

Türkiye'de Uzun Süredir Göz Ardı Edilen Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitsizliği Sorunu*

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ÖZ

Cinsiyet eşitsizliği sorunu sosyal ve yasal normlarla izlenebilir. Eşit olmayan ekonomik şartlar, eğitime erişim ve ayrıca karar alma süreci olarak şekillenebilir. Roller cinsiyete göre farklılaştığında kadın ve erkeklerin kaynaklara nasıl erişebileceklerini belirlemektedir. Bunlar balıkçılık, su ve tarım gibi kaynaklar olabilir. Kanıtlar, GBV'nın bu tür bir güç dengesizliğinin sürdürülmesini sağlamak için her zaman kullanıldığını göstermiştir. Sosyokültürel beklentiler ve normlar ciddi bir şekilde güçlenmektedir. Bunlar yalnızca cinsiyet eşitsizliği sorununu daha da kötüleştirmekte başarılı olmaktadır. Bu makale Türkiye'deki cinsiyete dayalı şiddetin sınırlarını çizecektir. 1980'lerden beri bu durum devletin ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarının gündemine dahil edilmektedir. Cinsiyet politikası da odaklanılması gereken bir durumdur. Kadına yönelik şiddet konusu ciddiye alınması gereken bir konudur. Bunun nedeni, sadece bir suç eylemi olmaması, aynı zamanda bazı ekonomik ve sosyal sonuçları olabilesidir. Bir toplum katı olduğu düşünülen toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini benimsemeye başladığında her zaman kadınlar ve erkekler arasında bariz eşitsizlik sorunu doğar. Türkiye'de aile içi şiddetin nasıl analiz edildiğini engelleyen önemli bir sorun veya zorluk vardır ve bu istatistiksel materyallerin bulunmamasıdır. Bu bakımdan bu çalışma konu üzerine eleştirel yaklaşmaktadır. Türkiye'de bu problemin ihmal edilmişliğine ek olarak kadınların eğitim, istihdamda geri bırakılmışlığı, kadına yönelik şiddetin medyadaki dili, hukukun yeterli olmaması Türkiye'de de aile içi şiddet sorununda hem etkilidir hem de endişe verici hale getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cinsellik, Cinsiyet, Cinsel Şiddet, Kadın, Türkiye.

The Long-Overlooked Gender Inequality Problem in Turkey

ABSTRACT

Gender inequality can be traced back to social and legal conventions. It could manifest itself in the form of unequal economic opportunity, educational access, and decision-making processes. When roles are divided based on gender, men and women will have different access to resources within them. Fisheries, water, and agriculture are examples of such resources. GBV has always been used or employed to preserve such a power imbalance, according to evidence. Expectations and conventions in society have been ruthlessly enforced. These have only served to exacerbate the issue of gender inequality. The focus of this study will be on gender-based violence in Turkey. Since the 1980s, this has been included in the state's agenda and that of civil society organizations. There is also need for gender politics to be focused on. Violence against women is an issue that needs to be taken seriously. This is because it is not just a criminal act but can also have some economic and social implications. When a culture adopts gender norms that are considered inflexible, there is always the issue of visible imbalance between men and women. There is a significant issue or challenge that has hampered the analysis of domestic violence in Turkey. This study takes a critical look at the topic in this regard. In addition to the neglect of this problem in Turkey, women have been left behind in education, employment, the language of violence against women in the media, the insufficient law is both effective and worrying in the domestic violence problem in Turkey.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Violence, Sexuality, Turkey, Women.

1. Introduction

Turkey is one of the world's developing nations. The disparities in social and economic growth between the Western and Eastern worlds are clear. When low- and high-income groups are considered, the results are similar. From 2001 to 2018, the country's per capita GDP climbed by more than 200

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percent (World Bank, 2019). In a similar line, the expense of living has risen. There has also been an increase in attendance for higher education. The good news is that in all of these, poverty rate has been reducing. These progress/advances have benefited both men and women. However, in the aspect of economic development, it can be said that women are still lagging behind. As compared to the men, women in Turkey are less educated. Also, their access to the labor market is quite limited. Although the country has made some progress when it comes to the aspect of gender inequality over the years, this progress has been very slow. Over the years, it can be said that formulated policies have been regressive. They are very dependent on men for financial assistance. This makes them very vulnerable. For instance, they can easily become victims of domestic violence due to such an over-reliance. There is a high rate of domestic violence in Turkey (against women) as compared to other European nations. Although policies have been formulated to combat such a problem, it still seems to be on the rise. This is only a sign that domestic violence will be difficult to get rid of in Turkey (Tozlu & Göksel, 2016). When carrying out an investigation on hindrances which have been fighting against the eradication of domestic violence, it is important that Turkey has been taken into consideration. This is because policy reforms in the country have been progressive. Also, domestic violence coexists alongside dominant family norms as well as conservative gender. For gender equality to be encouraged while domestic violence is reduced, some legal reforms as well as policies have been introduced. For instance, New Civil Code of 2001 initiated some of these. Crucial media coverage has also played its role. There was the reforming of The Penal Code aimed at fighting against gender inequality and domestic violence. Sexual assaults were seen as criminal acts. Also, honor killings attracted life imprisonment. In order to combat the problem of domestic violence against women, there was the adoption of two national action plans. Also, a law was setup to protect women (law number 6284). This was majorly for Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence. There were also establishment of Violence Prevention as well as Monitoring Centers.

The issue of women inequality as well as empowerment gives room for implications of some policies to be discussed. These are not just for responding to the problem but also ensuring it is eradicated or reduced down to its barest minimum. This paper will be highlighting the urgency for formulation of policies to combat these problems. The article will take the following structure: A background study of women and their status in Turkey with emphasis on legal reforms as well as gender inequality policies, women rights and gender mainstreaming will be analyzed in section 1. Presentation of domestic violence with women as victims including examples from various sources will be examined in section 2. Section 3 looks at the complete overview of Turkey's Istanbul convention. An investigation into how gender inequality has affected education using gender politics will be investigated in section 4. The paper will finally conclude in section 5 by discussing various implications of these policies. Recommendations for further research are also included.

2. Contextual Framework – Status of Turkish Women in the Society

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy used by most countries to improve gender equality. This is a plan, not a destination. The organization's main purpose is to make gender equality a reality. Gender equality goals should be at the core of every activity or program, according to mainstreaming. These could occur during resource allocation, implementation, planning, and monitoring, legislation, advocacy/dialogue, and policy development. Since the year 1997, there has been a high level of commitment towards ensuring that policies are implemented. These efforts are targeted towards empowerment as well as autonomy of women. They are to improve their health, economic and social status within the Turkish society. This is very important when it comes to sustainable development being achieved (UNDP, 2020). Women and men need to participate fully in production and reproduction including sharing of responsibilities on how children should be cared for and nurtured. This is also crucial for the household to be maintained effectively. In most countries, women are prone to different forms of threats. These could be life threatening, general well-being and health. The particular reason for this circumstance is that they are handling too many domestic roles. Also, they lack influence and power like their male counterparts. Furthermore, their abilities, knowledge and coping mechanisms have not been recognized. This means that most of the time, they end up not fulfilling their dreams in life. Policy and program actions need to be

in place for change to take place. These will provide women with unrestricted access towards securing of livelihoods as well as economic resources. Their domestic roles will also be alleviated to a great extent through phenomenon. Also, every legal impediment with regards to how they participate in public will be eliminated. Through such actions, they will have increased social awareness.

Based on the statistics which have portrayed women as vulnerable as well as weak, societies and countries at large should start adopting strategies that help to eradicate every form of gender inequality. There should be establishment of mechanisms to ensure women are equally participating at all political and economic levels. Women should be given platforms that can enable them express their needs and concerns. Also, they should be allowed to have unrestricted access to education in order to enable them fulfil their true potentials in life. Platforms for skill development as well as employment should be created. These are to ensure that poverty level amongst women is reduced. Women should be given the chance to earn a living through other means apart from traditional occupations to enable them become economically independent. They also need to have access to labor market as well as social security systems. By the time all of these measures put in place, the problem of gender inequality will be completely eradicated.

In recent years, Turkey's news cycle can be said to be quite overwhelming. This is due to problems like political and economic instability which has plagued the country. Newsrooms reported how the country's democratic system has been threatened through a coup attempt and its poor transition into a presidential system. There is also the refugee problem resulting from Syrian civil war, a country that happens to be its neighbor. All of these have caught the attention of journalists. In a bid to bring updated reports about all of these events, they have started ignoring stories related to gender inequalities which would have been of great benefit to members of the public. They are not investing adequate energy and time to keep the public abreast of such information. Apart from dominant political forces still existing within the system, the press' freedom to make certain reports has been limited to a great extent. They would have played the role of watchdog to ensure these social issues are eradicated.

Challenges like these haven't just been caused by politics in the country. Whenever the media attempts to cover stories related to violence against women, the focus has always been on the disturbing details of the crimes. They try to look at the emotional drama which such problem has caused. It is always common to insinuate that victims of such crimes have triggered the problem. Very few seem to be perceiving violence as a typical example of gender inequality. A woman called Cansu E was a victim of domestic violence. She was on the receiving end from Erim E, her husband. While the couple was planning to divorce, they were not living together. A report explained what transpired between the couple claiming that the husband decided to beat up the woman after meeting her in one of those nightclubs. The choice of words used in the reports tried to create the impression that the woman was irresponsible. The focus was on the scene of the encounter. The report tried to justify the anger of the man. One of the readers was in support of the report claiming the woman had no right to go anywhere her husband wasn't in support of. This story supported gender inequality instead of condemning such an act.

Turkish news has a way of supporting perpetrators of this act. A popular artiste known as Sila Gençoğlu decided to take legal actions against Ahmet Kural, her ex-partner who was also a celebrity for physical violence. It was a case which started to make headlines in the media. Journalists were quick to report history of how they started the relationship and got married. Kural's fans criticized him strongly despite denying the allegations and claiming they were false. The fans of Sila also criticized him on various social media platforms. After the whole event came to an end, the actor was asked by a journalist how he has been emotionally and psychologically affected. The journalist again, tried to paint Kural as being innocent. In fact, the report was that Sila, the artiste was the one at fault. After the actor was found guilty by a Turkish court, he was reported to be recovering from stress. According to the actor as well as his attorney, the court hearings weren't fair enough.

In a competition to get more website traffic and earn accolades, Turkish internet platforms and television networks are often guilty of painting violence in a wrong way. Most of the time, reporters and editors are biased. This makes their news very discriminatory. In order to ensure that journalists improve, there has been various recommendations from national media associations. Following the death of Bulut, Journalist Union of Turkey sent a message via a tweet saying ethical journalism should be practiced instead

of searching for more traffic and clicks. Journalists were encouraged to take an objective look into the problems that women are facing from their husbands in the form of domestic violence. Although contributions like these are valuable, media professionals need to ensure that their work reflects gender equality. Filmmor's women cooperative media guide states that news outlets have played a huge role in development of femicide. This may cause the public to start seeing violence as a legitimate act.

There has been an increased sense of awareness against Turkish women despite all of these challenges. The more women become enlightened and gain financial independence, the more they tend to voice out their opinions and feelings. Feminist organizations as well as social media campaigns are doing everything possible to ensure that there has been a positive change. An online platform known as anitsayac.com plans to keep the memory of victims alive. Turkish rappers are also raising their voice to protest against such an action. Susamam, one of the artistes in Turkey, once released a song titled "I Can't Remain Silent". In this song, pressing social issues in Turkey were raised and the system was strongly criticized. Despite being released in the month of September, it has gained huge online presence. For instance, over 37million people have viewed the song.

There has been a lot of pressure on the government to act against such an action. Law 6284 was passed in 2012 and got approved by Istanbul convention, a popular European council which is offering protection for women (Karakas, 2019). Although Turkey played a crucial role for this to happen, she is yet to have any of its provisions implemented. The problem of violence against women and femicide has some cultural dimensions that need to be looked at. Although this action has been kicked against by progressive voices, diehard Islamists don't buy such an idea. They believe that trying to empower women can end up having weak families. AK Party was in charge when the legislation was passed. Despite this fact, the president seems to be applying caution in his decision. It is our hope that the government will intensify its efforts in order to ensure this nightmare is eliminated from the Turkish system.

2.1. The "Challenge Accepted" Trend in Instagram

The trend of "challenge accepted" emerged in 2020. This involved woman posting pictures of themselves (white and black photos) using the hashtag of challenge accepted on Instagram. It has originated from Turkey when Pinar Gültekin, a woman aged 27 years, got murdered by her ex-lover. In 2019, the number of women who were reported to be murdered was 474 (Ozbicer, 2020). This is an obvious fact that Turkey has seriously experienced violence against women. In other words, it is a clear reflection of the country's underdevelopment and social-economic deprivations which most people have referred to in the past. In the rural underdeveloped areas of the country, there are patriarchal problems which need to be addressed. There are also issues related to fundamentalism where persons are guilty of crimes that are honor-related. In such cases, they try to use religious grounds in justifying their actions. Although there have been calls for change, it can be said that the trend of "challenge accepted" is yet to achieve its objectives.

We Will Stop Femicide presented same data. This organization is specialized in tracking violence that are domestic as well as gender-based against Turkish women. It has reported that over the last 10 years, murder has increased. Statistics show that between 2008 and 2017, more than 2000 women had been murdered (Eski, 2020). Even Turkish law enforcement has confirmed such figures. A study carried out in 2009 which analyzed strategies for prevention claimed that 42% of women in Turkey aged 15-60 are victims of sexual or physical violence from their partners (McKernan, 2020). In Turkish society, there is an unanimity that cultural norms legitimize physical and sexual violence. Sexual violence against women in Turkey has been on the increase, notably for the last five years. The worst part is that this issue seems to be getting worse every year. One of the reasons for this is that Turkey lacks the capacity to ensure victims are assisted. Those who are vulnerable to such an abuse are not protected well enough. Due to the pandemic which emerged in 2020, it is expected that the figures will be much higher than past years.

It can be said that the government of Turkey hasn't been able to address this problem despite its alarming nature. This is one of the reasons why Turkish women decided to protest against domestic violence in 2020. In the coastal cities of country, more protesters have emerged to kick against such an action. This even brought about violent crackdowns in some areas where police had to intervene and

eventually arrested about 10 women. The arrested women were reported to have taken part in a sit-in rally (Yalçınalp, 2020). Furthermore, many protestors were abused, beaten and detained. It was an authoritarian response which reflected the social problem of country. It was a system yearning for change in various aspects like societal, cultural and political changes. For the problem of femicide to be combated in Turkey, these changes will have to be implemented.

2.2. Istanbul Convention

In an attempt to prevent and combat the problem of violence against women as well as domestic violence, there was the adoption of Istanbul convention in the year 2014 (Council of Europe, 2016). This convention had one major objective – to create more awareness about problems related to violence against women including their implications to the society. Also, articles 12 and 14 have made provisions to ensure femicide is combated in the rural areas of Turkey. Provisions like these don't just create awareness (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, 2020). Also, they explain steps to be taken in order for nonviolent conflict resolution to be achieved.

PACE (Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council) has reported that Istanbul convention has been able to make some positive contributions since coming into being in many countries. This is true especially in the aspect of creating awareness about domestic violence and violence against women. However, it can be said that the convention lacked proper implementation. The worst part is that annulling Turkey's ratification of the Istanbul Convention on violence against women in March 2021. This is a major source of worry since gender-based violence is supposed to be taken seriously at such a time.

2.3. Rise of Anti-Genderism

Towards the ending periods of 2018, a statement was made by the National Minister of Education of the country. The comment was on a school plan which was gender-sensitive and results for projects that are based on gender equality. This wasn't approved of by radical columnists. According to them, gender equality will only succeed in destroying the societal values for which Turkey is known for. They also explained that Turkish families were at risk of suffering. We are of the opinion that statements like these are only meant to discourage the minister from doing what is right. In a bid to respond, the ministry had been quick to stay away from public debates pointing out how former administrations implemented gender equality projects. There are still more people who seemed to be opposed to the idea of gender equality in Turkey.

Some of them (like KADEM) choose to use gender justice in place of gender equality. According to them, the concept of gender justice is what social relations existing between women and men should be based on. There is an attack on gender equality based on sentiment and politics. The critics are referring to Poland and Hungary where nationalists talk about family values. Also, in places like France, Poland, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, Croatia, and Slovenia, there seem to be lots of oppositions against the idea of gender equality. Anti-genderism is just viewed as a feminist problem. Instead, it should BE seen as a major threat to liberal democracy (Toldy and Garraio, 2020).

3. Gender Politics is a Determinant of Gender Equality in Education

Over the past decades, educational levels have increased amongst both males and females. However, gender inequality or difference still persists. This is very obvious when it comes to access to secondary as well as higher education. Over 62% of boys in 2019, who are between 20 and 24 years have at least been able to graduate from high school diploma. The percentage of girls with the same achievement was 52.3% according to (TUIK, 2020). Higher education enrolments seem to be more for younger cohorts. Education has a gender gap and this is mostly obvious in rural areas. There are some parents who don't consider investment in female education to be beneficial. This usually happens in South-Eastern regions where agriculture is very dominant. Although education has a local offer, it is mostly limited or restricted to schooling at primary levels in South-Eastern regions. Employment rates for females have increased so much just like female education. However, these increased rates tend to indicate two clear trends. The first is that employment rates for females decreased for women aged 15-64 until the mid-2000s. The rate of

decrease was 25% from 36% (World Development Indicators, 2020). The agricultural sector began to shrink and this brought about such a problem. Women and girls who were not educated couldn't do other jobs. The child care support was inadequate. Also, women who were married weren't allowed to work in industrial sector like married men according to Goldin (1994). Another trend emerged because since the mid-2000s, these women started getting employed in the service sector. Due to this, there was an increase in the rate of female employment. For instance, in 2013, it reached about 32%. The beneficiaries of this increase have been educated women and younger cohorts (World Bank, 2019). In the year 2019, it was reported that about 40% of women between the ages of 25 and 29 took active part in the country's labor force against the 25% which took part between the ages of 45 and 49. During the same time, the women who worked at ages of 25-29 were 20% as explained by Turkstat Labour Force Surveys (2019). Despite all of these, the male employment rate in Turkey is still considerably higher by 76% than female employment. There seems to be a very obvious gender gap for the ages between 25 and 45. According to World Development Indicators (2020), about one quarter of women who are active in labor force have been employed on part-time basis.

Turkish women are always working as employees in formal jobs. Most of them are engaged in activities that are non-registered. These could be agriculture, self-employed or contributing family workers. A situation like this is quite different from what applies in other countries in Europe. In Turkey, about 34% of active women work as contributing family workers. There is an EU average of 4%. The percentage of men who work as contributing family workers is 5%. Again, there is an EU average of 1% (World Development Indicators, 2020). Amongst active women in Turkey, about 45% are self-employed. The number for men is about 34%. In EU, the respective averages are 19% for men and 13% for women. Only 20% of the Turkish women who are employed work as formal employees. For males, the number is about 60%. The EU average for both men women and men is 80% (World Bank World Development Indicators, 2020). Based on these statistics, it can be said that the gender wage gap in Turkey is very huge. The wages for women who are married with young children are very low as pointed out by Cudeville & Gurbuzer (2007). Women who have minimum of secondary education tend to be earning the highest wages in the formal labor market. Due to expansion of female education as well as formal employment, the age of women at first marriage has been affected. It has also affected their fertility. Combining work and family in Turkey is quite demanding. The reason for this is that child care services are limited. Also, there are conservative norms which tend to support women taking care of their families instead of pursuing careers. In 1960, fertility rate for each woman in Turkey was 6 children. However, this dropped to 2.26 children by 2013. In 2020, there was a further reduction to around 2.08 children (World Bank, 2020). This shows that over the years, there has been a decline in fertility rate. Turkish women who are between the age of 37 and 42years will give birth to an average of 2.2 children (SILC). According to survey data, it has been revealed that the proportion of women who tend to have 2 or more children has reduced between 1990 and 2020 cohorts (TUIK, 2020). Over generations, fertility rate of women has reduced in Turkey. Although this is obvious in all of the educational levels, it seems to be very obvious for women who are not highly educated. For women who have a minimum of secondary education, their average number of children is much lower. It should be noted that there is an increased rate of Turkish women who have undergone secondary education. This has strongly contributed to about 50% of the reduction in fertility rates being experienced (Greulich et al., 2016b).

4. Progress Towards Achievement of Gender Equality

At the beginning periods of the century, there was a rapprochement between European Union and Turkey. This has provided a platform where the society can diversify and grow. Undertaking of social projects has been supported by most civil society organizations. Most of the time, Human Rights issues are being focused on. This is evidenced on how the History Foundation handled Human Rights in Text Books from 2002 to 2004. As part of the project, violations of human rights in text books had to be screened by teachers. Gender discrimination was also included. Luckily, two follow-up projects had to be undertaken from 2007 to 2009 and 2013 to 2014. It can be said that such an evaluation has been successful given the encouraging results it has produced. The progress made has been linked to the fact

that people are becoming more aware of such problem of gender inequality within Board of Education, textbooks and the body which is in charge of curriculum development (MoNE, 2018).

A project was launched by MoNE in 2014 with the title “Promoting Gender Equality in Education Project”. The European Union supported its launch financially. It was a project with the aim of ensuring education policies and legislations are enhanced from the perspective of gender inequality. Other aspects it looked at were educational materials and education settings as well as processes. Eventually, the program succeeded in delivering a detailed report, handbooks and guides which are related to gender inequality. The most important aspect was how those in charge of the project claimed gender equality can be achieved via a continuous and systematic effort based on experienced as well as outputs.

MoNE’s goal of achieving gender equality was derailed by the tragic event of 2016 (MoNE, 2017). There was coup to have the government overthrown. In order for the government to react swiftly, there was need for the curriculum to be revised including introduction of new textbooks. This revision had to be in line with the educational values of AK Party. It is worthy of note to point out that gender inequality was not addressed. When gender was discussed, the concept of women’s rights was not included. At the arrival of the new textbooks, it was clear that the roles of women had been reduced. There was no content discussing gender equality. It can be said that the curriculum had taken a subjective view of gender inequality (BTE, 2017).

5. Conclusion

The criticism that gender equality has received in recent times shows that lots of efforts still need to be put for it to become a reality in the Turkish society. In the award-winning paper of Misra, attention has been drawn to the need for girl’s education. This feat has been achieved via interaction of national as well as international discourses. However, these discourses haven’t considered why such a situation is existing in the first instance. This is why Local Civil Monitoring Groups are making plans to create an awareness on girl’s education.

Based on the complexity of gender inequalities in the Turkish society, it can be said that there have been more effective projects and campaigns. Turkey is like other countries which have managed to learn the benefits of practicing gender equality. Girls education shouldn’t just be practiced when surfaced. Instead, it should be a channel through which girls are educated to make meaningful contributions towards development of Turkish society. It should be a channel through which they are being empowered into becoming active citizens and thinkers.

Since the year 2003 at the launch of Girls off to school program, it can be said that Turkey has been very active when it comes to fighting against gender inequality. However, more policies still need to be done for such an aim to be achieved. Projects and policies which have been implemented still have some limitations. Based on how this move has been criticized on biased grounds, it is easy to conclude that the reality of a Turkish society where gender equality exists is still far away. Advocates shouldn’t be discouraged though about such a development since they have been advised to continue finding a way through which gender equality can be achieved. Turkey has a gender movement which is not just robust but also dynamic in many ways.

Moreover, there should also be reflection on how the country has performed in education from gender perspective. More awareness needs to be created about girl’s education. There should be involvement of “girl child emancipation” with the focus on how girls need to be empowered via education for a better future. Based on the fact there are cultural, social, religious and ethnic differences in Turkey, an inclusive approach will be required for this to be achieved. Also, there should be grassroots efforts to create more awareness about girl’s empowerment. Policies should be formulated and implemented which support gender equality.

Most importantly, legislation which support gender equality in the work place should be enforced. This should reflect equal pay and treatment for both women and men. Without concrete measures like these, the reality of gender equality remains impossible. If there is any time to act, it is now.

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