

THE BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN INFORMAL SECTOR IN TURKEY: A CASE OF GONEN*

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ÖZET

Türkiye’de kadınların çalışma durumuna göre dağılımı incelendiğinde, ücretli ve maaşlı olarak çalışan kadınların oranı %35 iken bu oranının erkekler için %54 olduğu görülmektedir. Kendi hesabına çalışan kadınların oranı sadece %14 olarak kayıt edilirken, ücretsiz aile işçisi olarak çalışan kadınların oranı %51 olarak bulunmuştur (SIS, 2003). Bu sonuçlar, Türk kadınlarının hem kısıtlı iş fırsatları hem de kendi görevleri olarak görülen aile sorumlulukları yüzünden formel sektörde çalışmakta zorluklarla karşılaştığını göstermektedir. Bu çalışmada, tanımlayıcı istatistikler kullanarak kadınların enformel sektörde iş gücüne katılma kararları araştırılmaktadır. Bulgular, 2004 yılı yazı süresince nakış, dokuma ve sepet yapımı gibi zanaat üretiminde ev-eksenli olarak çalışan kadınlar ile yürütülen bir alan çalışmasından elde edilmiştir. Araştırmalarımız, kadınlardan daha çok orta yaşlı, kırsal kesimde yaşayan, düşük eğitilmiş ve evli olanların bu sektörde çalışmakta olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışma

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kadınların enformel sektörde marjinalize olmalarında düşük eğitim ve “eş ve anne” gibi egemen sosyal durumlarının önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Enformel sektör, Ev-eksenli çalışanlar, Kadınlar, Kadınların işgücüne katılımı*

Abstract

The employment status of Turkish women indicates that the share of women who works as waged and salaried workers are about 35 percent compared to 54 percent for men. The share of women working as self-employed is recorded at only 14 percent and the share of women working as family contributors is 51 percent (SIS, 2003). Statistics such these show that Turkish women have difficulties to work in formal sector because of both the limited job opportunities and family responsibilities, which are thought to be women’s own duties. In this study, we investigate the basic characteristics of women in informal sector using descriptive but detailed field statistics. We provide evidence from a field survey carried out with home-based women workers engaging artisan production; embroidery, weaving and basket-making in Gonen during the summer of 2004. Our examinations suggest that women who are middle aged, live in rural areas, make significant monetary contribution to family living, do not have enough education and are married participate more in informal sector works in Gonen. We also figured out that women’s lower education and dominant social roles as “wives and mothers” play important role in being marginalized in the informal sector.

Key words: *Informal Sector, Home-Based Workers, Women, Women’s Labor Participation*

1. Introduction

Informal sector is defined as heterogeneous group of economic arrangements that are not subject to government regulations (Castells and Portes, 1989: 12). Employment in this type of sector is informal too. Informal employment is comprised of both self-employment in informal enterprises (e.g., home production and petty work, small and /or unregistered) and wage employment in informal jobs (e.g., casual labor, contract labor and piecework). Self-employment is the ultimate internal labor market, in that the individuals, who do not receive wages, derive much of their income from their labor rather than from any capital, and creates incentive for them-selves to produce, is both worker and manager. Both the self-employed and informal waged workers

indeed, have to take care of themselves (Hamermesh and Rees, 1993: 324).

In the literature, there are two contrasting perspectives on employment conditions in informal sector (Gallaway and Bernasek, 2002, s. 316). One perspective takes a relatively positive view, while the other one takes a negative view. The authors on the positive side claim that informal sector provides opportunities to earn income for people who are poorest and most marginalized and do not have access to the formal sector. For example, Berger and Buvinic (1989) argue that given barriers to participation of women, in particular, in the formal sector, promoting and supporting their involvement in the informal sector activities is an important survival strategy for them and their families. In addition, it is discussed that women are more likely to work in the informal sector than formal sector as the result of their household and childcare responsibilities and informal sector is better suited to allowing women to combine household work with paid work because many informal sector activities can be undertaken at home. Dignard and Havet (1995) also suggest that women choose informal sector employment because of its compatibility with their household jobs.

The authors on the negative side argue that informal sector provides inferior working conditions for workers in terms of earnings, security, and protection in contrast to formal sector and it further marginalizes the poorest and most vulnerable people in the society. Most informal workers including both self-employed and waged workers are indeed deprived of secure work, worker's benefits, social protection, representation and voice. They often face competitive disadvantages vis-à-vis larger formal firms in capital and product markets. The surveys indicate that a higher percentage of people working in the informal sector face many difficulties as compared to those working in the formal sector (ILO, 2002: 12). Therefore, according to this view¹, the efforts should be made to expand employment in the formal sector and to make the informal sector disappear (Moser, 1984; Gallaway and Bernasek, 2002).

Informal employment seems to be a larger source of employment for women than men in all over the world and women are forced into the informal sector because the formal sector fails to adapt their household responsibilities. Given the inferiority of the informal

¹ This particularly sounds as the Feminist view.

sector public policy makers should focus on transformation of informal sector into formal one. Doing this helps to make employment compatible with women's lives and in particular to accommodate the need for infant and child care in this sector (Moser, 1984; Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Gallaway and Bernasek, 2002).

As the literature suggest, even though there exist many problems in informal sector especially for workers, there are some promising opportunities for those who work as self-employed or as unregistered. Increasing number of self-employees in most countries also support this argument. Among the politicians, public authorities and researchers at the non-governmental organizations such as ILO and WB there are people who spend significant amount of efforts to solve the problems of informal sector workers.

In Turkey, employees in the paid labor market who are not covered by any social security program are considered unregistered workers whereas the ones who are covered by social security are considered registered workers (Tansel, 2000). Employees in general are not covered by a single social security system in Turkey. The Republic of Turkey Retirement Funds covers permanent civil servants and those on fixed contract. The Bağ-Kur is an independent retirement fund and covers the self-employed and housewives and the social security institution covers workers. According to the 2003 Household labor Force Survey, about 52.1 percent of employed people work in the informal sector. In addition, the distribution of informal employment by economic status shows that the percentage of women and men working, as unpaid family workers, is 38 percent. The number of women and men working as waged and self-employed is recorded at only 28 percent, and 32 percent respectively. According to the same source, there is a large difference between employed male and female workers in Turkey (i.e., 44.2 percent for males and 71.2 percent for females), but in urban areas, this rate is about 32 percent for both males and females (Turk-iş, 2006: 10; 91).

Home-based workers, who are one of the largest sub-groups of the informal employment and, are mostly women, are available in both developed and developing countries. Activities of home-based workers, including the activities of self-employed ones who are engaged in family businesses or work for their own account and the activities of paid workers who work under sub-contracting arrangements form an important part of all national economies. However, there is too little

data to characterize home-based workers and to evaluate the true economic impact of their activities done within the informal sector. Due to the lack of information about this part of workers, 90 percent of whom are women, advocates often refer to home-based workers as “the invisible workforce” (Esim and Sims, 2000: 95). Although there has been an attempt at the local and national levels in Turkey to both organize home-based workers and gather information about their activities recently, still there is a little statistical information about home-based women workers in informal sector. For instance, in 1999, there was a workshop in Istanbul to discuss the nature and status of home-based work in Turkey. As participants, international and national researchers, Turkish Government officials, women among home-based workers, and representatives of non-governmental organizations, such as United Nations, and ILO joined this workshop. They emphasize that home-based workers are among the most vulnerable ones who do not have access to employment based benefits or protection and tend to remain isolated from other workers and therefore, they are less well organized and have less voice vis-à-vis employers and public authorities than other workers.

The female participation rate had declined between the years 1955 and 2000 from 72 percent to 26 percent and it is very low, compared to the OECD average of 60.1 percent (OECD, 2006). One reason for this is related to the special circumstances created by large-scale and increasing urban migration of the Turkish population. Especially in urban areas, women who are mostly unskilled, have low level of education and limited employment opportunities, withdraw from the labor force and become housewives or work in informal sector. In general, the percentage of women working, as waged and salaried workers are 35 percent compared with 54 percent for men. The share of women working as self-employed is also recorded at only 14 percent and 51 percent they are found to be contributing family workers (SIS, 2003). This indicates that Turkish women have difficulties to work in formal sector because of both the limited job opportunities and family responsibilities, which are thought to be women’s own duties.

Due to the unavailability of data on home-based workers we cannot provide exact proportion of women working in this sector but according to the World Bank study on Turkey, in 1993 an estimated of 1 million women work in the informal sector, and most of them are home-based workers (World Bank, 1993). Recent studies show that a work pattern, which has becoming more common among women, is piecewise work

in their homes. This kind of work penetrates their family life and the workers find themselves outside of the protectional environment of the workplace. They are not organized, working for low wages and these kinds of work patterns separate women from social communication and public sphere. In addition, there are no laws regulating and securing the quality and quantity of female labor performed in homes (Cinar, 1994; Esim and Sims, 2000; SIS, 2004; Hattatoglu and Isik, 2005, Turkis, 2006).

The nature and concept of informal sector in Turkey attracted noticeable attention recently (Cinar, 1994; Ozar, 1998; Şenyapili, 1998; Keles, 1998; Kasnakoglu and Yayla, 1998; Tansel, 2000; Esim and Sims, 2000; Bulutay and Tasti, 2004). However, there are some serious limitations for high quality research in this area. For instance, there is a lack of data. Therefore, home-based workers as one of the largest sub-groups of the informal sector draw little attention. This study aims to contribute to the literature on this matter. In this study, we investigate the labor force participation decisions of women in informal sector in Turkey using descriptive statistics. Taking into consideration of Feminist view which explained above women being marginalized in the informal sector as a result of their dominant social roles as “wives and mothers” we assume that variables that influence women’s work in the home, such as the presence of young children in home should affect women’s decisions to work as a home-based worker.

The remainder of this paper is as follows; we discuss the data and variables in the next section. During this section, we intend to introduce variables that are critical to describe main characteristics Gonen’s informal sector. In the third section, we present the findings of descriptive statistics, which is specific to the informal sector of Gonen. We also search for similarities and differences between characteristics of Gonen’s informal sector and general characteristics of this sector during this section. The final section draws concluding remarks and some policy implications.

2. The Data and Variables

In this section, we attempt to describe the various characteristics of the women working in informal sector using the survey, which was carried out with home-based women workers engaging artisan production; embroidery, weaving and basket-making in Gonen during the summer of 2004. Gonen, where these kinds of works are very

common is a small town in Balıkesir. The data that we use in this study is collected from the field as a first hand data². There are more than eight hundred employed females have participated in this questionnaire. Based on this questionnaire we are able to develop about a dozen of variables to describe the features of the informal sector established in Gonen and its peripheries.

We place the list of the variables used in this study into Table 1. These variables are mostly related to economic, social, demographic and intellectual characteristics of women work in the informal sector of Gonen. The variables `Continuing Income`, `Earnings` `Labsup`³ and `Working Spouse` represent economic variables, while the variables `Age`, `Children`, `Marital Status`, `Occupation`, `Location` `Education` and `Reasons to Work` and `Types of Work` are related to social and demographic characteristics of the women. Although most of these variables can easily be understood by the name, a few require a detailed explanation. For instance the variable, The Reasons for Work, indicates to various reasons for why the woman is working in Gonen. The reasons that women choose are listed as `work are for living`, `for monetary contribution to family`, `for hobby` and others. The variable, Occupation, is taken into account in order to distinguish between housewife and others.

Table 1: List of the Variables Used in This Study

The Name of Variables	Explanation About The Variables
Education	The level of education
Age	The age of the worker
Occupation	The type of occupation
Location	Location
Marital Status	Marital status
Working Spouse	Whether the husband employed
Continuing Income	Whether there is continuing income

² We would like to thank Municipal Government of City of Gonen, Sedat Azakli, and Osman Cenet for supporting this study by providing the data set and Huseyin Kanibir for entering the data into spreadsheets.

³ The variable `Labsup` represents weakly hours of working time and is equivalent to days of work in a week times hours of work in a day.

Children	Whether there are children or not
Earnings	The level of earnings
Reason to Work	The reasons to work
Types of Work	Types of work
Day/wk	Days of work in a week
Hours/day	Hours of work in a day
Labsup	Total number of hours worked in a week

3. Female Descriptive Statistics in Gonen

Descriptive statistics in Table 2 indicates that year of schooling on average is about 5 years. That means women in this sector have education level below secondary school. The statistics about the variable, Occupation, indicates that women in this sector are mostly housewives. Average age is about 37⁴. They live in both rural and urban areas⁵. They are mostly married⁶ with children⁷ and have working husbands⁸.

Table 2: Female Descriptive Statistics in Gonen

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Education	803	1.00	6.00	3.1258	.8388
Age	804	1.00	6.00	3.8047	1.2114
Occupation	802	1.00	2.00	1.1060	.3080

⁴ Age value number 3.8 as average corresponds to about 37 (See Table 5).

⁵ Location leads to places where women doing this work. The data for this variable goes from 1=a rural village to 30=a city Gonen. Thus, the number 16 in the Table indicates that this work is being done both in rural and urban areas.

⁶ The mean value of marital status is 1.2. In the data range of 1=married, 2=Single and 3=divorced, the mean is close to 1 that represent married women.

⁷ Do you have children? Yes=1, No=2; The mean value=1.1

⁸ Is your husband working? Yes=1 No=2; The mean value=1.3

Location	804	1.00	34.00	16.3433	12.8931
Marital Status	804	1.00	3.00	1.2811	.6298
Working Spouse	668	1.00	4.00	1.1946	.4074
Continuing Income	787	1.00	4.00	3.0915	.8791
Children	761	1.00	3.00	1.0999	.3044
Earnings	802	1.00	10.00	2.9077	1.3074
Reasons For Work	804	1.00	4.00	1.8918	.6249
Types of Work	804	1.00	4.00	1.8184	1.0689
Days/wk	804	1.00	7.00	5.8346	1.4563
Hours/day	804	1.00	6.00	2.9117	1.1697
Labsup	804	1.00	42.00	17.5672	8.9421

Not: The statistics in Table 2 are produced as indexed numbers. For example, education is classified as 1=no school 2=literate, 3=elementary education 4=secondary school 5=high school 6=above high school.

Statistics in Table 2 also shows that females mostly work part-time in this sector. The mean value of 'Labsup' is 17.6. This means that the average hours of working time per week is 17.6 hours. The average earnings per month are about 50 new Turkish Lira.

The survey shows distribution of females on how many hours a week they work. Table 3 shows the detailed statistics about working hours. According to Table 3 about 90 percent of them in this sector work as part-timers.⁹ That means for most of them total number of hours they work do not sum up to 30 hours a week.

Table 3: Female Labor Supply Statistics in Gonen

Hours	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1.00	2	.2	.2	.2
2.00	13	1.6	1.6	1.9
3.00	22	2.7	2.7	4.6
4.00	21	2.6	2.6	7.2

⁹ In this study, we use a threshold value of 30 usual working hours per week as the OECD's defining criterion for part-time work (OECD, 2002).

5.00	13	1.6	1.6	8.8
6.00	19	2.4	2.4	11.2
7.00	38	4.7	4.7	15.9
8.00	30	3.7	3.7	19.7
9.00	6	.7	.7	20.4
10.00	39	4.9	4.9	25.2
12.00	41	5.1	5.1	30.3
14.00	92	11.4	11.4	41.8
15.00	73	9.1	9.1	50.9
16.00	5	.6	.6	51.5
18.00	24	3.0	3.0	54.5
20.00	26	3.2	3.2	57.7
21.00	130	16.2	16.2	73.9
24.00	31	3.9	3.9	77.7
25.00	7	.9	.9	78.6
28.00	106	13.2	13.2	91.8
30.00	9	1.1	1.1	92.9
35.00	53	6.6	6.6	99.5
42.00	4	.5	.5	100.0
Total	804	100.0	100.0	

Earnings in this sector are also very low. Almost every worker in this sector earns less than minimum wage. The data in Table 4 shows that about 97.5 percent of the women earn less than 100 New Turkish Lira (which corresponds to 75 US dollars) per month. About 45 percent of them get less than 50 New Turkish Liras (NTL) per month. About 10 percent of the women get only 30 NTL per month. Only one person out of eight hundred gets an amount of earning close to minimum wage.

Table 4: Female Monthly Earnings in Gonen

Num	Earnings	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	30 NTL or Less	80	10.0	10.0	10.0
2	30- 50 NTL	266	33.1	33.2	43.1
3	51-70 NTL	236	29.4	29.4	72.6
4	71-90 NTL	133	16.5	16.6	89.2
5	91-100 NTL	67	8.3	8.4	97.5
6	101- 125 NTL	7	.9	.9	98.4
7	126-150 NTL	5	.6	.6	99.0
8	151-200 NTL	5	.6	.6	99.6

9	201-250 NTL	2	.2	.2	99.9
10	251-300 NTL	1	.1	.1	100.0
	Total	802	99.8	100.0	

Females who work in this sector have some schooling, but not much. Table 5 shows that about 68.2 percent of the women have only five years of schooling. 11 percent of them have no schooling and 13.6 percent of them have 8 years of schooling, 6 percent of them have high school diploma and only 1 percent have higher education. As we mentioned above, less educated women are more likely to work at home instead of working outside because of their limited employment opportunities.

Table 5: Education Level of Females in Gonen

Num	Education	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	No school	38	4.7	4.7	4.7
2	Literate	52	6.5	6.5	11.2
3	Primary School	548	68.2	68.2	79.5
4	Middle School	109	13.6	13.6	93.0
5	High School	48	6.0	6.0	99.0
6	Higher Education	8	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	803	99.9	100.0	

The age distribution of females is shown in the following figure. In Table 6 it is shown that about 75 percent of the women are in between 26 and 55 years old. This shows that this is not a sector in which early age or older age women work but is it a sector where legally working age women work. This example is the evidence that there are such sectors in Turkey employing working age women informally. This trend also shows that the labor force participation of women who work as home-based worker in this sector are very high and their marriage and childcare work seem to be not disturb them as much as they affect their urban counterparts in general. Therefore, it is not a surprise to see that married and middle-aged women with children are doing home based works.

Table 6: Age Distribution of Females in Gonen

Num.	Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	18 or Less	14	1.7	1.7	1.7
2	19-25	103	12.8	12.8	14.6
3	26-35	209	26.0	26.0	40.5
4	36-45	259	32.2	32.2	72.8
5	46-55	138	17.2	17.2	89.9
6	56 or Above	81	10.1	10.1	100.0
	Total	804	100.0	100.0	

Workers in this sector consist of married, divorced and single females. Table 7 shows marital status of women working in this sector. About 80.5 percent are married, 10 percent are widowed or divorced and 10 percent are single. As is seen from the Table 7, they are mostly married and in this sector being married does not affect negatively women's decision to work. Women in this sector can do or have to do household jobs and handcrafting at the same time. This Table also shows that about 10 percent of women are single family that may need to survive with money earned in this sector. Therefore, this sector seems to have an important role in this region of Turkey.

Table 7: Marital Status of Females in Gonen

Num.	Marital Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	Married	656	81.6	81.6	81.6
2	Single	70	8.7	8.7	90.3
4	Widowed/Divorced	78	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	804	100.0	100.0	

Females work in this sector do this job for various reasons. Table 8 shows that about 22.3 percent of females do this job for living. For about 70 percent do this job for monetary contribution to family budget. Only 5 percent of the women do this job for a hobby. This

statistic shows that families, which provide labor to this sector, are low-income families because most women work in such a low paid sector for monetary contribution to family. Nonetheless, this outcome confirms that women are still accepted as homemakers and mothers rather than breadwinners. Only a minority of women is able to control their own economic lives. The majority of females is seem to be economic minority and generally economically depended on men (Kocak, 1999: 78).

Table 8: Reasons for Work for Females in Gonen

Num.	Reasons for Work	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	For Living	179	22.3	22.3	22.3
2	For Contribution	559	69.5	69.5	91.8
3	For Hobby	40	5.0	5.0	96.8
4	Other	26	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	804	100.0	100.0	

There are various types of jobs proceed in this sector. The results of the questionnaire indicate that about 2 third of this women engage with artisan production such as embroidery, weaving and basket-making and the rest are related to sewing and clothing (Table 9).

Table 9: Types of Work for Females in Gonen

Num.	Types of Work	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	Artisan Work	445	55.3	55.3	55.3
2	Sewing	160	19.9	19.9	75.2
3	Subcontracting Work	99	12.3	12.3	87.6
4	Other	100	12.4	12.4	100.0
	Total	804	100.0	100.0	

We were also able to figure out some other characteristics of the females working this sector from the existing data. First, while husbands of 80 percent of married women have jobs, the rest 20 percent is not working. Second, about one third of these people have no continuing income. In addition, about half of them get income mainly from agricultural sector and 90 percent of these women are housewife or working in farming with families. Moreover, although 45 percent of these women live in city of Gonen, the other 45 percent are evenly distributed in relatively crowded and close villages such as Tuzakci, Hasanbey, Gundogan, and Sarikoy. The rest, 10 percent, are distributed about 40 different localities.

4. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of home-based female workers in informal sector in Gonen in Turkey. We made a descriptive analysis using the statistics drawn from the questionnaire in the city of Gonen and its peripheries. The questionnaire is used by the researchers who work for the municipality of Gonen during the summer of 2004 and embraces about 800 hundred women who work causally in this sector.

The data shows many interesting facts about the female labor participation of informal sector in Gonen, such as the higher the education level they have, the higher their wages are and the lower the hours they work. The one's who are house-wife participate more but work less number of hours whereas the one's who are singled or widowed work more hours. The ones who live in cities earn more but work less number of hours whereas the ones live in rural areas earns less but work more numbers of hours. The ones who are single or widowed makes lower portion of participants but work more numbers of hours. The one's who work for living and for contribution to family budget makes higher share of the participants and work more number of hours.

The results summarized above suggest that education, location, economic status of family and childcare responsibilities are very important factors that affect women's decision to work in informal sector in Gonen. Women who have lower education skills and live in rural areas have difficulties to find decent job for living. The responsibilities attributed women by cultural and traditional values such as looking after

children and household duties also affect their participation to informal sector but not formal one. This outcome is consistent with Feminist's view that explained women as being marginalized in the informal sector due to their dominant social roles as "wives and mothers".

Our observations from this survey lead some implications for public policy. The first implication is related to education and human skills of women. In fact, women have disadvantages to find decent work in formal sector due to their lower educational level. In addition, women lack of experience and low skills prevent women to start up a decent and regular job. Increasing women's education and human skills can help to build confidence to look for paid job in formal sector. Therefore, as it is being done today in Turkey, Government can provide direct education for women and support private provision by tax incentives and grants. Incentives such those would lead to end women tragedy of informal work and lead them to start up better jobs in formal sector.

The second implication is related to household responsibilities of women. Government can also help women by providing childcare facilities because as Kau and Rubin (1981) suggest they are very important instruments to increase women's participation to the formal sector. However, lack of childcare facilities constrains women with household responsibilities. Therefore, public provision and support for childcare facilities would help women to get out of house, find time to get training and search for a full time decent jobs. This function of government would assist women to overcome being marginalized into informal sector.

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