Perceived Discrimination among Muslim, Muslim Feminist and Feminist Women in Türkiye

Türkiye'deki Müslüman, Müslüman Feminist ve Feminist Kadınlar Arasında Algılanan Ayrımcılık

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Abstract

The current study aims to explore the perceived discrimination among three women groups in Türkiye: Muslims, Muslim feminists, and feminists. Four hundred fifteen women aged 18-76 (*M* = 40.6, *SD* = 16.5) participated in the study. The sample included 177 Muslim women, 92 Muslim feminists, and 146 feminist women. We found significant differences in perceived individual and group discrimination in three women groups. While at the individual level, all groups differed from each other, at the group level discrimination, self-labeling feminists did not differ, yet Muslim women perceived the lower levels of discrimination. Feminists indicated experiencing discrimination mostly from their close ones and outgroups/others. At the same time, Muslim women specified discrimination mostly from religious people, and Muslim feminist women indicated discrimination mostly from outgroups/others and school/work environments. The findings were discussed in terms of the literature on the subject. Future research is encouraged on the authentic identities of women in Türkiye and their discrimination experiences.

Keywords: Perceived discrimination, Muslim women, Muslim feminist women, feminist women

Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki üç kadın grubu arasında algılanan ayrımcılığı araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır: Müslümanlar, Müslüman feministler ve feministler. Çalışmaya 18-76 yaş aralığında (M = 40.6, SD = 16.5) dört yüz on beş kadın katılmıştır. Örneklemde 177 Müslüman kadın, 92 Müslüman feminist kadın ve 146 feminist kadın yer almıştır. Üç kadın grubunda da algılanan bireysel ve grup ayrımcılığında önemli farklılıklar bulunmuştur. Bireysel düzeyde tüm gruplar birbirlerinden farklılaşırken, grup düzeyinde ayrımcılıkta kendini feminist olarak etiketleyenler farklılaşmamış, ancak Müslüman kadınlar daha düşük düzeyde ayrımcılık algılamıştır. Feministler en çok yakınlarından ve dış gruplardan/diğerlerinden ayrımcılığa uğradıklarını belirtirken, Müslüman kadınlar en çok dindarlardan, Müslüman feminist kadınlar ise en çok dış gruplardan/diğerlerinden ve okul/iş ortamlarından ayrımcılığa uğradıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bulgular konuyla ilgili literatür açısından tartışılmıştır. Türkiye'deki kadınların otantik kimlikleri ve ayrımcılık deneyimleri üzerine gelecekteki araştırmalar teşvik edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algılanan ayrımcılık, Müslüman kadınlar, Müslüman feminist kadınlar, feminist kadınlar

Introduction

Despite the developments in the current years, gender inequality and discrimination remain persistent problems. In daily life, women are discriminated against at home, at work, on the street, and at school based on being a woman (see Radke et al., 2016). According to the gender gap report of the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2023), despite the improvements globally, Türkiye ranked the lowest with Azerbaijan and Tajikistan among Eurasia and Central Asia region. WEF (2023) evaluates the countries based on institutional indicators: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Although indexes like the gender gap report represent a general overview of the countries, the unique characteristics of countries differentiate the inequalities and discrimination women face. In Türkiye, the intersection of varying ethnic, political, and religious identities also determine the women's experiences of discrimination. While feminism is associated with negative connotations like men-hater, perversion, and ugliness (Gürhan, 2010), religious women in Türkiye also face stereotypes such as "backward," "uneducated," and "anti-modern" (Özçetin, 2009, p.117). Within the intersection of feminism and Islam, Muslim feminist women also perceive discrimination both in secular and religious settings (Okuyan & Curtin, 2018). Therefore, in the present study, we mainly explore the perceived discrimination among three women groups in Türkiye: Muslims, Muslim feminists, and feminists.

Perceived Discrimination

Discrimination can be described as unequal treatment or maltreatment by others because of someone's personality or group characteristics (Thoits, 2010), and perceived discrimination refers to the subjective perception of the discrimination, yet it does not involve discrimination that the subject may not notice (Wooten & Ferguson, 2021). In societies with power imbalances, the potential for discrimination is ever-present, and individuals from disadvantaged groups frequently face unjust treatment (Schmitt et al., 2014). Women are one of the underprivileged groups that face discrimination in society. However, there is no single homogenous women identity. In addition to their gender identity, women can be discriminated against because of religious, ethnic, racial, and political identities (Murrar et al., 2023; Washington & Randall, 2023).

Perceived discrimination is associated with several adverse outcomes. For instance, Pascoe and Richman (2009) found detrimental psychological consequences such as depression and anxiety and different physiological problems, including hypertension, cancer, the potential for substance abuse, and obesity. Furthermore, the study of Ryff and colleagues (2003) showed that perceived discrimination is related to lower mastery, autonomy, and self-acceptance levels. Similarly, Thoits (2010) argued that perceived discrimination as a social stressor challenges the mastery, self-efficacy, and self-esteem of the person exposed to discrimination. So, perceiving discrimination makes people feel less accepted and lacking resources when facing difficulties. In their meta-analysis, Schmitt and colleagues (2014) showed that perceiving discrimination negatively impacts psychological well-being across various measures both at the individual and group levels.

The literature shows the crucial consequences (e.g. well-being, life satisfaction, depression) of perceiving discrimination in varying groups (Schmitt et al., 2014). Considering the adverse effects, this study first focuses on the perceived discrimination at group and individual levels as well as the women's discrimination experiences. To our knowledge, no study compares Muslim, Muslim feminist, and feminist women in Türkiye and their personal discrimination experiences.

Discrimination towards Muslims, Muslim feminists, and Feminist Women

Muslims live in different parts of the world as majority and minorities. The studies about perceived discrimination against Muslims generally focus on the maltreatment of Muslim immigrants in the host countries. Salahshour and Boamah (2020), for instance, showed that one in four Muslims in New Zealand perceive discrimination in their workplace and feel that they are assigned tasks due to their religious identity. Muslim women, however, could be more visible compared to men because of the religious clothes, like hijabs. The studies on Muslim women in Europe and the U.S. mainly focus on the discrimination towards Muslim women who are veiled and unveiled in work settings (Di Stasio & Veit, 2023; Ghumman & Ryan, 2013). In both studies, researchers found that in job applications, veiled Muslim women are discriminated against. Linando (2022) compares the studies examining discrimination towards Muslims in Muslim majority and minority countries regarding macro-societal, meso-organizational, and micro-individual factors and according to findings, in Muslim-majority countries, women are discriminated against subtly at all levels. Within the intersection of Islam and feminism, Muslim feminist women in Türkiye have increased visibility in recent years (Taştekin, 2019) with Muslim feminist associations such as Havle and blogs like Reçel. Güç (2008) defines Islamic Feminism as an approach that discusses the role of women in religion and tradition from a critical perspective, emphasizes gender equality, and uses the Quran and other religious texts (e.g., hadith, tafsir) to question the male-dominated character of traditional norms and religious interpretations. Having one of the highest Muslim populations

in Türkiye, Yüce Tar (2013) refers to Muslim women's struggle as a war on two fronts, with modernism-Kemalism-secularism on the one hand and with Muslim men on the other. While Muslim women engage in discussions with Muslim men in the context of gender inequality, the feminist movement, which positions itself as secular, is biased against religious identity (Okuyan & Curtin, 2018).

Despite the limited research on the topic, studies highlighted the discrimination Muslim feminist women face. The quest for the rights of Muslim feminist women in Türkiye has come to the fore with the headscarf bans, especially during and after the postmodern coup on February 28th. However, according to Güngör (2018), women, who had previously struggled mostly against the prohibitions imposed by the state, started to oppose political Islamists in addition to the borders drawn by Kemalists since the 1990s. Between the intersection of their religious, gender, and political identities, Muslim feminist women in Türkiye perceive discrimination due to their religion in secular settings or by feminists (Okuyan & Curtin, 2018). At the same time, they are also discriminated against because of their feminist identity in religious settings. In a similar vein, Gul's (2021) interviews revealed the discrimination, criticism, and threats from both *inside* and *outside* Muslim feminist women being exposed. A woman (Age 21, engaged in gender activism) from Okuyan and Curtin's study explains inside criticism like this:

> "*When you are a Muslim woman, you get criticized by the religious community the most, your headscarf, your political views, everything.... You become a target. They immediately label and ''other'' you* (Okuyan & Curtin, 2018, p. 501)."

As the quote shows, being a gender activist or identifying as a feminist is not always well regarded, and feminism or the feminist label often evokes negative connotations in the minds of non-feminists (Huddy et al., 2000). Studies have shown the prejudice and discrimination against feminists (e.g., Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Gervais & Hoffman, 2013). For instance, Roy and colleagues (2009) found that when a feminist woman expresses dissatisfaction about workplace discrimination, she is more likely to be seen as a "complainer" compared to a non-feminist woman. Similarly, in Türkiye, feminists are seen negatively and stereotyped as men-hater, perverts, and ugly (Gürhan, 2010). In the study on stereotypes about women's rights, Sakallı (2001) found that women who used the labels feminism-feminist were evaluated with more negative adjectives. However, when the labels women's rights/women's rights defenders were used in the scales instead of feminism-feminist, the movement for women's rights and the person working on this issue were evaluated with more positive adjectives. In a recent study, Çetin (2023) examined hate speech about Greta Thunberg and found misogyny and hate speech against feminists in the Ekşi Sözlük entries.

The Present Study

Prejudice and discrimination towards women have been well-established in the literature (e.g., Agadullina et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2017). However, varying women groups, with their ethnic, religious, and political identities, experience discrimination differently. Therefore, in this exploratory research, we aim to show (1) whether there is a difference between Muslim, Muslim feminist, and feminist women regarding group and individual discrimination and (2) from whom these women report the most discrimination. In light of the literature, our hypotheses are as follows:

H_1: There will be expected to be a significant difference between Muslim, Muslim feminist, and feminist women in terms of perceived group and individual discrimination.

H_2: Feminist women will be expected to perceive more discrimination compared to Muslim feminists and Muslim women.

H_3: Muslim feminist women will be expected to perceive more discrimination compared to Muslim women.

H_4: Discrimination experiences and groups of women will be expected to be different from each other.

Method

Participants

Participants were reached through social media (Facebook groups, Twitter, and Instagram). Six hundred fifty-nine people participated in the study. Despite the study announcement, there were male participants and female participants who did not define themselves as Muslim, Muslim feminist, or feminist. Therefore, we exclude the participants who do not meet the criteria. Some participants declined to study, and some did not complete the study link. Finally, we checked for the multivariate outliers, and after the data cleaning, the final sample included 415 women between the ages of 18-76 (M = 40.6, SD = 16.5). There were 177 Muslims, 92 Muslim feminists, and 146 feminists for the remaining analysis. Most of them were

living in metropoles (49.9%) and were university students (31.6%) or graduates (53.3%). Participants were mainly married (47.8%), and the mean of the political identity of the sample was 4.23 (*SD* = 2.85) on a scale ranging from 1 to 11, where one indicates left and 11 indicates right.

Measures

Perceived discrimination. The Perceived Discrimination Scale (PDS; Baysu, 2007) assessed participants' perceived discrimination regarding individuals and groups. Perceived group discrimination subscale of PDS is an adapted version of the Perceived Group Discrimination Scale (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995) by Baysu (2007). Initially, it was a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), and it consisted of 5 items such as *"Are people from your group ever discriminated against when looking for a job?"*. PDS's perceived individual discrimination subscale is a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). It has four items like *"I feel disapproved because of my identity."* In the study, participants were asked to complete the questionnaires by considering the group they indicated as belonging to (*Muslim, Muslim feminist, and feminist*) at the beginning of the study. Higher scores showed more perceived discrimination both at the group and individual levels. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha scores were found to be 0.93 and 0.87, respectively.

Discrimination experiences. To better understand in which situation participants feel that they are subject to discrimination, an open-ended question such as *"Personally, from whom did you feel discrimination the most against the group (Muslim, Muslim feminist, and feminist) that you said you belonged to?"* was asked.

Demographics. A demographic information form was given to the participants to understand the sample characteristics. In the beginning, the gender (*male, female, other*) and *"Which of the indicated groups would you describe yourself as belonging to?"* (*Muslim, Muslim feminist, feminist, or neither)* questions were asked as an exclusion criterion of the study. Subsequently, age, residency (*metropolis, city, county, town/village*), education level (*elementary school, middle school, high school, university, graduate level),* and marital status (*married, single*) were asked. Lastly, participants indicated their political views from 0 (*left*) to 10 (*right*).

Procedure

Before collecting the data, we obtained the necessary ethical permissions with the decision of the Middle East Technical University Applied Ethics Research Center dated 15.02.2022 and numbered 28620816. The participants were reached through social media platforms, and data will be gathered via the online survey platform Qualtrics. Firstly, the participants were given informed consent. Later, participants were asked to answer the following question, "Which of the indicated groups would you describe yourself as belonging to?" as an inclusion criterion for the study. For those who describe themselves as Muslim, feminist, or Muslim feminist, the study continued, and a demographic information form was given to the participants. Then, the Perceived Discrimination Scale was presented. Lastly, discriminatory situations that the participants experienced were asked with an open-ended question. The titles of the scales were replaced by numbers to prevent any bias. After completing the questionnaires, participants were thanked for participating, and a debriefing form was given.

Results

The data were analyzed by using Jamovi and SPSS. First, the descriptive statistics and correlation between study variables were examined. The results showed that perceived group and individual discrimination were positively correlated (r = .59, p<.001). When participants embraced the feminist identity, they were more likely to perceive discrimination. In addition, group (r =-.31, p<.001) and individual (r = -.30, p<.001) discrimination were negatively correlated with age. In other words, participants were less likely to perceive discrimination when they got older. Marital status was positively correlated with discrimination at the group (r =.31, p<.001) and individual (r =.15, p<.01) levels, indicating married participants' higher perceived discrimination. Finally, political view was negatively correlated with perceived group (r =-.12, p<.05) and individual (r =-.13, p<.01) discrimination, showing left-wing participants' higher perceived discrimination.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	SD
1. Group	—							5.93	.88
2. Age	-.24***	—						40.6	16.5
3. Education	-.03	.27***	—					4.49	.97
4. Marital status	.23***	-.38***	-.17***	—				1.61	.65
5. Political view	-.21***	.05	-.10	-.05	—			4.23	2.85
6. Group discrimination	.64***	-.31***	-.09	.30***	-.12*	—		2.64	1.01
7. Individual discrimination	.52***	-.30***	-.06	.15**	-.13**	.59***	—	1.81	.79

Note. Perceived group and individual discrimination ranged from 0 (never) to 5 (always), with higher scores indicating more perceived discrimination. Political views ranged from 1 (left) to 11 (right). The group was coded as 1: Muslims, 2: Muslim feminists, and 3: Feminists. Marital status was coded as 1: Single and 2: Married.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 1 Correlation between Study Variables

Then, we conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare the perceived group and individual discrimination among Muslim, Muslim feminist, and feminist women. The results revealed a significant difference in perceived group discrimination between three women groups (F (2, 398) = 165, $p < .001$, η^2 = .45). Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons showed that Muslim feminist women (M = 3.09, SD = .69) perceived significantly higher group discrimination than Muslim women (M = 1.85, SD = .82; t (398) = 12.65, $p < .001$). Furthermore, compared to Muslim women, feminist women also perceived higher group discrimination (M = 3.30, SD = .70; t (398) = 17, $p < .001$). There was no significant difference between feminist and Muslim feminist women in terms of perceived group discrimination (t (398) = 2.03, $p = .11$). Concerning perceived individual discrimination, the results showed a significant difference in perceived individual discrimination between Muslim, Muslim feminist, and feminist women (F (2, 398) = 76.2, $p < .001$, η^2 = .28). Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that Muslim feminist women (M = 1.95, SD = .76) perceived significantly higher individual discrimination than Muslim women (M = 1.35, SD = .58; t (398) = 6.79, $p < .001$). Moreover, feminist women (M = 2.27, SD = .72) perceived higher individual discrimination compared to both Muslim feminists (t (398) = 3.44, $p = .002$) and Muslim women (t (398) = 12.13, $p < .001$).

To examine the group differences in personal discrimination experiences, first, we categorize the participants' answers to the question, "Personally, from whom did you feel discrimination the most against the group (Muslim, Muslim feminist, and feminist) that you said you belonged to?" Three hundred forty-two participants wrote varying answers such as husband, family, professors, employer, men, and religious people. From these, twenty-three Muslim women and seven Muslim feminist women said they had not been discriminated against. Four categories emerged from the participants' responses: (1) close ones, (2) school/work environment, (3) religious people, and (4) outgroups/others (e.g., atheists, people on the streets, and secular people). Then, we conducted a chi-square analysis with 312 participants who indicated personal discrimination experiences. Chi-square analysis revealed a significant group difference in discrimination experiences (χ^2(6, N= 312) = 26.217, p< .001). More specifically, feminist women significantly differ from Muslim feminists and Muslim women in experiencing discrimination primarily by their close ones ($p < .05$). Muslim women, on the other hand, significantly differ from Muslim feminists and feminists in experiencing discrimination primarily by religious people ($p < .05$).

Discussion

In the current study, we focused on the perceived group and individual discrimination among three women groups in Türkiye: Muslims, Muslim feminists, and feminists. We examined the differences between these groups regarding discrimination and explored who they think is discriminated against the most. The results revealed significant group differences in perceived group and individual discrimination. At the group level, both Muslim feminists and feminists reported higher perceived discrimination than Muslim women. There is no difference between Muslim feminists and feminist women in perceived group discrimination. However, feminists were higher in perceived individual discrimination than Muslim feminists and Muslim women, while Muslim feminists were higher than Muslim women. The findings were mainly expected in terms of our hypotheses.

Feminist women's higher perceived individual discrimination compared to Muslim feminists and Muslim women could be due to the feminists' consciousness regarding social inequalities and injustices (Liss & Erchull, 2010). Especially women who embrace feminist identities publicly tend to engage in everyday feminism, which is characterized as "talking to people about social justice issues, negotiating relationships, and making consumer choices" (Kelly, 2014, p. 88). Besides, having a stigmatized and marginalized identity could make feminist women more susceptible to perceiving discrimination (Anastosopoulos & Desmarais, 2015). We found that the feminists personally reported experiencing the most discrimination were close ones and outgroups/others. Compared to Muslim women, Muslim feminists' higher perceived discrimination could also be related to their feminist identity and, thus, feminist consciousness about discrimination. Muslim women reported lower perceived individual discrimination compared to other groups. This could be related to several reasons. First, since Türkiye is a Muslim-majority country, they are not discriminated as much as feminists. Secondly, the items of the individual discrimination asked participants to evaluate considering their Muslim identity, so a Muslim participant may not think of as a Muslim woman but as a Muslim person. For further studies, researchers may consider giving instructions as "a Muslim woman" to understand their unique experiences. Muslim women indicated experiencing the most discrimination from outgroups/others and religious people. Muslim women's outgroups/others mainly included the people on the streets (outside), atheists, and secular people. The findings were parallel with Okuyan and Curtin's (2018) study, showing Muslim women's perceived discrimination in secular settings.

We employed a convenient and snowball sampling method, restricting our findings to the specific group of women who use the Internet. Consequently, it is essential to acknowledge that the study's generalizability is constrained, and there is a need for replication with women representing more diverse educational and economic backgrounds. The study's limitations include the qualitative nature of the findings despite an open-ended question. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the discrimination experiences of these women, future research could benefit from using qualitative and experimental methodologies. The next step could be to examine the consequences of discrimination; future studies should look at the outcomes, such as well-being and life satisfaction (Schmitt et al., 2014), and coping mechanisms among these groups.

The current study emphasizes significant insights into how perceived discrimination varies among three distinct groups of women in Türkiye: Muslims, Muslim feminists, and feminists. It underscores the importance for practitioners to recognize the different levels of discrimination experienced by each group, considering their intersectional identities. Considering the cultural context is essential, particularly in Muslim-majority countries like Türkiye, where religious and secular dynamics shape discrimination experiences. Addressing these issues enables practitioners to better assist women in Türkiye facing discrimination based on their religious and feminist identities.

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