**Childcare and Maternity Policy Brief**

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*Abstract*

The present policy brief is about childcare and maternity. Study begins with explaining rationale of childcare and maternity policy. For the Turkish government this policy is mostly related with protection of fertility rates and young populace. Improving working mothers’ work and home conditions comes as a rationale after population planning aim. In order to examine in detail, policy is divided into three sub-categories; leave policy, workplace conditions, childcare. Three categories is examined and explained why they are the topic of the policy. Existing legislative context of Sweden is presented as an example of childcare and maternity policy. Then Turkish legislation is presented and current regulations and applications are revealed. As a result, essential new policy and regulation for existing policy suggested are included.

*keywords;* childcare, maternity, policy brief, Turkey, Sweden

*Öz*

Bu politika özeti çocuk bakımı ve annelik politikaları üzerine yazılmıştır. Çalışma; çocuk bakımı ve annelik politikalarının gerekçesinin açıklanmasıyla başlamaktadır. Türk hükümeti çocuk bakımı ve annelik politikalarını çoğunlukla doğurganlık oranını ve genç nüfusu korumayla ilişkili olarak oluşturmaktadır. Çalışan annelerin iş ve ev şartlarının iyilşetirilmesi nüfus planlaması gerekçesinden sonra gelmektedir. Daha detaylı incelemek amacıyla bu politikalar üç alt kategoriye bölünmüştür; izin politikaları, iş ortamı şartları, çocuk bakımı. Bu üç kategorinin neden bu politikanın konusu oldukları açıklanmıştır. İsviçre’nin mevcut yasal düzenlemeleri çocuk bakımı ve annelik politikalarına örnek olarak sunulmuştur. Sonraki kısımda Türkiye’nin mevcut yasal düzenleme ve uygulamaları ortaya konulmuştur. Sonuç olarak, mevcut politikaların yeniden düzenlenmesine yönelik önerilere yer verilmiştir.

*anahtar kelimeler;* çocuk bakımı, annelik, politika özeti, Türkiye, İsviçre

**Introduction**

Childcare and maternity issues are the agenda topic of Turkish government in recent years. It is especially at the government’s agenda as a result of attempts of protection of dynamic and young populace as a result of concerns about aging population and lower fertility rates. In 2008, Erdogan did the first call on families to have at least three children (NTVMSNBC, 2008). Then anti-abortion policies are followed in that process. These attempts are mainly driven by the need to protect dynamic population; also they have an economic background (Strigaki, 2004). The attempts cause the debates about especially working mothers and families under the poverty line. Concerns of policy makers are related to work-family life conflict, which involves childcare issues and working conditions so debates on the maternity and childcare range from the maternity leave policy and work conditions, paternity leave policy, early child development, and access to qualified childcare (Redmond, Valiulis & Drew, 2006). These issues are the positive initiatives for different reasons; revealing women distress and provide gender balance in workplace, sharing responsibilities, promote development and prevent possible health problems of the children (Chang, 2013; Spiteri & Xuereb, 2012; UN Women, 2010).

Leave policies are essential topics to need attention in order to provide equal conditions for women and men, and also support mother to take care of their child. There is significant inequality between genders in case of childcare. Women spend twice time of men on unpaid leave and work on domestic duties and childcare (ILO, 2005). This part is the ‘home-to-work conflict’, which is defined as home liabilities like caring responsibilities cause conflict on business life of person. As well as the importance of maternity leave, importance of paternity leave also is the topic of debates in order to share the caring responsibilities and support father-child relationship.

Workplace condition also important on ‘work-to-home conflict’ is the altered places form of home-to-work conflict. At that time business duties and conditions cause conflict on home or/and family life of individual (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011). Childcare issues also affected by workplace culture policies. Fixed work conditions and competitive structure of business life is the issue of workplace conditions. Organizational pressure on employees causes minimization of spent time with children. Parents, even they have the right to parental leave or part-time work, continue to work in order not to fall behind in competition (Fried, 1998).

As an external support to childcare preschool education and day care services are the topic of debates (Ministry of Labor and Social Security & UNICEF, 2013). Availability and the quality of these services must be the issue of policies in order to resolve work-family conflicts and decrease distress of parents. On the other hand it is important to consider the use of these services in balance with parental care to support early childhood development both physically and emotionally. Importance ofexclusive breastfeeding and attachment on children development are the main points of childcare subtopic (Ali& Rattani, 2015).

1. **Women, men and caring**

Family structure in Turkey is changing from extended family to nuclear family and also familial relationship is changing. Government also mentioned that there is a need for monitoring and mentoring the problems of single-parent families (Ministry of Development, 2014).The problem is not only related with single parents. Before the changing structure of family, it was easier to find familial help to get support for caring the babies. Now there are much more families who cannot get familial support in order to reduce their caring responsibilities (Kimmel, 2001). Government is the essential organization that should support the working parents and reduce their responsibilities.

In 2012 proportion women in labor market was 29.5%, while men was 71%. (TUİK,2012). “Turkey had the lowest female labor market participation among the OECD with less than 40% of the female working population in employment in 2009.

The gender employment gap for prime-age workers is high in Turkey at over 50 percentage points” (OECD). Mothers have the 89.2% of caring responsibilities of 0-5 year of age children, while fathers just have 1.5% of the responsibility. Additionally, 2.4% of caring is undertaken by daycare services (TUİK,2012).

Turkey has a minimal leave policy, which only targets to women. As we see above, there is already equality between genders both in work places and caring responsibilities. Leave policies should be arranged according to this situation. Long period of maternity leave have risk tendency of stressing the traditional role of mother model and also cause depressive symptoms among women (Coley et. al., 2007; Buehler & O’Brien, 2011). On the other hand, short unpaid maternity leave may cause work-to-home conflict. Additionally men should take an active role on child caring in order to create working and leisure time for women. Women’s participation in labor market will likely to increase if fathers become involved in childcare (Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 2013).

1. **Maternity and the workplaces**

Part-time work and flexible work conditions are not common in Turkey, which is one of the reason that makes working life more difficult for women. Another factor that make work life difficult for women is the fact that they are not employed in proper full-time jobs (EU, 2012). Generally employers are least prone to allow make arrangements of their working hours in Turkey, even more than 50% of companies offer some kind of flexible working arrangements to some employees (OECD).

Research (Aycan & Eskin, 2005) shows that both men and women allow the work duties interfere with home life more than they allow family duties interfere with work life. Findings also showed that women have more work-to-home conflict that men have. This is the result of their amount of family and home responsibilities. This conflict found linked with guilt of women as a result of feeling incompetent. Additionally, younger generation beware to getting marries and having children because of worries about work-life conflict.

Findings show flexible work conditions and part-time working reduce conflict. Buehler and Brien (2011) found that mothers who employed in a part-time job perceived less work-family conflict, and at several times also reported less family work conflict than mothers employed full-time. (Buehler & O’Brien, 2011; Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000).

1. **Childcare: Best interest of children**

When we talk about maternity and childcare, generally women take into account but it is also important watching child’s best interest from a developmental perspective.

Ministry of Labor and UNICEF (2013) publish a policy report; “Child Well-Being In Early Years And Women’s Employment” which explains how maternal employment effects the development of children. According to results, when mother have a job, it significantly reduces the risk of child suffering from poverty and enhances the quality of life and life satisfaction of children (TARKI & Applica, 2010). Working mothers’ children are more likely to acquire qualified education. Also working mothers are more likely to aware of their rights and it also another factor that promote child well-being. Job gives the insurance privileges to mother and also children. When women have insurance it is more likely to have access to pre and post-natal care, which is related with child health and development directly (Sida, 2015).

On the other hand even it is important to support maternal working it is also important to regulate work hours and conditions according to early childhood development requirements. It is very important to provide exclusive breastfeeding to the children and exclusive breastfeeding is related with motor development, high IQ level and literacy development. Additionally, non-exclusive breastfeeding has added to neonatal infant morbidity and mortality. (Haneef, Maqbool, & Arif, 2000). It is hard to respond child’s needs for working mothers immediately, especially physical needs. Emotional needs are also important to respond. Research shows that first year maternal employment might be linked with insecure attachment; child may develop fear and insecurity feelings, lack of confidence and a decline in performance at school (Ali & Rattani, 2015). Other study shows that part-time working mothers’ eight grade children scored higher than full time working mothers’ children on school- related communication, checking homework, after school supervision, and school involvement. (Muller, 1995)

1. **Legislative context**

Issues of maternity and childcare involve legislative and organizational regulations and applications. This part is showing Sweden and Turkey’s current legislative context.

* 1. Sweden
     1. *Leave policy*

Swedish parents have extensive parental leave policy. Pregnant women have right to paid leave as early as 60 days into pregnancy and they can continue to work until 11 days before delivery. Women who have a job that contains risky situations and heavy conditions are competent to taking earlier leave during pregnancy. Parents, who give birth or adopt a child, are entitled to 480 days of high paid parental leave which 60 days of leave are kept for the fathers. Father’s 60 days of parental leave right is not transferrable to the mother. In 2012 fathers took 24% of the leave. Social Insurance Agency pays the 80% percent of daily pay of mother. Parental leave right can be used until child becomes eight years of age. Parents have same right for each children expect the multiple births. (Official Sweden Website)

* + 1. *Workplace Cultures & Conditions*

In 2012, employment rate of women was 71.8% which is close to men’s rate; 75.6%. Employment rate of mothers with children was 76.8%, which is the highest third rate in the EU. Sweden provides flexible work arrangement reduction of working hour rights to parents. Parents have legal rights to reduce their working hours 25% until their children turns to eight. Especially women use flexible work arrangements. Women’ rate who prefer working part-time was 39.6% and men ‘s rate stands at 14.6%. (EU, Sweden)

* + 1. *Childcare*

Sweden provides the parents qualified and accessible daycare services and preschools with a maximum cost of SEK 1,287 ($150) per month, and women can reduce the price by using their monthly child allowance. Parents can receive a care service at the earliest for one year of child. %75 of children between 1-5 years old and %65 of children between 6-9 years old take advantage from the services (UNESCO, 2003). Schools, which are from preschool class through upper secondary school, are free of charge with lunch. There are also after school caring services for parents who cannot make work arrangements. In addition to caring services, parents have additional monthly allowance for child care until child turns to 16. They have 120 days per year for children under the 12 years of age. Parents need to have doctor’s certificate for children between 12-15 (Official Sweden Website).

* 1. Turkey
     1. *Leave policy*

Turkey has the recently emergent regulations about leave policies. The Labor Law of 2003 that extended maternity leaves from 12 to 16 weeks. Eight weeks of the leave is used before delivery, other eight weeks is used after. Women can work until three weeks to delivery; the week that she doesn’t use is transferred after giving birth leave rights. Women paid %66.7 of their daily pays. Recent regulation of Labor Law give five days paid paternity leave to fathers. Parents have 24 months unpaid parental leave; mother can use this leave after maternity leave, father can use the leave right after the delivery.

* + 1. *Workplace Cultures & Conditions*

Women take over the majority of care work and housework. Recently government make regulations under the name of “Family Package” and give part-time working opportunity to with high paid for 6 months after maternity leave. Both parents can work part-time with half salary until mandatory school age of children.

* + 1. *Childcare*

Government provides public preschools with a minimum charge of 80 TL ($26,5) per month without lunch, 100 TL ($33,1) per month with lunch. There is state daycare center for children. Schools are charge free from the primary school to high school. There is no additional off days for childcare besides parental leave, but government give right to women 1.5 hours per day for first year of their child in order to support breastfeeding. According to Labor Law, it is obligatory for companies, which employ 100 to 150 women workers, to establish a nursing room for women with under the age of one for nursing and breastfeeding. Also companies with 150 women workers, it is obligatory to provide childcare service for women with children under the six.

In addition to that, recent “Family Package” regulation provides financial delivery aid to families for children once at the birth of the child. Every mother or father will be paid 300 TL for their first child, 400 TL for their second child, 600 TL for their child and next children. (Resmi Gazete, 2015)

1. **Policy suggestion**

Legislations should assure people’s capabilities. With this perspective, maternity and childcare policies should provide opportunities to especially women and also be sure that they are able to choose those opportunities. Each subtopic of policy can be handle by the perspective of capability approach.

Leave policies should strength in Turkey. First of all, there should be enough payment for maternity leave and parental leave. Government pay 66% of mother’s daily payments and there is no payment for parental leave. It is important to support parents to encourage them to be involving the child’s needs and care and relieve their financial stress while they are caring their children. Study shows that if mothers have enough financial sources they are tend to take care the babies by themselves (Sayıl, Güre, Ucanak, & Pungello, 2009) which is important to responsive care, breastfeeding and attachment of child. Payments for leaves should be improved. In addition to that even parental leave is the right of both parents, men is not likely to take care of children. It could be useful to implement Swedish Policy; nontransferable parental leave right for fathers to create, promote, and generalize paternal care culture in our society.

Work conditions are the second issue. Work conditions have important role on work-to-home conflict. Especially mothers have greater pressure and feeling of guilt about the conflict (Aycan & Eskin, 2005). In order to prevent women’s leave the labor market and also burning out under the duties, it is important to give rights of regulating their work time and breaks. Recently, government gave women the right to work part-time for 6 months with high salary. This right should be interchangeable between parents in order increase participation of fathers on childcare. Mothers have right to have 1.5 hours break for feeding and nursing their children per day. Especially in urban regions it is not realistic to reach child to nursing in 1.5 hours. Having a daycare center in work places or making agreement with existing centers could be a solution for this problem. Labor Law made this regulation obligatory for organizations which have 150 and more women employees. This law could be regulated according to consider that each baby needs to be nursing.

Turkey does not have caring service for children under the age of four. Child can be enrolled to public preschools at the earliest four years old. There should be conformity between ending of parental leave and mother’s access to caring service. It is also important to providing additional parental leave for support childcare. Sweden example also can be implemented and government can provide nontransferable leaves for especially unexpected conditions.

**7. Conclusion**

Turkey recently begins to work on maternity and childcare issues. Current legislative context of Turkey provide moderate paid 16 weeks maternity leave, 5 days paternity leave and 24 months unpaid parental leave to parents. Payments for leave are not enough to support mothers financially. It should be developed and found a solution to provide higher payments for parents. Also, it is mentioned that paternal care should supported by nontransferable leave for fathers. Working conditions are not appropriate for mothers with children under the age of four. New regulations give part-time work opportunity to mothers for 6 months. This paper suggest that there must be flexible and part-time work opportunity until child’s certain age that child can receive government’s primary care. Also workplace conditions might be promoted through Labor Law and government might give chance to parents to take care their babies while they are working. Lastly, government may give additional leave days for unexpected conditions in order to give assurance to parents that they can deal with their children health problem etc. As a result, Turkish government recently applied encouraging regulations and applications but regulations are still not enough to support parents and release their work-home conflicts.

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