

UNDER THE EUROPEAN UNION “SPOTLIGHT”, GENDER POLICIES IN TURKISH MEDIA AND STUDENTS’ CHOICES AS FUTURE EMPLOYEES: IS INEQUALITY FATE OR WILL?*

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ABSTRACT

In Turkish media workspace and representations, gender stereotypes and inequality between man and woman are very important problems. This discrimination results from many different reasons. In order to discuss these reasons the paper analyses the opinions of the students of Ege University Communication Faculty, as future media employees. Under the spotlight of the regulations of the EU, will the students try to solve the discrimination problem in their representations or is it not possible to solve it in the existing media structure of the country? This paper is an evaluation of the discrimination from the viewpoint of students.

Key Words: Turkish media, gender policy, discrimination, European Union.

ÖZET

Türk medyasının çalışma alanı ve medya temsillerinde, toplumsal cinsiyet stereotiplerinin kullanılması ve kadın-erkek arasındaki eşitsiz sunumlar oldukça önemli sorunlardır. Kadın-erkek arasındaki ayrımcılık çok sayıda nedene dayanmaktadır. Makale, bu problemleri tartışmak için, geleceğin medya çalışanları olarak Ege Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi öğrencilerinin düşüncelerini analiz etmektedir. Avrupa Birliği düzenlemelerinin ışığı altında, öğrenciler, kendi hazırladıkları medya sunumlarında, ayrımcılık problemlerini çözmeye çalışacaklardır mı? Ya da ülkenin var olan medya yapısı içindebu sorunu çözmek mümkün değil midir? Bu çalışma, öğrencilerin bakış açısından, medyada kadın-erkek arasında sürdürülen ayrımcılığın değerlendirilmesini ve değişimin mümkün olup olmadığını araştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk medyası, toplumsal cinsiyet politikası, ayrımcılık, Avrupa Birliği.

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) aims to promote equality between man and woman in social, economic and political areas. For realizing this, the EU has launched different programmes (Fontaine,2000:12). For example “Community Programme for Employment and Solidarity– *Progress*” supports the effective implementation of the principle of gender equality and promotes gender mainstreaming in the EU policies (<http://www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11332.htm>).

Another programme is “Fifth Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities”. This programme aims to promote and disseminate the values and practices underlying gender equality. It tries to develop the capacity of people to promote gender equality effectively, in particular through support for the exchange of information and good practice and networking at community level (<http://www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c10904.htm>).

The EU has been trying to provide the same approach in the media sector as well. For instance, “Gender Mainstreaming” policy aims to change gender bias in the media representations which defines man and woman different from each other because of their sexual differentiation. Working standards of women, as media workers, have to get better and equal working conditions have to be provided for both man and woman. Besides, all media workers should be conscious about equality and should produce their work with this responsibility.

The problems which these programmes indicate are experienced in Turkey, therefore Turkey adopted one of the EU's social-political programmes -Gender Equality Programme- in February 2003 with the Council of Ministers' decision (Official Journal of the Turkish Republic, 2003). Thus, Turkey has accepted to treat both man and woman equally without any discrimination and to fight with gender bias.

Looking at the media sector in Turkey, problems such as long working hours, uncertain shifts, low and irregular payments and lack of job security for both man and woman attracts one's attention immediately (Kabadayı,2002). In addition to these, women employees have other problems, too. One of them is that women are not in the decision-making positions in the media sector. Another important problem is representations of gender stereotypes in the media products. Taking into account the difficulty in providing equality between man and woman it is possible for future media employees to change gender roles and stereotypes in the media representations.

In general, Communication Faculties try to provide their students with sufficient information and skills about their future work. This knowledge is mostly formed by theoretical and technical information about the media. However, in my point of view, information about gender issues needs to be developed. This awareness can be given in different courses as it is done in the Communication Faculty of Ege University. The three departments raise awareness in gender related issues in different courses. However, due to the national, cultural and sectoral influences, students' concerns can be affected. The students tend to support the existing values in order to continue with their jobs.

RESEARCH AREA

Aiming to reveal their profile, this paper tries to analyse the opinions and thoughts of the students of Ege University Communication Faculty about their future-works and their sensitivity in equality of genders. What do the students of the Communication Faculty think about discrimination against woman and/or equality between man and woman in general? And, how will they act when they start working? Could gender discrimination in the media sector be overcome? Do the students trust themselves in promoting equality between man and woman in their own future-media products?

The paper evaluates the students' ideas about the media stereotyping, ways of changing it, how to fight with gender-related sexual exploitation and how to promote gender equality in the media and in the society in general. Under the spotlight of the regulations of the EU, how could it be possible to educate the students and raise their awareness about equality of genders and prepare them for practising? This paper will try to discuss the student's responses to these questions.

SAMPLING AND METHODOLOGY

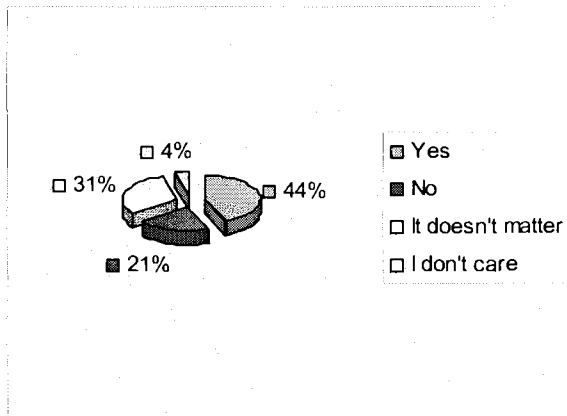
The sample of the research covers three departments -Public Relations, Radio-TV-Cinema and Journalism- of the Communication Faculty students. The number of the students who participated in the questionnaire are 317; of which, 161 are women and 156 are men. The questionnaire consists of two sections and 21 questions.

In the first section, there are six questions. In this section, it is aimed to learn students' opinions about the European Union structure and practices. In this way it could be possible to determine their knowledge and awareness level about the EU.

The second section is formed with 15 questions. These questions shape students' profiles as future employees and define their ideas about the media workspace and the media products. All are multiple-choice questions except the last one. In some questions, students can choose the three most important options. The final question of the questionnaire is an open-ended question which asks the students to give their opinion about the EU, gender related problems or occupational area.

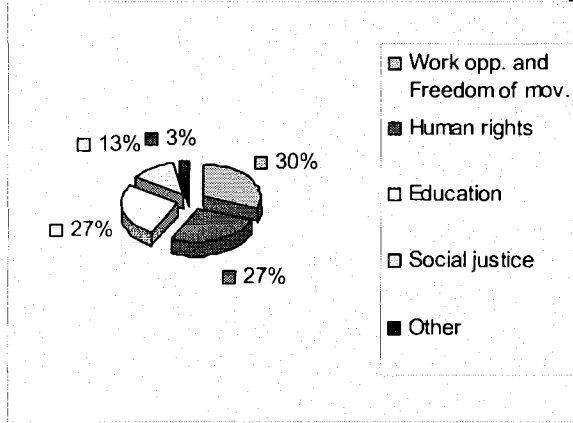
THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Table 1. Do You Think Turkey Should Continue Its Efforts to Participate in the EU?



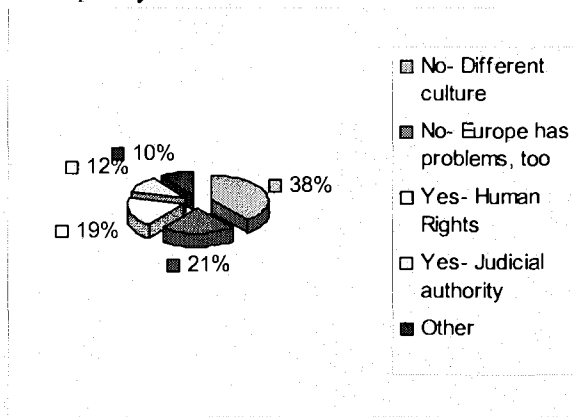
In the first section of the questionnaire, questions are related with the perception of the EU policies. The first question asks what students think about Turkey's efforts to participate in the EU, if it should be continued or not. 44 percent of the students say: "Yes, Turkey should continue its efforts to participate in the EU". 21 percent of the students say: "No, Turkey should not continue it". For this question, probably the most interesting answer is given by the 31 percent of the students: "It doesn't matter, because the EU will never let us join them". The 4 percent of the students say: "I don't care if Turkey continues its efforts to join the EU or not".

Table 2. The EU's Probable Benefits for Turkey



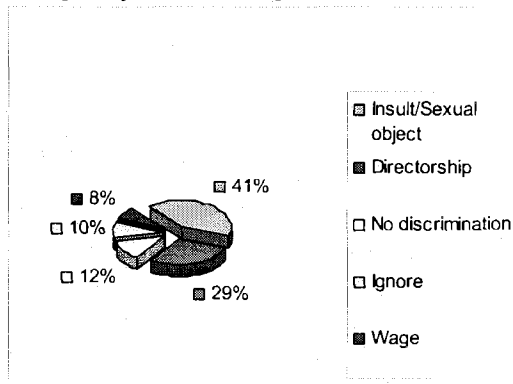
The second question of this section asks what kind of benefits you think the EU's membership will bring to Turkey. The students are asked to choose the three most important options in this question. One of the most given answers is the increase in employment facilities and freedom of movement for work. Another option relating the positive developments in human rights and better qualities in educational area is given by 27 percent of the students. The students are asked to give their ideas about the benefits of the EU. The answers are both positive and negative. For example, one of the students says: "The EU brings standardized products to food industry", another student says: "It brings exaggerated foreign capital and exploitation to our country's national resources".

Table 3. If Turkey Participates in the EU, Will The Equality Between Man And Woman Be Achieved?



The answers to the third and fourth questions show that students, generally, have learned that the EU has some woman and youth-oriented programmes to provide equality in workspace and educational area. In conjunction with these questions the fifth question is asked, whether they believe equality between man and woman will be achieved in the country and if Turkey participates in the EU. High percentage of the students have chosen the option: “No, I don’t believe that Turkey can provide equality between man and woman even if we join the EU because, we are living in a different cultural geography”. The second highest percentage is again a negative perception of the EU. 21 percent of the students say that they don’t believe the EU’s power about this matter because, Europe already has inequality problems in lots of areas and it can not be a model for other countries and/or communities. The answers to the third highest percentage is a positive approach. 19 percent of the students say: “The European Union can provide equality because human rights issue will be improved if we join the EU”. 12 percent of the students say that the EU provides equality because judicial authority has a deterrent power. In the “other” option of the question it is stated that generally, the matter of equality between man and woman is the country’s own problem and it can only be solved by its own people not by the EU. The last question of the first section supports the previous one. Students generally have a positive approach about the EU’s opportunities for workspace and equal opportunities for man and woman.

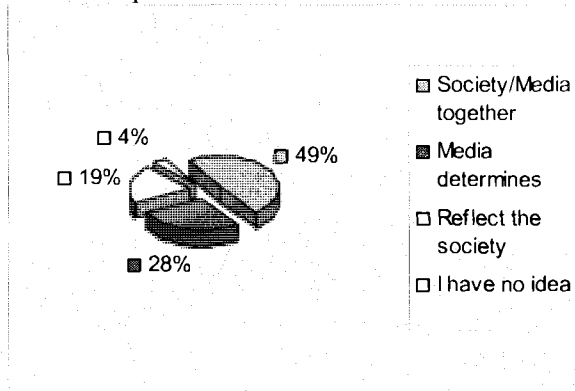
Table 4. Inequality in Which Specific Areas in the Media Sector?



In the second section of the questionnaire, first three questions asked are: Have the students ever worked in the media sector, do they want to work in the sector and do they think that working standards in the media are

different for man and woman. Students' general opinion for the last question is about the media sector. It is asked if the media treats man and woman equally and if it has some problems for both of them. The fourth question in this section is: "Do you think in the media workspace, women are exposed to sexism and inequality? If yes, in which specific areas and how?" Students can choose the three most important options that they believe. As a result, almost half of the students have said that women are exposed to an insult mostly in their professional areas and are treated as sexual objects. 29 percent of the students say that even the very successful women in the media sector, are not promoted to the manager position or are not given the decision making positions. 10 percent of the students say that women media workers are ignored by their male colleagues. Another indication for inequality is the wages in the media. Students think that this is the least important problem among the others. Furthermore, 12 percent of the students think that there is no discrimination in the media workplace. Moreover, students think that in the media sector, labour force participation rate for women is almost equal to men.

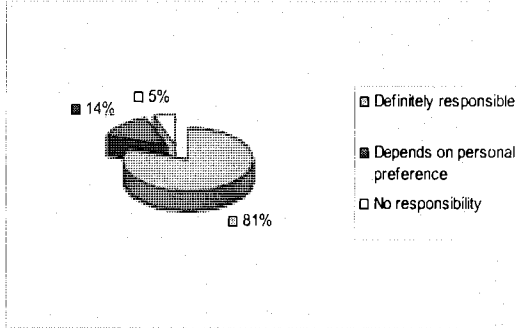
Table 5. What Do You Think About Stereotypical Representations in the Media?



The sixth question of this section is about stereotypical representations of man and woman in the media products. 49 percent of students think that both the society and the media have an influence on stereotypical representations. These representations are supported by the society, which gives them its patterns, and the media shapes the format. 28 percent of the students say that: "The representations don't reflect the society, it is the media that determines the positions for man and woman". 19

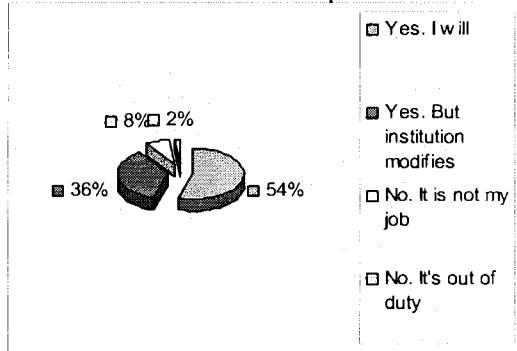
percent of the students think that the representations reflect the society and express the society's expectations for man and woman.

Table 6. Do Media Employees Have The Responsibility As The Opinion Leader?



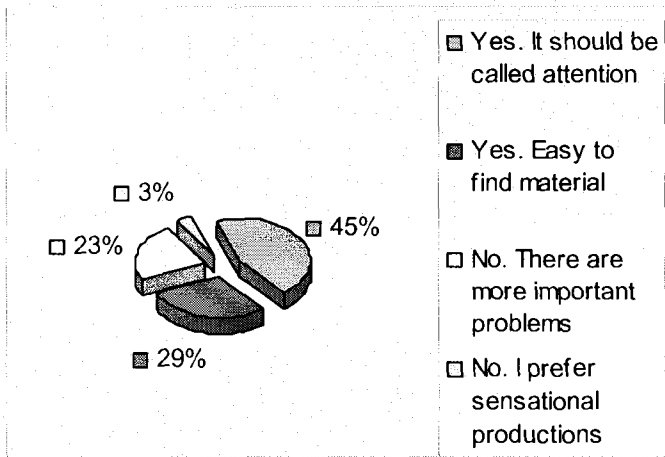
In the following two questions the students express that their view it there must be something to be done in order to change stereotypical representations in the media products for equality. In the ninth question, they are asked if "Should media employees be 'The Opinion Leader' for the rest of the society for changing negative and stereotypical representations? Do you believe that a media employee has the responsibility as an opinion leader?" 81 percent of the answers is: "Yes, media employees have a certain responsibility". 14 percent of the answers is: "It depends on the preference of the employees". Also 5 percent of the students accept that employees don't have any responsibility as the opinion leaders.

Table 7. Do You Feel The Responsibility? Will You Work As An Opinion Leader?



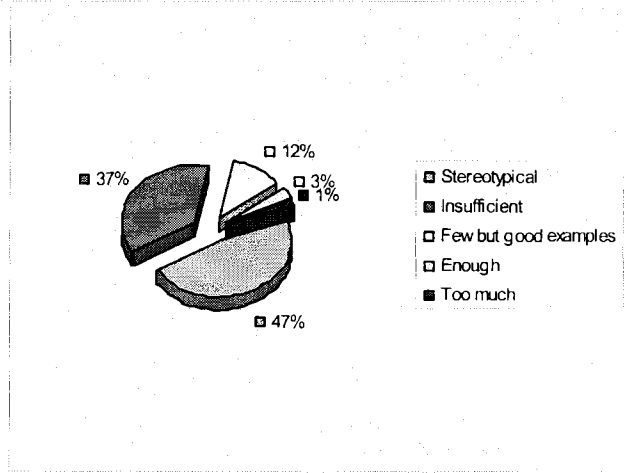
In conjunction with the ninth question, in tenth question students mainly mark an option in which they say that they feel the responsibility as opinion leaders and they are determined to act accordingly. Nonetheless, 36 percent of them think that the media companies have the power of modifying their works. 10 percent say that they don't feel any responsibility because it is not a part of their job and it is the manager's duty.

Table 8. Do You Prefer To Work Up On the Problems About Equality In Your Future Productions?



In the eleventh question students are asked: "In a media institution which you will work in the future, assume that you have a task of making news, radio programme or script writing etc. Do you prefer to work up on the problems about equality between man and woman rather than any other subjects? Why?" 45 percent of the total answers is "Yes, because I want to call attention to this matter". 29 percent of the answers is "Yes" again, "Because, I think I can easily find material on this subject and I can introduce people an interesting production". 23 percent of the students' choices is "No, I don't prefer to do it, because there are many other important subjects in the country to work on". Another negative approach is covering 3 percent of the students saying: "No, because I prefer to do sensational productions for news and other kind of media products".

Table 9. News About Equality Between Man And Woman In the Turkish Media



In this paper's last diagram, the question which students answered is: "How do you evaluate the news about man-woman equality in the Turkish media?" Almost half of the answers said that the news has a stereotypical format about man-woman equality. Second highest percentage for this question concludes that the news on equality is insufficient. 12 percent of the answers said that: "There are few but good examples of man-woman equality in the Turkish media". And as the lowest percentage – 1%- shows, few students think that there is too much news on that subject.

The fourteenth question asks "Do you want to take a course about the regulations and performances of the EU?" Students are divided in two main groups in this question. One group says "Yes, I do. Because I do not know what to expect from the EU's regulations" and the other group says "No, I don't. Because I have got enough information about it by some other courses related to the EU and these courses should not be mandatory.

The questionnaire's last question is open-ended one and it asks "If you have another thought about the European Union and the issues about man-woman equality, please write down". Some of the students have filled in the blank. One of the students has written "I hope every country in the world can achieve equality between man and woman". Other has said "It is important that the will for more equality comes from the society itself". The

answers show that personal and social efforts are important to change the understanding of the issue and to change the media's attitude towards it.

CONCLUSION

This paper aims to analyze the profile of Ege University Communication Faculty students' thoughts and expectations about the European Union and gender equality matters especially in the media workspace and productions.

The Communication Faculty students' thoughts and interpretations show us how gender inequality is structured in their daily lives and future workspace. We found no significant difference between male and female students' answers about gender issues. Their ideas about equality are, generally, in advanced level, but their expectations and beliefs whether the values in the media sector can be changed are not very strong. For example, although most of the students are willing to be the opinion leaders in the media sector for the benefit of the society, they think that they will not be able to express themselves freely in their work.

Considering the result of the analysis of the students' answers, it is possible to anticipate how they will act in the media workplace when they start working. Students as future employees generally will be influenced by the media institutions' policies. When they struggle with other problems of workplace, it is useless to expect them to work insistently for man-woman equality in the all areas of the media. In addition, in the questionnaire, students' choices about the influence of the society and/or media on representations indicate that they believe the media is dependent on the society, so that the media itself cannot be a pioneer for solving gender related problems.

Turkey's national, cultural and sectoral policies and structure about gender equality are very effective on students' opinions and actions. In this context, despite the European Union's positive regulations on this subject, students do not expect much from them. Firstly, the students do not believe that Turkey can incorporate in the EU as a member, and secondly, inequality between man and woman is one of the problems of the European Union countries, too. These are the causes of disappointment among students. In this condition, to create more sensitivity and to raise awareness about the EU and gender related issues in the media sector is getting difficult. However, for the problems about gender inequality that women have to face up to, generally, permanent solution can be achieved by the efforts of all the employees in the media sector. Most of the students who participate in the

questionnaire believe that gender equality is an important issue, inequality must be overcome, and they have the responsibility as the opinion leaders. So, this sensitivity should be improved with education, successful institutional structuring in Turkey and reliable performances and practices of the EU. In the same time, students should be provided with the feeling that they are the important part of the developing social values.

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