

HOUSEWIVES OR WORKING WOMEN? SELF-PERCEPTION OF HOME-BASED FEMALE WORKERS IN KAYSERİ, TURKEY IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

Ev Kadınları mı Çalışan Kadınlar mı? Pandemi Döneminde Türkiye/Kayseri’de Ev Eksenli Çalışan Kadınların Öz Algıları

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Abstract

Home-based work, which faded away at the beginning of the twentieth century, has become widespread again in parallel with the deepening economic crisis since the 1980s and is expected to become more prevalent with the addition of pandemic conditions to the process. It has become a source of livelihood for poor women in Kayseri as well, which they can carry out without overstepping the limits of gender roles deemed appropriate for them, but dialectically same process may bring up some positive effects. In this study, we tried to explore self-perception of home-based working women in one of the central districts of Kayseri, Kocasinan. Based on the findings of our field research we argue that even in the most conservative places where patriarchal values are more prevalent, home-based work can comparatively improve status of women in the household, increase their self-confidence and enhance their self-perception as well.

Key Words: Home-based Work, Kayseri, Patriarchal Capitalism, Self- Perception, Pandemic.

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Öz

Yirminci yüzyılın başında kaybolmaya yüz tutan ev eksenli çalışma, 1980'lerden itibaren derinleşen ekonomik krize paralel olarak yeniden yaygınlaşmaya başlamıştır ve pandemi koşullarının da sürece eklenmesiyle daha da yaygınlaşması beklenmektedir. Ev eksenli işler, Kayseri'de de yoksul kadınlar için kendilerine uygun görülen toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin sınırlarını aşmadan yürütebilecekleri bir geçim kaynağı haline gelmiştir; ancak diyalektik olarak aynı süreç bazı olumlu etkileri de beraberinde getirebilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, Kayseri'nin merkez ilçelerinden biri olan Kocasinan'da ev eksenli çalışan kadınların öz algılarını keşfetmeye çalıştık. Saha araştırmamızın bulgularına dayanarak, patriarkal değerlerin görece güçlü olduğu en muhafazakar yerlerde bile ev eksenli çalışmanın kadınların hane içindeki statülerini nispeten iyileştirebileceğini, özgüvenlerini artırabileceğini ve öz algılarını pozitif yönde etkileyebileceğini öne sürdük.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Ev Eksenli Çalışma, Kayseri, Patriarkal Kapitalizm, Öz Algı, Pandemi.

Introduction

The process that started to become evident in the 1980's has pointed to a new stage of capitalism and has often been conceptualised as globalisation, economic restructuring or neo-liberalism in the related literature. Increasing unemployment, declining rates of profit, underutilisation of industrial capacity and falling investment rates in developed countries in the early 1970s marked the end of the growth period prevailed after the Second World War. From the 1980s onwards the world economy has witnessed widespread implementation of a new set of policies aimed at superseding the structural crisis trends of the system.

The reflection of these policies on production and labour markets has been in the form of flexibilization of production and labour processes. One of the consequences of these processes for workers has been the casualisation of work. Employment security, social insurance, income security, non-wage benefits, pension payments have become a dream for many employees. The regulations made in the labour markets of different countries in line with the policies of the restructuring of the world economy have brought the labour to a very fragile position and reduced labour costs. Multinational companies, which have begun to control a large part of the world economy, were given the opportunity to fragment the production process and to perform different parts of production on the basis of subcontracting relations in various parts of the world depending on cost advantages they provided. Thus, home-based work or putting out system, which was prevalent in rural households in the 17th century before industrial capitalism in Great Britain, faded away at the beginning of the 20th century, but started to become widespread again in the last quarter of the same siècle.

Worldwide economic crisis, worsened by the impact of the Covid 19 outbreak, has caused even more people to become unemployed and forced them to do home-based work in order to survive. The pandemic, which has already been observed to have dynamics that will completely change the world as we know it, has had profound effects on workers in the labour markets. Although all female and male workers are affected by these processes, they have been affected in different ways and degrees due to the gendered division of labour in the society. Women are the first to be fired in times of crisis, and they are also the ones who feel poverty more intensely than men (Pearce, 1978; Marcoux, 1998; Bradshaw et. al., 2003; Chen et. al., 2006; Jarvis et al., 2009; Sallan Gül, 2005). The majority of home-based workers are women. The women who perform this work are trying to alleviate the impoverishment increased by the already existing crisis, which is deepening by the effect of the pandemic.

The fact that home-based work is carried out at home by women intertwined with house and care work devalues it as a work and the products of women's labour as well. This causes both employers and workers themselves to treat it as a leisure activity that contributes to household income. On the contrary, the findings of the field study indicate that home-based work is a job that requires long hours and intense work pace. In spite of the women who do this work share the burden of livelihood of the household with the male members or even in the periods when they are the main income earners, they still are generally reluctant to explicitly describe themselves as working women in the public sphere.

Kayseri, where the field research of this study was carried out, is a city in Central Anatolia known for its conservatism. Generally, patriarchal values have a strong validity in the city and working outside the home is not considered appropriate for women, especially in poor neighbourhoods. Patriarchal values attribute negative meanings to women's work outside the home in terms of the family, cultural and religious values. Hence work outside the home for women is not accepted by the male members of the family. Men see their wives' working outside the home as a humiliating situation and insult to their masculinity. Gendered division of labour that exists in the society is maintained by men in the household (Hartmann, 1979). Patriarchal values confine women to the domestic realm and assign them to reproductive labour. Therefore, women from modest and less educated backgrounds have no other option but to do home-based work to alleviate poverty, to make ends meet, and to stand on their own feet for not to have to ask any money from anybody, including their husbands.

The majority of the studies on homeworking in Turkey and in the world, especially in critical literature, generally argue that home-based work does not change power relations and division of labour at home, and women who carry out home-based work do not consider themselves as working individuals. We challenge this line of thought by arguing that such a view is not dialectical and underestimates the power of women to overcome socio-spatial barriers. The self-perception of home-based working women is changing slowly even in the most conservative parts of Turkey. Kayseri is one of them. Although the majority of home-based working women in our sample group define themselves as housewives in the public sphere, they actually see themselves as working women, and even some of them are planning to set up their own businesses if conditions of Covid 19 pandemic permit them to do so. Thus, we argue that although home-based work does not radically change domestic power relations, it is a big step for women who do this work to achieve a relatively stronger position in the household and society, and more importantly their self-perception changes positively.

In this study, we tried to find the positive effects of home-based work on the self-perceptions of home-based working women. The empirical part of the study based on the question of whether they feel themselves as housewives or working women, and we also tried to find out whether their work increases their self-confidence and future expectations, despite all the disadvantages of being both poor and female, as well as all the disadvantages of home-based work itself. We have adopted a dialectical way of thinking and a gender-sensitive approach in our evaluation. The study generally consists of two parts: Theoretical Part and Field Research. In the theoretical part, the acceleration of informalisation processes, of which home-based work is an important part, due to the overlap of the economic crisis that continues to deepen in the world and in Turkey with the pandemic conditions, is associated with the flexible accumulation system. In the empirical part of the study, the relevant data of the field research conducted in poor neighbourhoods of Kayseri's one of the central districts, where patriarchal values are particularly strong, are evaluated.

Flexible Accumulation and Increasing Informal Labour Use

Emergence of flexible accumulation

The implementation of neo-liberal policies to overcome the crisis that started to emerge in capitalist economies in the early 1970s has been carried out hand in hand with the *New International Division of Labour* (Fröbel, Heinrich and Kreye, 1980). While neo liberal policies lifted legal, spatial

and economic barriers in front of the movement of different kinds of capital that are industrial, commercial, and financial, new division of labour brought about fragmenting production and labour processes on a global scale and shifting different parts of industrial production to low cost areas. The process is also called as “*Spatial Divisions of Labour*” by Doreen Massey (1984). While Massey’s focus was on the effects of spatial organisation of production on social relations; Fröbel, Heinrich, and Kreye (1980) emphasized results of the reorganisation and relocation of industrial production processes on countries with different development levels. According to them, the new division of labour resulted in structural unemployment in consequence of deindustrialisation in advanced countries and low wage, labour intensive production in less developed ones. Harvey called this process *Flexible Accumulation* instead of flexible specialisation, which conceals the class character of the process. According to Harvey flexible accumulation mainly aimed at accumulation of capital through the domination of space within the urban process and it is associated with an increasing social and spatial polarisation of urban class antagonisms (Harvey, 1987, 1993). Lipietz (1982) called the process *Global Fordism*. For him underlying reason for the spread of Fordism to the periphery by multinational companies in search of low labour costs is technical and social failure of Fordism in the core countries. Shifting the site of production made it possible to combine Fordist production technics with low wages.

The flexibility of the production process has also brought about the flexibility of labour markets. This flexibility not only gives capital the opportunity to manipulate different labour markets in a way that maximizes its profits, but also gives the freedom to hire and fire easily. Therefore, the meaning of flexibility for employers has been to produce where they can take all the profit-making advantages of the place, including using different labour control systems, which are considered institutions of the past modes of production; on the other hand, for workers it has meant easy dismissal. According to Wallerstein (2000: 84, 85), “different labour control systems exist under single world capitalist system ...The second serfdom, slavery, and all other forms of non-wage labour are not to be regarded as anomalies...they all involve a relationship between employer and labourer”. Slavery has been a very flexible labour control system which accommodates changing demands of world economy for centuries. Harvey (1992) also emphasized revival of older systems such as domestic, artisanal, patriarchal and paternalistic labour regimes as centrepieces rather than appendages of the production system. Revival of these labour regimes together with subcontracting

system facilitated the exploitation of women's labour power and permitted resurgence of patriarchal practices and homeworking. Thus, home based work which disappeared with industrial capitalism has started to be practiced widely since the late twentieth century again.

During the flexible accumulation period, female labour force participation increased in parallel with the marketisation of jobs attributed to their gender as a result of gendered division of labour prevailing in labour markets and in society. The marketisation of housework, handicraft and care work that was previously unpaid and mostly done by women conceptualised as feminisation of labour in the literature (Standing, 1989, 1999).

Reflection of the process on Turkey has been in the form of financial liberalisation, flexibilisation of the rules regulating labour markets, reducing supports in agriculture and animal husbandry and focusing on imports instead of domestic production, specializing in the labour-intensive parts of industrial production, privatisation of previously public services such as education, health and transportation since the beginning of the 1980s. Erosion in workers' rights has been accelerated by the implementation of neo-liberal policies that are called structural adjustment and stabilisation policies, jointly designed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and the effects of these erosions have revealed in the form of increasing unemployment, informality and poverty for a large part of the society. After the 1980s, the old social security system was replaced by informal forms of work (Buğra, 2012). Flexibility regulations in the labour market are associated with greater employment opportunities for women but in lower-wage, lower-skill jobs with little job security and since the 1980s, textiles, garment, leather, carpet making and electronic sectors have mainly relied on the cheaper informal labour of home-based workers (Kocabiçak, 2013). The conditions in question can also be applied to workers who market make-up, cleaning materials, etc. for various brands via social media from home under the piece rate pay system.

Rise of informalisation and homeworking

Growth of informalisation has become one of the main aspects of flexible accumulation. It is estimated that more than 60 percent of total employment worldwide is informal. Around 90 percent of employment in developing countries and 67 percent in emerging countries is informal (Bonnet, Vanek and Chen, 2019). Although formal production is the hegemonic form of capitalist system, informal economy has become an essential by product of

it to facilitate the reproduction of the modern capitalistic world order (Laha, 2008). Sweatshop type of labour control relations and informal production of goods and services have become a vital part of this world order even in the advanced countries as the economic crisis deepens (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Mitter, 1986; Harvey, 1987, 1992; Castells and Portes, 1991; Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004; Beneria and Floro, 2005; Chen, 2005, 2012; Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006; Laha, 2008; Peterson, 2010, 2018; Bromlay and Wilson, 2018; Dasgupta and Lloyd-Jones, 2018; Chen and Carre, 2020; Breman, 2020; Munck, Pradella and Wilson, 2020). The flexible accumulation system based on subcontracting relations has encouraged informal forms of work. As in the world, most informal workers in Turkey are women (Karadeniz 2019: 31; ILO 2021: 11).

It is difficult to define and to determine the scope of informality. It is also difficult to distinguish formality and informality with clear boundaries as two homogeneous economic sectors (Roberts, 1991). Hence there is not a single definition for the concept. In 2003, informal employment defined by ILO (International Labour Organisation) as employment without social protection through work – both inside and outside the informal sector (ILO, 2003). In 2018, the definition was expanded to include homeworkers, dependent contractors and other industrial outworkers with the contributions of WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) (Carre, 2020).

Although ILO's definition shifted from enterprise-based concept of employment in the informal sector to a broader, job-based concept of informal employment, it still did not fully cover linkages between formal and informal activities and their nature. ILO's conceptualisation was fundamentally economic, and it did not reflect the linkages with the broader local, regional and global power structures (Laha, 2008). Definition of the structuralist approach focused on the process of production and exchange rather than the character of the final product and individual conditions. It also placed its emphasis on the linkages between formality and informality. According to Castells and Portes (1991) informality can be defined as a process of all income-earning activities that are not regulated by the state, in a legal and social environment where similar activities are regulated. Castells and Portes (1991) also emphasized that informalisation in neo liberal era encouraged re-emergence of sweatshop type of labour control relations in a new institutional, social and economic context. While informal employment has become the form of employment for the overwhelming majority of the

world's workforce, formal conditions of earning a livelihood have become the economic status of only a small and privileged segment of labouring men and women. Women are often deprived of waged labour as long as men are around (Breman, 2020). Chen (2012) and Gaugh, Eisenschitz and McCulloch (2006) drew attention to the fact that low paid and low status jobs in the world fall on women, certain minority ethnic groups, and disabled people who are the most vulnerable segments of society. These types of work deprive workers even from the proletarian work relationships (Fortuna and Prates, 1991). One of the most common practices of informal employment is that some parts of the production are given to households as piecework. Although the productivity of home-based workers is higher than factory workers, home-based work is the last and cheapest link in the production chain. Fortuna and Prates (1991) argue that skills of homeworkers together with piece-rate system surpass factory operatives significantly.

Since workers who produce different products or market products on behalf of companies online from their homes are misclassified as self-employed entrepreneurs, they are not protected by employment rights generally, and companies can avoid social security payments of these workers, which reduces their costs even further.

The fact that home-based workers are working informally does not allow them benefit from regular workers' rights such as retirement, legal protection, healthcare, paid holidays, sick leaves, pre-determined working hours, overtime payments etc. In spite of their widespread informal labour use, companies these home-based workers work for are often registered. Systematic crisis of the world economy that has been aggravated by the effect of the pandemic has increased vulnerability of large parts of the population and as it is shown below in numbers, women's job losses are far greater than that of men in Turkey. According to ILO same is true for women globally and this will persist in the near future (ILO Monitor, 2021: 9). This means higher risk of poverty for women compare to men as well. While the risk of poverty for men in Turkey is 38.6 percent, the fact that the risk of falling into poverty for women rises to 41 percent indicates that women's poverty is considerably higher than that of men (DİSK - Genel-İş, 2021: 10). Hence, "homework has become much more prominent, allowing women to combine the tasks of child-rearing and productive labour in the same space, while saving entrepreneurs the costs of overhead such as plant, lighting etc." (Harvey, 1987: 263). According to Munck (2002), this is the obvious proof of the collaboration of capitalist state and patriarchal system in women's oppression. Capitalism has been

interwoven with the patriarchal system. Women participate in labour market from different sectors of economy within the borders drawn by capitalism together with patriarchy (Hartmann, 1979; Young, 1981; Acar-Savran, 2003).

Home-based work can be seen on the one hand women's being stuck in the grip of capitalism and patriarchy, on the other hand, a way out of this grip too. It is a dialectical process. According to the dialectical approach change is universal. "All 'things' (objects or patterns of objects or processes) are constantly subject to outside influences that would change them. They are also all heterogeneous internally, and the internal dynamics is a continuing source of change" (Levins, 2008: 40). Comprehending a world that is ever changing and interacting needs "expanding our notion of anything to include, as aspects of what it is, both the process by which it has become that and the broader interactive context in which it is found" (Ollman, 1993: 11). When this line of dialectical logic is followed, it can be said that home-based work is a step forward for women from modest background, even if it does not make radical changes in their lives. It can change their self-perception positively and increase their self-confidence.

Women in Turkey's Labour Market in Times of Pandemic

Due to the effects of the pandemic women have lost more jobs than men in Turkey. Women's labour force participation rates, which is already too low, have decreased even further and more women have started to work from home than men. This resulted in increased household and care responsibilities for women (UN Women, 2020).

Only 3 out of 10 women in the workforce are working in Turkey. While the employment rate of the female population in Turkey was around 29 percent in March 2020, the employment rate of the male population was around 65 percent. In November 2020, this rate dropped to 26 percent for women as a result of the effect of the pandemic. In 2019 alone, 500 thousand women had to leave their jobs because of domestic care responsibilities; 13.5 million women could not participate in working life due to house and care work. The female unemployment rate in Turkey is twice that of the EU member countries and three times that of the OECD member countries. The number of unemployed women reached nearly to 2 million. This represents 52 percent increase in women's unemployment from 2014 to 2019. More women work informally than men and 4 out of every 10 women employed are working informally (DISK-Genel İş, 2020, 2021). In November 2020, women's broad definition of job loss and unemployment rate increased to 43 percent

with the effect of Covid 19, the same rate for men was 27.4 percent (DISK-AR, 2021). According to the same source, the rate of informal workers has decreased, and this rate has decreased by 5.8 points from 41.3 percent to 35.5 percent for women in the same period. The reason for the decrease in informal employment is most likely the dismissal of workers or closure of workplaces in the crisis environment caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. This confirms the thesis that women are often the first to lose their jobs in times of crisis. This tendency can also be observed in the rates of withdrawal from the workforce. With the effect of Covid 19, the rate of withdrawal of men from the workforce in one year from November 2019 to November 2020 was 2.5 percent, while this rate was 8.2 percent for women. ILO (2020, 2021) also confirmed that groups with a higher tendency to work informally, led by women and youth in Turkey, suffered the most from the impact of Covid 19 on unemployment, and home-based work has become even more widespread in times of the Covid 19 pandemic. Number of unemployed increased by 1.4 million people in 2021 compare to the pre-pandemic year of 2019. Currently, 30.9 percent of all workers are registered and in full-time employment, only 16.7 per cent of every 100 women are registered and working full-time in Turkey (DISK-AR, 2022).

All these data show that with the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, women are withdrawn from the workforce and employment more than men and confined to their homes. It would not be wrong to say that the majority of these women, who had to withdraw from the workforce, will turn to home-based work. These women have developed strategies to survive by switching to income-generating jobs that they can do together with other household and care work at home, or by concentrating more on these jobs if they have already been doing this type of work before. Although it is difficult to measure because of its informal character, it can be estimated that home-based work has been on the rise. Home-based workers have faced both economic and health risks under the pandemic conditions, as those who work informally generally cannot benefit from workers' rights such as minimum wage and health insurance coverage.

Methodology

In recent years, instead of the structure-agent dualism in the explanation of social reality in social sciences, an approach that transcends this dualism and emphasises relationality and multidimensionality has started to gain importance. According to this approach, there is a complex interaction between individual lives and social processes (Bourdieu 1996; Bhaskar

1989a, 1989b). Bourdieu argued that the individual's action is neither completely determined by the social structure nor completely autonomous from it and that agents strategically and pragmatically exercise power while being defined bodily, consciously and socioeconomically within structures (Bourdieu 1992: 135; 1996: 482, 483). Following this line of thought, we have adopted neither an objectivist approach, which sees the action of the individual as a direct reflection of the social structure, nor a subjectivist approach. We set out with the understanding that objectivist and subjectivist moments are in a dialectical relationship. Thus, we tried to unearth intersections and interactions between micro level of individuals and the macro levels of culture, economy, policies (Kok 2007: 4, 5) and power relations. Since Individual actions are influenced by global structures (such as the continually shifting and deeply gendered international labour market), this approach might help us connect the 'micro' level of individuals with the 'macro' level of structure. We also tried to combine statistics with qualitative research technics. Home-based work remains hidden from laws and employers as well as from statistics. It is widely known that it is difficult to obtain reliable data on this issue as informal workers hide their jobs during surveys (Bahçe and Memiş, 2010). Hence, the subject is not suitable to be analysed properly by using quantitative methods alone. When quantitative methods such as statistics and econometric models are not used together with the qualitative methods, they reduce the social phenomena that need to be examined multidimensionally to mono dimensional numerical values and isolate them from their historical, social, cultural and spatial dimensions in the name of measurability and objectivity. Hence, we used statistics to show the general trends. Qualitative research method and semi-structured, in-depth interview technique were used in the empirical part of the study.

Tomaskovic-Devey (2014: 52) points out that "it is the relations between people and positions that generate the power, status, and selves that appear to be traits of individuals and jobs". Hence, there is a need for gender-sensitive approaches that take into account the power inequalities caused by the patriarchal relations in the society and in the household in order to accurately analyze the poverty and oppression of women. Therefore, gender-sensitive analysis is adopted in this study as well.

The field research of the study is based on a sample of home-based working women in Kocasinan, one of the core districts of Kayseri. Kayseri is a large industrial city in Central Anatolia, Turkey. The field research was carried out in three poor neighbourhoods of Kocasinan district. While two of these

neighbourhoods were shantytowns, where the garbage of the city was emptied in the past years, today they are in the process of urban transformation. Compared to more central neighbourhoods, they still suffer from lack of infrastructure and access to basic services such as healthcare, education and transport. Although poverty is a disadvantage for both male and female children in accessing education no matter where they live in Turkey, female children face double challenges as a result of sexist values in the society. The fact that Kayseri is a very conservative city further aggravates this situation for the girls in these poor neighbourhoods. Families generally allocate their resources primarily to the education of male children.

Central Anatolia is known with its comparatively strong patriarchal values where it is not considered appropriate for women to work outside the home and women are primarily seen as housewives and/or mothers, not as individuals who participate equally in social life. Therefore, home-based work practices are quite common among women. Home-based work is one of the most common strategies especially for less educated and poor women to survive under the conditions limited by the economic crisis, pandemic and gendered division of labour in the society (participant observation notes). The sample includes in-depth interviews with 15 home-based working women during May 2021 in the lower and lower-middle class neighbourhoods of Kocasinan district, where home-based workers are concentrated. Snowball strategy was used to gain access to interviewees. Reaching the interviewees was quite difficult for various reasons such as lack of time due to being too busy, having young children, not having permission from their husbands, housework etc. The addition of pandemic conditions to social pressures made it even more difficult to reach them.

The average age of the interviewees was 48. The majority of them were primary school graduates. Only three women were high school graduates. Interviewees were coded as G1, G2, ..., G15. Twelve of the interviewees were married and three of them were single. Husbands of two women had co-wife. Two women's spouses died, and one was divorced.

In addition to home-based work, six of the interviewees took care of either the elderly, ill family members or children, and all of the remaining nine stated that they have done similar unpaid care work in the past years. The interviewees in the sample group either worked on their own account or on behalf of the employer (sometimes both at the same time). They knitted wash-clothes, vests; made clothes for children and adults; made bed linen,

embroidery and lace; cooked some provincial food, and sold catalogued products online.

Findings of the Field Research

Housewives or working women?

This section tries to illuminate self-perceptions of home-based working women in Kayseri, Kocasinan by analysing the findings of the field research. With the in-depth interviews conducted in the framework of field research, it has been tried to reveal whether home-based working women who are in the grip of capitalism and patriarchal values see themselves as working women or housewives, how they perceive their work, and whether their income generating work increases their self-confidence.

The primary reasons of home-based work are poverty and gendered division of labour caused by patriarchal value system in the society. Although low level of education is another important factor, it is caused by these two main factors that push them to do home-based work.

Whether home-based working women perceive themselves as working individuals or not, they are primarily responsible for care and reproduction work in the house. They had to take this responsibility, because the men in the house were not willing to share it. Although all women in the sample group, regardless of their marital status, thought that housework was not only for women and should be shared by men in the household, only two women stated that their husbands “helped” them occasionally. According to Mies (2012) “housewifisation” of women is the necessary precondition for the extraction of super profits from home-based working women and it keeps women totally atomised and disorganised as workers. Hence, this mode of production reduces the economic and political costs of production to a minimum and allows for unrestricted maximisation of profits. Federici (1975) points out that under capitalism all workers, men and women are manipulated and exploited, and their relation to capital is mystified. But housework is imposed on women and asserted to be a seemingly natural attribute of female physique and personality. This mystification or invisibility is more real in the case of home-based workers who perform both paid and unpaid work inside their homes throughout the day. Although working from home plays an important role in the invisibility of home-based work, the main factor that makes it invisible is that it is predominantly done by women. Gendered character of invisible work prevents it to be conceived as work and, moreover, not valued (Daniels, 1987; England, Budig and Folbre 2002;

Peterson 2010, 2018) sometimes even by the workers themselves as they associate their work with leisure. In the field research of our study, four of the women out of fifteen define themselves as housewives because they see their work as a leisure activity:

“I do the housework ... After that, when I have nothing else to do, I start doing it.” (G11, 32) .

“I’m sitting at home, I say to myself not to sit idle, who gives five cents to whom without doing anything.” (G3, 47).

In effect, these women work long hours for very low income. Their home-based production is intertwined with house and care work. The majority of them approach their work as an extension of their housework. Therefore, they are not aware that they are producing an economic value.

Five of the women see themselves clearly as working women:

“My husband allowed me to do this work because it is performed at home ... I think of myself as a working woman. I am conscious that I am working.” (G14, 48).

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“I define myself as a working woman. I have nothing to do with being a housewife ... that’s how I always see myself.” (G7, 37).

Although these five women see themselves clearly as working women, male members of the household are strongly opposed to helping let alone sharing. They sometimes get help from their daughters.

“Sometimes my daughter comes and helps. Thankfully, her husband doesn’t say anything. Most of the time I am alone.” (G12, 51).

“Everyone comes in the evening ... I serve their food, their tea, their fruits, I am constantly on my feet until I go to bed... they don’t even pour the water from the jug into their glasses. “Fill the water” he says. There’s a teapot on the table, instead of helping themselves they say “fill it”. When you say help yourselves, a fight breaks out. It is very difficult to change that.” (G4, 50).

Six of them stated that they see themselves as working women even though they introduce themselves as housewives “outside”.

“Of course, to me I am a working woman, and to anyone who asks, I would say I am a housewife.” (G8, 58).

Even G1, who has been doing home-based work for twenty years and has been trying to make a living on her own due to the death of her husband in the last ten years, presents herself as a housewife “outside”.

“Of course, I tell I am a housewife to those who ask, but I see myself as a working woman. I’m working after all. I look after my family. Aren’t I?” (G1, 51).

Women who define themselves as primarily housewives and as housewives outside the home, but consider themselves as working women state the following as the reasons for these self-perceptions: Patriarchal values in the society, their low levels of education, doing these jobs in secret from their husbands, seeing work as something done outside the home and lack of regular income and insurance.

Whether they see themselves as working women or not, all women in the sample group seek support from the state in the form of credits, social insurance, marketing opportunities for their products, courses to acquire new skills etc. Turkey has not yet signed the ILO’s Homework Convention (177). Its main aims are to promote and protect the rights of those who work at home creating products for an employer. The signing of this convention is important for home-based workers to acquire the same status as other workers.

Increasing self confidence

Our research on home-based working women in Kayseri centre showed that the majority of the women in the sample group felt more self-confidence and had greater part in decision making at home as a result of their paid home-based work. G13 was selling products through internet for different brands. She was the only one among interviewees with insurance coverage, which she paid herself. She expressed her feelings about how her job has boosted her self-confidence with the words below:

“Before this job, I was not a person who could express myself. I bettered myself with it. I wasn’t the type to raise a hand to read our

oath in elementary school. Will someone laugh at me? am I doing it wrong? But if I were to be put in the middle of the army right now, I would be able to defend myself. Because now my job is to talk to people, to persuade them.” (G13, 33).

G2, has been carried out home-based work for twenty years. She was making quilts, cooking some traditional food on order. She was the only bread winner in the periods when her husband was unemployed. Now, her husband has a co-wife.

“It feels better to spend my own earnings ... You don’t have to worry about your husband is going to get angry ... You’re freer than before, you have self-confidence ... It’s nice to stand on your own feet ... Thank goodness.” (G2, 58).

As can be seen, most of the women in the sample group was unclear about defining themselves as housewives or working women. On the other hand, almost all of them were positive about their income-generating work. The women in question expressed that they were more respected in the family and were able to take part in domestic decision-making processes more than before. This is a step forward for women in Kayseri, where gendered division of labour is still quite strong in the society.

Realising their potential

Although the interviewed women saw themselves primarily in certain categories such as mothers and women in charge of household chores, their home-based work did not satisfy them regardless of their age and marital status. All of the women said that if they had the choice, they would have worked outside the home in a job with insurance coverage. Four women who were relatively better off than the others wanted to set up business when the economic stagnation in the markets caused by corona is over. However, all four of them stated that they still needed state support to achieve this. G5 who was making clothes, bed linen etc. at home was waiting for the pandemic to end while she was doing research to open her shop, which her husband reluctantly approved after years of persuasion.

“So, if the pandemic ends, I am hopeful for the future ... I’m thinking of opening a boutique style shop for clothes” (G5, 50).

G3 who was making and selling handmade knitwear, food, sauces from home as well as fresh and dried vegetables grown by her was also waiting for the effects of Covid 19 pandemic on the markets to be over in order to establish her business and to realise her dream.

“I really want to open a yufka shop ... One of my goals is to plant garlic in the village. They say there’s a lot of money in garlic.” (G3, 47).

Starting their businesses is not only economically important to them, it also means having a respectable job outside the home, realising their potential as independent individuals, standing on their own feet, having insurance, being visible, and not having to ask for money from their husbands.

Discussion and Conclusion

Home based informal activities in the liberal literature have generally been treated as innovative self-employment or informal entrepreneurship. According to this literature informal economic activities are not always related to low-income jobs performed by the poorer sections of society. Some of the informal economic activities can be quite innovative and generate good income. Although such activities began to rise long before the Covid 19 pandemic, their numbers are increasing rapidly in the atmosphere of the deepening economic crisis. Rising unemployment rates have forced many people to find new specialised niches in different sectors. The result has been the emergence of a relatively new approach focused on the innovation-based informal economy and informal entrepreneurship. The main argument in this literature is that participation of the self-employed in the informal economy is lower among marginalised populations. Instead, “largely relatively affluent, better educated, more professional groups of the self-employed display a greater propensity to participate in the informal economy” in Western economies (Williams and Horodnic, 2015: 227; Williams, 2007). However, according to critical researchers, informal entrepreneurs make up only a small portion of informal workers. According to the statistics, globally around 60 percent of all workers are informal workers and 45 percent of all informal workers are self-employed excluding agriculture, this rate goes up to 71 percent in developing countries. Informal self-employed who hire workers and might therefore be considered an entrepreneurial class represent only 3 per cent of all informal workers globally: Only 3 percent of men informal workers and 1 percent of women informal workers (Bonnet, Vanek and Chen, 2019: 6). The majority of the self-employed are not entrepreneurs, but rather

working poor persons who operate in a single person or family units (Chen and Carre, 2020). Self-employment is often a form of disguised waged work (Breman, 2020). Deleaney et al. (2019: 6) point out that the redefinition of workers as entrepreneurs, self-employed and non-workers is a contribution of neoliberal regulatory regimes. It can be regarded as a strategy to circumvent labour rights and related protective measures to exclude them from waged workers (Balaban and Sarioğlu 2008: 22). Since the women in our sample in Kayseri/Kocasinan are self-employed out of necessity, not out of their own choice, they cannot be called self-employed entrepreneurs, but they can be called as false self-employed. Their access to formal labour employment is very limited due to sexist values in the society, limited educational opportunities and poverty. It can be said that it is quite “innovative” for them finding income generating ways even under these difficult conditions.

In the critical and feminist literature, home-based work, whether in the form of self-employment or home-based work in direct connection with the factory, is generally evaluated with its negative features such as the weakest form of labour at the bottom of global value chain, the lowest paid and invisible, low quality, unregulated and largely unorganised, lacking of social protection, keeping women within the boundaries drawn by patriarchal values and reinforcing their traditional roles etc. and it is emphasised that homeworkers should be organised for empowerment (some examples from this vast literature: Mitter, 1986; Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987; Boris and Daniels, 1989; Phizacklea and Wolkowitz, 1995; Mies, 1998, 2012; Carr, Chen Tate, 2000; Beneria, 2001; Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006; Pearson, 2004, 2007; Burchielli, Buttigieg and Delaney, 2008; Patel and Pandya, 2017; Deleaney, 2019; Bonnet, Vanek and Chen, 2019; Chen and Carre, 2020; Breman, 2020). According to some feminists, women’s wage work can be seen as an opportunity for themselves and their family’s economic well-being as well as for their dignity, respect and autonomy under multiple constraints of patriarchy and capitalism. However, flexible employment empowers women in a way to serve flexible capitalism and patriarchy disproportionately and justifies the neoliberal state’s call for women’s labour force participation. Therefore, women’s empowerment through employment alone would not become a transformative power to challenge patriarchy. Women’s real empowerment necessitates feminist consciousness and systemic changes for enabling environments for gender equality (Fraser 2013; Ali 2014; Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2017; Suzuki Him 2020).

Findings of studies on homeworking in Turkey also generally argue that this type of work does not change power relations and division of labour at home, and women who carry out home-based work do not see themselves as working individuals (Berik 1987; Ayata 1987; Lordođlu 1990; White 1994; ađatay and Berik 1994; Toksöz and Özşuca 2002; Balaban and Sarıođlu 2008; Atasü-Topçuođlu 2010; Yaman-Öztürk and Dedeođlu 2010; Tartanođlu 2017; Dedeođlu 2021). There are fewer studies on home based work which argue that although there has not been a radical transformation of power relations and division of labour in domestic relations, entry of women in working life changes women’s view about themselves, and they have relatively greater independence in making decisions at home (Kümbetođlu, 1995; Kandiyoti, 1997; Eraydın and Erendil, 1999; Hattatođlu, 2000; 2010; Moçoş, 2004; Kocabaş, Besler and Özgüler, 2017; Aşkın and Aşkın, 2019; Tekbaş, 2019). Kocabaş et al. (2017)’s research also shows that all of the home-based working women see themselves clearly as working women. The study is conducted in Eskişehir. Eskişehir is a more modern city compare to Kayseri, and it is not unusual for women to work outside the home. Although the women in sample group produce their products at home, they sell some of these products in handmade marketplace provided by the municipality. In the study conducted by Tezcek and Polat (2016) in one of the shantytowns of Izmir, which received immigrants especially from Eastern Anatolia, where patriarchal values are more powerful than the west part, home-based working women do not see themselves as workers; although they are directly affiliated with a company, they define themselves as mothers and housewives. The authors associate this with the fact that these women carry out production at their homes. On the other hand, Tezcek and Polat also point out that the hierarchical relationship within the migrant patriarchal family has been changing with the effect of capitalism and male power peculiar to feudal-patriarchal structures has been weakening and taking a new form. This new form is called patriarchal capitalism. (Hartmann, 1979; Acar-Savran, 2003).

Home-based work, which was one of the common forms of labour control in the pre-industrial era and began to disappear towards the beginning of the 20th century, was revived especially in the flexible accumulation period when neoliberal policies were started to be implemented widely in the 1980s to minimize the costs of production and to overcome the crisis of the world capitalist system. The flexibility of production and labour processes on a global scale has caused the production at home to be seen as an extension of the gender roles attributed to women, and it has paved the way for women to work in informal and unorganised ways for very low wages at an increasing

rate. Home-based work emerged as a type of work that best exemplified these intertwined relationships between income-generating jobs at home on the one hand and unpaid reproductive work on the other.

As seen above, according to the vast majority of the relevant literature in the world and in Turkey, home-based work reinforces and reproduces unequal gender roles in households and in society and serves flexible capitalism. Women who are in the grip of patriarchal values in the society and poverty have no choice but to do this job. On the other hand, according to a small number of studies, including our own, although home-based work does not radically transform gender roles and it is a survival strategy for poor, uneducated women under the limiting conditions of deepening economic crisis, pandemic and gendered division of labour in society, it may be a step forward for women in the direction of change in those unequal gender roles. As Hattatoğlu points out (2010), at least women realize their own power. We agree that macro level structures such as patriarchal capitalism, gendered labour markets, flexible accumulation etc. influence and limit the actions of individuals, but the same processes dialectically present some opportunities for individuals or groups. According to Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity (1989a: 36), society neither exists independently of human activities nor is it the product of such activities alone. Individuals can therefore exercise transformative power over their own conditions of existence.

Interviews conducted within the framework of our field study in Kocasinan/ Kayseri showed that despite its disadvantages, home-based work can have some positive effects for women. We observed that home-based work meant a lot more than easing economic difficulties for women such as feeling more respected in the family, having greater say in domestic decision making, standing on their own feet, realising their potential and not having to ask money from the male members of the family or anybody else. In short, home-based work comparatively increased status of the women in the household, and more importantly increased their self-confidence and changed their self-perception positively. The first sign of this have been observed in the fact that increasing self-confidence of some of the women, who have been performing home-based work under patriarchal pressures of their husbands for several years, enough to go out of the house and dream of starting their own business. This will not end patriarchal pressures on them, but it is a challenge and one big step forward.

Although home-based work can open some doors for women, it was not a job they would have chosen of their own free will. Overcoming the gendered division of labour in the society is a long-term process, but measures can be taken to strengthen the position of home-based workers in the labour market. First of all, home-based work has to be defined as a line of business and it should be ensured that home-based workers have equal rights with other workers. Turkey has not yet signed the ILO's 177 Home Work Convention. It is of great importance to sign this convention and to make legal arrangements in line with the requirements of it.

Designing an unconditional basic income policy based on individuals, not households, that is sufficient to meet basic needs, ensure living in dignity, and create employment opportunities are among the first steps to be taken.

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