and Namal, 2019; Yenihan and Cerev, 2016). Finally, Keleş (2021) conducted research on women's roles in the hierarchical structures of labour organizations and incorporated women's ideological perspectives into the analysis. She suggests that individuals who do not question the prevailing patriarchal mindset tend to conform to the established male-dominated order in various ways.

As reviewing official data, public sector trade unionism in Turkey can be considered a more convenient unionisation field. The degree of unionisation of public employees corresponds to a high

rate of 74.54% (ÇSGB, 2023). The employment rate of women in public service is 46.97%, and the degree of unionisation among women public employees is 41.17% (ÇSGB, 2021). This data suggests that the public sector offers a relatively more conducive setting for female employees in terms of potential union membership. However, despite these advantageous conditions, Kirton's (2018) research, which focuses on a small professional union in the public sector, sheds light on the challenges women face in their union participation within the context of labour relations and gender dynamics. The stringent managerial control within the labour relations regime has created an oppressive workplace environment, increasing stress levels and posing practical challenges for union activists. In tandem with this, achieving work-life balance has become a major concern, particularly for women who are at the early stages of their careers and have family responsibilities, including childcare. The need for these female employees, many of whom are in the early phases of their careers, to secure their jobs and shoulder domestic caregiving responsibilities to a significant extent has limited their ability to engage in union activities.

3. METHOD

The qualitative research approach was preferred in the empirical process of the study. In this approach, which focuses on the personal evaluations of the subjects within the framework of the research question, researchers try to reach generalizable findings from these personal evaluations by justifying their methodological preferences in detail (Merriam, 2013: 5). As stated by some methodologists, the choice of research approach is directly related to the structure of the determined basic and sub-research questions. Accordingly, the qualitative research approach is an appropriate choice for questions that cannot be answered with numerical data, such as why, how and what, while questions that can be answered with statistical models, such as effect and correlation, are considered ideal for the quantitative approach (Creswell, 2007: 107). This study, which aims to answer the question, "Why are women not sufficiently involved in trade union management in the context of public sector unionism?" is structured on a qualitative approach as a result of the structure of the research question. In Figure 2, information about the sub-components that shape the research approach is presented, and in the next step, methodological preferences are explained within the framework of this information.

Figure 2. Qualitative Research Approach



Research Design and Researcher Positionality: In the empirical phase, the qualitative research approach is structured around a single case study design. This approach is particularly suited for investigating a distinct research unit with a unique structure, aiming to delve deeply into a limited system within its natural context (Punch, 2011: 144; Yin, 2003: 2-3). The quality of the data obtained is significantly impacted by the researcher's ability to conduct this comprehensive analysis in an appropriate environment. Therefore, the researcher's role in the empirical process, and its alignment with the findings, is a crucial determinant of the success of a case study (Neuman, 2016: 23).

The researcher responsible for conducting the field research has held a position as a public employee within the sample organization since 2015. Additionally, they have been a board member of a public employee's trade union operating within the workplace since August 2018. The researcher's roles have played a pivotal role in formulating the research question, selecting the sample, and significantly influencing the data collection phase.

In November 2021, during the elections for the mandatory branches of the union, in which the researcher is currently a board member, the researcher actively encouraged women to apply for the women's quota—an innovative practice within this particular union branch. This initiative aimed to foster a stronger connection with female members who have become increasingly demanding in recent years, deliver improved services, and cultivate loyalty among female members toward the union by ensuring that at least one female member would serve on the seven-member board of directors. Despite the absence of any material gain for board members, there are several intangible benefits associated with holding a position on the branch board of public employee unions. These advantages include heightened visibility within the workplace, enhanced opportunities for career advancement (as successful unionism is often valued in professional settings), and the ability to establish a more influential social network

through interactions with key individuals both within and outside the organization. Due to these advantages, it is commonly observed that there is substantial competition among male union members during election periods to secure positions within the trade union leadership. However, female members typically do not participate in this competition. The introduction of the women's quota, as mentioned earlier, was intended to provide an incentive for women to become members of the branch's board of directors without having to enter this competitive arena. However, even after announcing the implementation of a women's quota for leadership roles, no female members volunteered to become branch managers. Despite the current managers approaching female members, explaining this practice in detail, and encouraging them to consider leadership roles, none of them expressed interest in assuming such positions. The research is motivated by the question of why female members are hesitant to pursue roles that male members actively compete for, despite the presence of various incentives and advantages associated with being a union manager. The research design has been developed with this motivation in mind, seeking to explore the underlying reasons for this phenomenon.

Sample and Data Collection Technique: During the field research, the purposive sampling technique, a non-probability sampling method, was employed. This technique involves the researcher intentionally selecting individuals who are best suited to address the specific research problem, aligning well with the nature of qualitative research designs (Punch, 2011: 183). As Merriam (2013: 87) emphasizes, qualitative research should prioritize gathering in-depth and original data from each participant rather than focusing solely on the quantity of interviews conducted. In this particular study, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 14 female employees who were members of various unions with different ideological backgrounds, but who were not holding managerial positions within these unions. The repetition of answers to questions at a certain stage helped determine the final sample size of 14 participants.

Semi-structured interview schedules were chosen for this qualitative research as they allow for the exploration of new and unforeseen areas that may emerge during the fieldwork. Initially, preliminary interviews were conducted with five female employees to assess the comprehensibility and adequacy of the interview questions. Subsequently, the primary interviews were conducted. These interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed into written documents, and prepared for the coding process. To reinforce the findings derived from the interviews, the researcher's observational notes were utilized during the coding and interpretation of the data.

Coding and Analysis Technique: The findings were subjected to a comprehensive three-stage coding process involving all researchers. To elaborate, in the initial stage, each researcher independently conducted open coding without any restrictions, allowing for a free exploration of the data. Subsequently, in the second stage, the concepts that emerged from open coding were refined through processes such as elimination, consolidation, or modification. Finally, in the last stage, the relevant

statements were grouped under overarching themes, preparing the data for interpretation, a methodology consistent with research best practices (Çelik and Ekşi, 2015: 54; Saldana, 2019: 4-14).

Within this framework, the empirical process yielded several prominent themes, including trade union legislation, the established trade union regime, gender dynamics, and the prevailing political context. Additionally, the theme of personal reasons was also explored as a category in which subjectivities, not easily categorized within these four main themes, were analyzed and discussed.

Validity and Reliability: Some scholars argue that the subjectivity inherent in qualitative research can be made more universally applicable when the entire research process is meticulously and transparently explained. They suggest that expert analysis can be a valuable tool in mitigating the impact of subjectivity (Creswell, 2016: 202; Neuman, 2016: 288; Merriam, 2013: 221). To enhance the validity and reliability of various stages within the complex qualitative research process, input from external evaluators specializing in each respective stage was sought. The pertinent stages and the deemed necessary expert opinions are outlined as follows:

- i. Obtaining opinions from three different researchers on qualitative research design,
- ii. Getting opinions from three different researchers for semi-structured interview questions,
- iii. Following Miles and Huberman's (1994) model, coding is done separately by 3 different researchers and at least 80% harmony is sought between the codings. This process is continued during the formation of categories and themes,
- iv. At the last stage, it was expected that three external evaluators would approve the final code, categories and themes, each expert on social policy and labour relations, and that the agreement between the evaluators would be at least 80%.

Following the initial open coding phase of the study, a total of 89 codes were generated. Subsequently, these 89 codes were condensed into eight overarching themes based on expert input. In the final stage, five core themes emerged, consistently coded by the researchers at an 84% agreement rate. The subsequent data analysis focused on these five themes, guided by expert opinions.

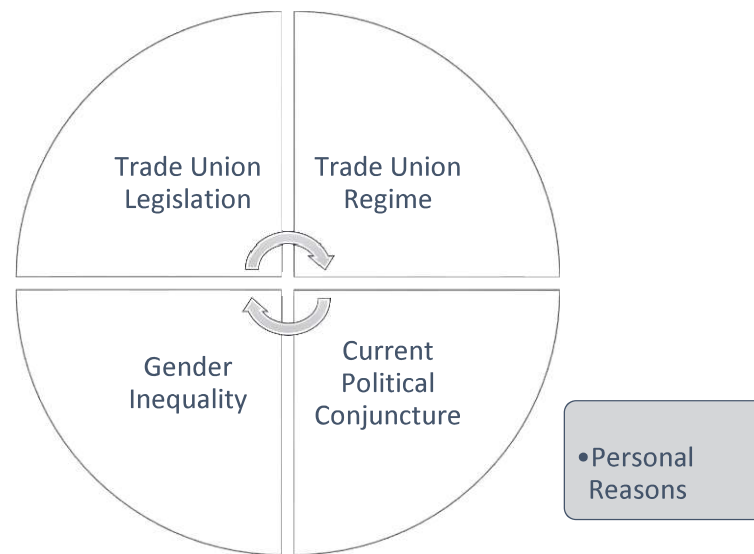
In the subsequent section of the research, the findings derived from the empirical process were examined in light of these established themes.

4. FINDINGS

The data derived from the conducted interviews, intertwined in a complex and interconnected manner, reveal that the persistence of women as union members presents a considerable challenge, even before they express an interest in assuming managerial roles within trade unions. It was observed that while there were areas of convergence in the perspectives of various participants, there were also points of divergence; nonetheless, these viewpoints exhibited substantial interconnectedness. The factors

contributing to the gender-based representation gap among women managers can be categorized into five overarching themes within this context. These themes pertain to the operational dynamics of the established trade union *regime*, the legal framework governing public employee unions, disparities in gender roles, the ramifications of the prevailing political regime, and certain personal motivations. Among these themes, the category of personal *motivations*, encompassing reasons such as a reluctance to dedicate time to trade union activities, exhibits the weakest emphasis and indifference. Consequently, it has been excluded from the relational framework, necessitating further examination as it remains relatively isolated from the social dynamics encountered within the other thematic areas.

Figure 3. Problem Areas of Women Representation Gap in the Management of a Public Trade Union



4.1. Trade Union Legislation

The prevailing legislation governing public employee unions emerges as the predominant factor cited by individuals as deterring them from pursuing managerial roles within these unions across various dimensions. The most notable finding underscores the deficiency of legal enforceability within unions. Interviewees consistently pointed to the absence of legal empowerment, which is largely associated with legal constraints. They attributed their reluctance to assume managerial positions in public employee unions to the regulatory framework in question. This framework is criticized for conferring limited agency upon union members with regard to activities such as strikes, protests, and collective bargaining, due to the restrictions placed on these rights by the legislation. It is unequivocally noted that the legislation, which inhibits union members from ascending to managerial roles, effectively renders trade unions nearly powerless in terms of sanctions, aside from their fundamental right to organize. Throughout the course of this research, nearly every participant highlighted that private sector trade unions possess, at the very least, the right to strike, underscoring the conspicuous absence of any such sanctioning authority for public sector unions.

The current legislation governing public sector trade unions in Turkey falls short of effectively harmonizing the right to organize with collective labour relations rights, encompassing the right to strike and engage in collective bargaining. Consequently, individuals are deterred from assuming leadership roles within these unions because they perceive that the union cannot adequately fulfil its fundamental functions. In various aspects, it is evident that public sector unionism in Turkey lacks the essential components of collective labour rights, which are inherently interrelated. Consequently, there is a prevailing sentiment that public employees are stigmatized, as if their involvement in union activities alone is the primary focus. Recognizing this situation, public employees either opt not to become union members in the first place or, if they are members, they refrain from pursuing leadership positions within the union.

Furthermore, the legislation's limitation and constriction of the core domains of activity for public sector unions have resulted in intensified competition among unions within the same sector. This heightened competition not only undermines unionism but is also significantly influenced by the prevailing political polarization and partisan divisions in the country. Consequently, it has been observed that various trade unions operating within the same workplace struggle to establish a common ground, even when confronted with issues necessitating unity. Additionally, it is considered a disadvantage that if a union member assumes a managerial role, it may be perceived as aligning with a particular faction, potentially positioning them in opposition to other unions.

4.2. Trade Union Regime

The concept of the established trade union regime refers to processes that exert influence beyond the legal framework, effectively imposing themselves as de facto norms. These processes encompass the relationship between unions and politics, issues related to merit within the union, the erosion of the union's cultural identity, unions primarily prioritizing their own members, and inadequacies in union activities. A commonly held belief is that unions maintain a distorted relationship with political parties. Public sector employees who wish to avoid entanglement in political matters often opt to refrain from pursuing leadership roles within the union. This implicit connection between unions and political parties can result in powerful politicians intervening in the internal affairs of unions and appointing unqualified leaders simply based on their alignment with a particular ideology. This situation poses a challenge that hinders members from demonstrating loyalty to their union and participating in union-related events. It is anticipated that a leader who has attained a union management position in this manner may struggle to effectively execute social or educational initiatives. Furthermore, shortcomings in activities that facilitate direct engagement with employees can lead to a detachment from the union once again.

A prevailing perspective that emerged during the interviews revolves around the notion that trade union leaders often prioritize political ambitions, leveraging their positions as a means to advance their political careers. This viewpoint is expressed with connotations that underscore how trade unions

sometimes function more like political parties rather than organizations dedicated to employee welfare. It is reported that this dynamic leads to the appointment or employment of union leaders based on their alignment with certain political ideologies rather than their qualifications for union leadership roles. In essence, the perception that union leaders are more focused on advancing their own political agendas rather than addressing employee concerns stands out as a key reason why many trade union members hesitate to pursue leadership positions. This situation is interpreted as a failure to align the interests of union member employees with the central management's priorities, resulting in a disconnect between their respective interests.

4.3. Gender Inequality

In this research, which raises concerns regarding the underrepresentation of women in trade union leadership despite their membership, gender-based inequalities emerged as prominent issues that extend beyond institutional and regulatory frameworks and are deeply ingrained within society. These issues encompass various factors, including the cultural norms of the country, the domestic responsibilities placed on women, the predominantly male-dominated nature of trade unions, the internalization of gendered emotional patterns by women, and the overshadowing of women within the broader social context. These phenomena appear to be deeply interwoven within the cultural fabric and have evolved over time. Consequently, addressing these dynamics is crucial for enhancing the ability of women to occupy prominent roles in union leadership positions.

Upon examination of the data gathered within this thematic framework, it becomes apparent that some participants openly articulated their perspectives. For instance, many participants expressed their grievances regarding the predominantly male-dominated nature of trade unions. Nearly all of them stressed the importance of having at least one woman in union leadership, with many advocating for a substantial increase in female representation, even suggesting that at least half of the leadership should be comprised of women. However, when questioned about their own reluctance to take on these leadership roles and reminded that without their active participation, men would continue to dominate union management, the participants often cited personal reasons for not pursuing such positions. Their responses often echoed sentiments like "women should certainly be part of union leadership, but I should not be that woman." This perspective was consistently shared by all 14 participants.

Upon closer examination during the interviews, both tangible challenges and implicit reasons for their hesitancy emerged. For instance, it became evident that the significant domestic responsibilities placed on women, commonly referred to as the domestic burden, serves as a substantial impediment preventing their involvement in union leadership. The prevailing cultural norms that continue to assign a significant portion of household duties to women have created formidable barriers, effectively confining them to their homes and limiting their engagement in external roles such as union leadership.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that while some participants express their feelings of frustration, sadness, or intimidation regarding this situation, others view it as an outcome of the natural order and accept it as a norm, continuing their lives despite these challenges. Addressing this persistent issue does not appear to have a straightforward solution in the current circumstances.

Certain women harbour concerns that even if they were to assume leadership roles within the union, they may not be taken seriously by their male counterparts and could potentially encounter obstacles. In some cases, women even fear that they might face violence. However, the researcher possesses a comprehensive understanding of the participants and their workplace. It is evident that very few, if any, of the participants have actually witnessed or heard of instances of violence against women in trade unions. Nonetheless, due to societal dynamics, women have developed these biases and, in an attempt to safeguard themselves, have adopted an overly cautious approach, confining themselves to perceived safe spaces.

4.4. Current Political Conjuncture

As the country experiences escalating political polarization and an increase in authoritarianism within the political leadership, certain factors, such as the fear of being labelled as radical trade unionists and hesitancy to express their opinions, have emerged as significant hindrances to employee engagement in trade union activities and responsibilities. The need to interact with public organization administrators who are deeply involved in current politics, often referred to as a reason for hesitation in pursuing managerial positions, further complicates matters. For instance, some requests from these public organization officials, viewed as displays of political power, can become issues to which employees feel compelled to acquiesce out of fear for their own well-being. In essence, public organization managers are perceived as representatives of the political establishment.

Despite the trade union's willingness to resist unlawful demands, it is evident that employees are increasingly reluctant to take a stance due to the prevailing political climate.

4.5. Personal Reasons

The findings within this category highlight a prevailing sense of apathy toward the trade union movement, reflecting subjective positions that persist even when social barriers are removed. An analysis of the data within this thematic area reveals that this apathy has become a problem in itself, as the root causes of other themes have solidified over the years. For instance, a majority of respondents express disinterest in union-related matters. Considering the historical and contemporary political developments that have driven people away from unions, it is evident that these attitudes are more a result of being shaped by neo-liberal ideology than purely personal reasons.

Furthermore, despite trade unions being the organizations directly responsible for safeguarding the social rights of employees and exerting control over their working lives, the reluctance of individuals

to allocate time for union activities can be seen as a manifestation of the prevailing neo-liberal paradigm. While it is entirely normal for an employee to not wish to join or take on a leadership role in a trade union due to personal reasons, the recent transformation of the economic paradigm in Turkey can be considered an underlying factor influencing the data collected within this thematic area.

5. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

In the context of public sector trade unionism in Turkey, we observe a situation where not only the aspects related to women's participation in unions, often seen as "ornamental" (Urhan, 2017), but the entire landscape of public sector unionism is influenced by the institutional structure and the prevailing regulations. Much like the overall decline in trade unionism occurring within the framework of a neo-liberal labour regime, public sector unions are directly affected by both formal and informal elements of the political regime that exert a suppressive influence.

In the context of public sector trade unionism in Turkey, the barriers preventing women from assuming leadership and managerial roles cannot be comprehended solely through the lens of gender role disparities. Many hurdles assume a more intricate form, as public sector unionism appears to operate within conditions that, on the surface, seem favourable for women's organization and union activities, owing to its legal definition and close ties to current political dynamics. Kirton's (2018) assessment of gender relations, particularly within the unique parameters of the labour relations regime, holds true. When applying a similar perspective to the context of the present study, we encounter a constraining workplace environment in Turkey. This environment is characterized by significant political-administrative control within the public sector labour relations regime, affecting employees at the organizational level and restricting the legal framework governing collective labour rights and unionism. Against this backdrop, the dynamics of gender relations, as reflected in the literature, often place women in charge of domestic caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, this domestic burden makes it more challenging for women to aspire to leadership positions within the context of trade unionism. As a result, despite being cognizant of the existing gender inequalities, women within the union who are also employees hesitate to demonstrate the will to challenge these inequalities in their professional lives, primarily to avoid being politically stigmatized and to prevent any hindrances in their careers. In the context of such an organizational work environment, it is not surprising that men, conversely, strive to maintain their positions within the predominantly male-dominated dynamics of current politics, thus securing their advancement into managerial roles.

The absence of the right to strike and the limited definition of the right to collective bargaining within the framework of Act No. 4688 on Public Employee's Unions and Collective Bargaining presents a significant issue for public sector trade unions in Turkey. Under this law, these unions are effectively restrained from engaging in strike actions or even defined forms of protests. This legal framework has essentially transformed public sector trade unions into entities resembling 'fraternity association for

public employees,' as it hampers the integration of the right to organize with the rights of collective bargaining and strike.

Collective bargaining, as articulated in the law's second part, lacks substantive influence. During the collective negotiations leading up to the collective agreement, public officials have limited leverage to secure desired gains, placing them at the bargaining table with diminished bargaining power. Given that pro-government unions typically have the highest membership numbers, negotiations primarily occur between them and the government, resulting in a collective agreement. Even if unions not aligned with the government are present at the bargaining table, their primary focus remains the interests of their members. However, when they are unable to accept the outcomes imposed by the state, they lack an objective authority to which they can appeal, leaving them with no recourse but the state-formed High Arbitration Board. This situation underscores the challenges faced by public sector trade unions in asserting their interests within the current legal framework. The structure of public employee trade unions in the context of the specific public organization you are referring to has consistently been moulded by legislative actions guided by politicians. In this dynamic, trade unionism operates within the framework set by those in power, and the traditions and operations of these unions become firmly rooted under the influence of these political forces. This close alignment with political powers shapes the landscape within which these trade unions function.

Indeed, if members of public employee trade unions have confidence that their union leaders are competent, well-informed about employee demands, and genuinely dedicated to representing their interests, it can have several positive outcomes. Firstly, it is likely to enhance their sense of organizational belonging and engagement. As a result, they may become more active and vocal in advocating for improvements in their working conditions through the union.

Furthermore, if union members are assured that their union has the ability to take legal action and that impartial courts will consider their cases, it can bolster their perception of the union's influence and power. This increased confidence in the union's capacity to act as a watchdog and advocate for their rights may lead to greater union loyalty among members. This strengthened union loyalty, in turn, may motivate these members to consider leadership roles within the union in the future. When they believe that the union is effective and capable of driving change, they are more likely to want to actively participate and contribute to its leadership and decision-making processes. This cycle of confidence, loyalty, and engagement can ultimately benefit both the union and its members by fostering a more effective and influential union presence in advocating for employee rights and interests.

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