



Araştırma Makalesi • Research Article

Women's Discrimination in Engineering Faculties: A View from Turkey

Mühendislik Fakültelerinde Kadınlara Yönelik Ayrımcılık: Türkiye'den bir Bakış

Fatma Fulya Tepe^{a*}

^a Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Okul Öncesi Öğretmenliği Bölümü, İstanbul /Türkiye.
ORCID: 0000-0002-7276-6561

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Makale Geçmişi:

Başvuru tarihi: 10 Ağustos 2018
Düzeltilme tarihi: 12 Kasım 2018
Kabul tarihi: 24 Aralık 2018

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Türkiye'de Kadın Akademisyenler
Mühendislikte Kadın Akademisyenler
Türk Akademiyasında Kadınlara Yönelik Ayrımcılık

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 August 2018
Received in revised form 12 November 2018
Accepted 24 December 2018

Keywords:

Women Academics in Turkey
Women Academics in Engineering
Women's Discrimination in Turkish Academia

ÖZ

Bu araştırmanın amacı, akademisyen kadınların Türkiye'de de cinsiyet ayrımcılığına giren hareket ve tutumlara maruz kaldığı hipotezine destek sağlamaktır. Bu çalışma, en iyi fenomenolojik bir araştırma olarak tanımlanabilir. Türk üniversitelerinin mühendislik bölümlerinde çalışan 15 kadın ve bir erkek akademisyenle 2008 ve 2013 yılları arasında yapılan 16 görüşmeye dayanmaktadır. Veri yorumunda yakın okuma tekniği kullanılmıştır. Görüşmelerde akademisyen kadınlar işe alım ve yükseltmelerde ayrımcılık yaşadıklarını; ayrıca toplumsal cinsiyetleri nedeniyle teşvik edilmeme ve küçümsenme deneyimlediklerini belirtmektedirler. Çalışmanın sonucu Türk üniversitelerinde toplumsal cinsiyet ayrımcılığının boyutu ve doğasını daha iyi anlamak için daha fazla araştırma yapılmasına ihtiyaç olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to provide support for the hypothesis that academic women are being subjected to acts and attitudes of a gender discriminatory nature in the Turkish context, too. This study can be best described as a phenomenological research. It is based on sixteen interviews made with fifteen women and one male academic between 2008 and 2013 in engineering departments of Turkish universities. Close reading was used to interpret the data. In the interviews, academic women report that they have experienced discrimination in hiring and promotions, as well as discouragement and belittlement due to their gender. The conclusion is that more research is needed to further understand the extent and nature of gender discrimination at Turkish universities.

1. Introduction

Barriers faced by women in science in the Western world have been documented extensively at least for the last six decades (Lewin & Duchan, 1971; Jones & Lovejoy, 1980; Tripp-Knowles, 1995). However, according to the existing research on academic women in Turkey, women's discrimination in academia is not a major problem (Acar 1983; Köker 1988; Acar 1991; Öztan & Doğan, 2015).

On the other hand, taking the country context into account, one will find that 9.2 per cent of all Turkish women above 25 years old are still illiterate and only 15 per cent have high

school education (İstatistiklerle Kadın 2015, 2016). To further illustrate the burden and indeed the danger of being a woman in Turkey, we may note that 1675 women have been killed since 2010 for reasons such as wanting to divorce, having rejected a male partner, being the victims of sexual assault, and so on (Türkiye'de 2010'dan beri 1675 kadın öldürüldü, 2017). All this might seem unrelated to the more specific situation of women academics, but it goes to prove that women have to deal with oppressive social structures, and given that universities cannot be that much isolated from what is going on in the rest of society, it should also tell us something about what it means to be a Turkish woman academic. Moreover, considering that the male to female

* Sorumlu yazar/Corresponding author.
e-posta: fulyatepe@aydin.edu.tr

ratio among Turkish professors is 71 per cent male to 29 per cent female (YÖK, 2016) and 80.9 per cent male to 19.1 per cent female in engineering and technology (European Commission, 2013: 93), the gender disparity in academia becomes even more evident. This situation makes it even less likely that there should be no discrimination against women academics. My research departs from this background and aims to provide support for the hypothesis that discrimination against women exists in Turkish academia. Some suggestions concerning where, when, and how such discrimination takes place will be presented, based on sixteen interviews made with fifteen women academics and one male academic working in engineering faculties.

In this study, inspired by the work of Liisa Husu (2005), I will use the gendered organizations theory of Acker together with the sex discrimination typology of Benokraitis and Feagin. In her theory, Acker identifies the academy as a gendered organization (Acker, 1992a: 567). According to her, “to say an organization or any analytic unit is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (Acker, 1990: 146). Acker describes gendered organizations in terms of four processes. These are (1) the production of gender divisions; (2) the creation of gendered symbols, images and forms of consciousness; (3) interactions between individuals as a site of power relations; and (4) the internal mental work of individuals in relation to their positionality in the gendered organization (Acker, 1992b: 252–253). Gendered processes and practices may be open and overt or deeply hidden (Acker, 1992b: 251). This distinction corresponds to the one made by Benokraitis and Feagin’s distinction between overt, subtle and covert discrimination. According to Benokraitis and Feagin, while “overt sex discrimination refers to an unequal and harmful treatment of women that is readily apparent, visible [sic], and observable and can be easily documented ... (s)ubtle sex discrimination refers to the unequal and harmful treatment of women that is visible but often not noticed because we have internalized sexist behaviour as ‘normal,’ ‘natural,’ ‘acceptable’, or ‘customary’” (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1986: 30). Covert discrimination, on the other hand, refers to “hidden, clandestine, maliciously motivated” unequal and harmful treatment of women that is “very difficult to document” (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1986: 31).

Researchers have been studying the situation of Turkish women academics for the last four decades now (Acar, 1983; Köker, 1988; Acar, 1991a, Acar, 1996, Adak & Cömertler, 2005; Şentürk, 2012; Poyraz, 2013; Ayyıldız Ünnü & Baybars & Kesken, 2014; Öztan & Doğan, 2015; Yenilmez, 2016). Especially early studies made in the 1980s and 1990s but also some later studies were comprehensive and aimed at covering all aspects of the lives of academic women from Turkey. Here only findings related to discrimination against women academics will be presented. Feride Acar was the first researcher who specifically studied women academics in Turkey and some part of her research was about women’s discrimination in academia. Most academic women in Acar’s research understood equality in terms of formal criteria and conditions, and therefore generally reported that there was no discrimination against women at universities. Accordingly, in the research made by Acar and Eser Köker,

women’s discrimination was presented as a phenomenon experienced by only a few young women academics (Acar, 1983; Köker, 1988; Acar, 1991a; Acar, 1996). However, when it came to the informal aspects of the academic life, Acar’s study provides us with the first glimpses of women academics’ discrimination experiences:

Generally, Turkish academic women report having received fair and equal treatment in the academic world, their perceptions thus supporting the optimistic interpretations of the hard data. So far as most women are concerned, discrimination in the university has simply not been their personal experience ... However, it has been argued elsewhere ... that Turkish academic women’s conception of equality was rather ‘formalistic’. Thus only in cases where women conceived of gender equality in more than ‘formal’ terms, could they identify subtle reflections of discriminations as forces acting as barriers to their career advancement. In fact, it was found that such women often complained of exclusion from informal collegiate networks that led to their being less informed and less influential in the academic institutions’ internal politics (Acar, 1991a: 154).

In another article Acar, comparing Turkish and Jordanian women academics, gave more space to the views of those of her respondents who believed that women were being discriminated against at the university:

On the other hand, only a few of the Jordanian respondents and half of the Turkish academic women, mostly those classified as integrators in the latter case, subscribed to a more abstract definition of equality at home or at work. Their criteria included the likelihood of a woman being taken seriously by male colleagues, gaining access to information concerning organizational matters, and wielding influence in decision-making and agenda-setting in the work place. These women identified many signs of discrimination against women in their organizations and were very critical of them (Acar, 1991b: 139).

In short, in the early research on women academics and discrimination at least some respondents distinguished the formal aspects of academic life from the informal aspects and reported discrimination at the informal level. However, findings presented on this issue in related publications are limited to the two paragraphs quoted above. Thus research made in the 1980s and 1990s provides us with little knowledge concerning discrimination against women in universities.

In a later study, Özkanlı and Korkmaz (2000a, 2000b) reported that academic women in Turkey mostly think that there is no gender discrimination as regards academic promotion. However, in the last decade, the scholarly interest in Turkish academic women has increased and two tendencies have become more apparent in the literature: First, at least two researchers have problematized the large gap between the low rate of women professors and the higher rate of women academics in junior and lower academic positions. Based on this difference, Poyraz (2013) and Yenilmez (2016) noted that gender discrimination in academia is indeed an important problem. The findings of Ergöl and others (2012) also belong to this line of research: 27.2 per cent of 246 women research assistants working in a university think that there is sex discrimination in the workplace (Ergöl et al., 2012: 44). Second, low representation levels of academic women at management and decision-making positions at the universities has now been more frequently problematized not just as a side issue but as a problem in its own right (Adak & Cömertler, 2005; Şentürk, 2012; Ünnü & Baybars & Kesken, 2014; Öztan & Doğan, 2015).

As a result, it would be fair to conclude that the literature on women's discrimination in Turkish academia is limited, and that women's underrepresentation especially in higher ranks in engineering disciplines suggests that there is a need for further research in this field. This study is an attempt to satisfy this need.

2. Method

In this section, information on the model of the research, sample group, instrument of data gathering, data gathering and analysis of data will be presented.

2.1. Model of the Research

The present study relies on a qualitative rather than a quantitative research design, focusing on the experiences and perceptions of the informants. In qualitative research, “[r]ather than determining cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population, we might be interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009: 5). Hence, when we in this study approach the topic of gender discrimination, it is from the perspective of the informants and their perceptions of such discrimination.

While qualitative methods might be considered weak due to their inability to establish quantitatively and statistically valid conclusions, they have an important advantage over purely quantitative methods in that they can uncover aspects of human agency that otherwise tend to be ignored. These aspects of human agency involve individual human beings' perception of themselves and their goals as well as their experience of the environment in which they have to act. Hence, agents' subjective understanding of their reality can be made a part of social research as “qualitative methods are

more concerned with producing discursive descriptions and exploring social actors' meanings and interpretations” (Blaikie, 2009: 204–205).

In interviews informants may open up and disclose sensitive and intimate details about themselves and others that would be very difficult or even impossible to capture in a quantitative study. Accordingly, qualitative studies are well suited for research about gender discrimination as this typically involves sensitive experiences, requiring a bond of trust between researcher and informant as well as flexible techniques of interviewing that could not be achieved by means of a purely quantitative survey. Moreover, since qualitative researchers conceive of reality as at least partly socially constructed, they are also open to the dynamic aspects of agency whereby norms, values, and expectations are formed, maintained, developed, and transformed. Hence, “[t]hey seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 8). Since gender discrimination is centrally about the meanings attached to gender and the social norms and expectations derived from these meanings, it is only reasonable to study this form of discrimination according to qualitative methods. Moreover, the design of the present research can best be described as phenomenological, as it explores the experiences of individuals to clarify phenomena of which we might be aware but of which we do not have a detailed or deep understanding (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008: 72)

2.2. Sample Group

In order to find out about the where, when, and how of women's discrimination in engineering faculties, interviews were made with sixteen academics, fifteen women and one male. The research subjects were found with the help of a snowballing method. One of the research subjects was a research assistant / Ph.D. student, three of them were Ph.D.s, two of them were assistant professors, one of them was an associate professor, and nine of them were full professors.

The reason why there is a certain overrepresentation of full professors in the sample is that I thought it more likely that full professors, being at the summit of their careers, would be willing to talk about their experiences of gender discrimination than would academics at lower ranks, given the sensitive nature of the topic. The interviews suggest that this assumption was basically correct. A few women academics were reluctant to think and talk about gender discrimination in relation to themselves. Poyraz (2013) had the same experience with some of her respondents. In my opinion, some of the women professors did not want to talk about gender discrimination simply because they prefer not to see themselves and their academic past in a negative light, that is, in terms of victimhood, but want to build on positive experiences. While this could be seen as a constructive approach when it comes to dealing with negative working conditions, it is certainly an obstacle for researchers who aim to produce interview data on gender discrimination at universities.

Moreover, interviewing nine full professors and one experienced associate professor brings with it an extra

advantage. The data produced carry the quality of historical perspectives and insights. In some interviews, the lived experiences go back to the 1980s. However, the rest of the data, coming from six women academics in the early stages of their careers, reflect more contemporary experiences.

The academics contributing to this research came from different faculties or departments of engineering. There are women academics who are single and there are those who are married, with or without children (one child or two children), with or without a grandchild. The male professor in the sample is married and has a child. Almost all of the academics in this research have international publications.

2.3. Instrument of Data Gathering

The data gathering instrument used in this research is semistructured interview. “[S]emistructured interview is in the middle, between structured and unstructured. In this type of interview, either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more or less structured questions. Usually, specific information is desired from all respondents, in which case there is a more structured section to the interview” (Merriam, 2009: 90). In the interviews in this study, one main question was asked to the research subjects: “Have you ever felt you were treated differently in the university because of your gender?” The answers given to this question were then further probed by the researcher, and the research subjects were encouraged to talk about their experiences.

2.4. Data Gathering

One of the sixteen interviews was made in 2008 and the rest were made in 2012 and 2013. They took place in the offices of the academics at the university except for three interviews which were made in the cafeteria areas of the universities. Except for one interview which was made with two academics at the same time, all interviews were made on a one to one basis. Interviews were recorded and then selectively transcribed. The sixteen interviews that I made lasted in total for more than 12 hours.

2.5. Analysis of Data

In this research, data were analysed with the help of a close reading technique which was structured according to the interpretation strategies of the documentary method (Güvercin & Nohl, 2015). According to this method, the first step is to read the transcribed data while looking for answers to the question “What is being said in this text?” At the second step, attention is paid to how the specific content is expressed in the text. At the third step, the researcher looks for themes in the text. Specific interview pieces are selected to exemplify these themes. Moreover, subject positions and power relations in these interview pieces are uncovered when it is necessary to do so. The analysis carried out in this research can be best described as descriptive analysis.

The data collection of this study takes its point of departure in well-established international research on discrimination against women academics. According to the European Technology Assessment Network’s Report, “irrespective of discipline, proportion of female undergraduates in the discipline, and country, women leave scientific careers in disproportionate numbers at every stage, but particularly

after the post-doctoral level” (Rees, 2001: 243). In this research, too, women’s experiences of discrimination appear to be an early career phenomenon. One woman full professor summarizes the situation like this:

The difficulties are intensely experienced at the early career stage. The first period could be extremely difficult. Indeed, especially the period before becoming a professor. Now perhaps I can relax, knowing that no one can obstruct me. Maybe I am also braver and this makes them shut up. But it wasn’t like this ten or twelve years ago.

The above quote suggests that while women’s experiences of discrimination take place especially in the early stages of their careers, these early stages could last all the way until they become full professors. First at this point, enjoying the external empowerment coming with a full professorship position, women no longer have to fear being the targets of gender discrimination.

In my interviews, academic women report that they experience discrimination in hiring and promotions. They experience discouragement and belittlement based on their gender; moreover, they feel they have to mask their womanhood. Below these experiences will be presented, organized according to the kind of complaint made by the informants.

3. Findings and Comments

3.1. Womanhood as a Disadvantage in Hiring

Formal procedures regulate academic hiring in Turkey and this is generally thought of as a proof of the gender-neutral character of hiring in Turkey. However, the data produced in this research suggest that gender still plays a significant role in hiring from the very beginning of the academic career. For instance, one woman assistant professor wanted to apply for another assistant professorship position in a smaller city. Here she recounts the incident in her own words:

My family lives in an Anatolian town and I thought about transferring to the university there because there is nothing that connects me to the big city here. I tried to get an appointment with the rector. Although I tried very hard, it did not happen. I talked to the vice-rector. He told me that the rector was a very modern man and the fact that I am a woman wouldn’t be a problem, either.

Here, gender was not supposed to work against the woman applicant. However, the very fact that someone thought it necessary to explain to her why it is *not* a problem that she is a woman, suggests that under normal circumstances it *would* be a problem. On the part of the woman applicant, this felt like a threat and an insult that she was not prepared for.

At the research assistant level, applicants have to take an exam to be hired. Also at this level, gendered selection in hiring could be a problem. The experience of one woman full

professor illustrates how gender discriminatory attitudes could be expressed overtly in academia and how this could be discouraging for young female students:

Now at the time I had in my mind to become an academic, but as girls we didn't have any hope about being successful in this. Back then scientific fields were organized in chairs. I don't want to name them since I don't want it to be on record. They would tell us: "Excuse us, we don't hire girls". In the field that I wanted to study there was a similar rumour. But thanks to God, a woman friend who was two years older than me was admitted to this field and I envied her. ... A professor, God bless him, who really helped me much later, told me: "OK, you may join us. But you will leave when I tell you to go." I said "OK, of course". ... They could say: "You will not make me have any problems with you. You will go when I say so." Years later, I talked to some male friends. I heard that none of them was told such a thing. I was probably a bit naïve at the time, too. I thought that these things just happen. ... But back then it also felt heavy on me. But as I said, I cannot deny that this professor later worked on my behalf. He gave me full support later.

This woman professor mentions that academic departments could reject women as research assistants on principle. From this we understand that discrimination is a phenomenon that might be experienced by more than a few women academics. In the best case, when women were accepted, they were accepted conditionally, as in the case of this woman academic. Women were told that they would stay or go depending on the professor's good will. They were expected to be grateful for such a conditional acceptance – and the condition is simply the arbitrary will of the professor. This situation instrumentalizes and humiliates the woman research assistant and her career.

The subject of the above negative experience asked me to note that her professor was very much supportive of her career later on. When we consider this case, we see that one and the same male professor could hold discriminatory attitudes towards women in general and still be supportive of one individual woman. This goes some way to illuminate the complexity of gender discrimination. Discriminatory attitudes do not necessarily imply discriminatory actions. On the other hand, one could speculate about whether the support provided by this professor might be explained by another aspect of patriarchy, namely, that of the protective male father figure who, in exchange for their loyalty and obedience, extends his support also to his "daughters". The quotation also reveals the woman academic's loyalty and gratitude to this male professor: "I cannot deny that this professor later worked on my behalf. He gave me full support later." Such relations of loyalty might also complicate the data collection on women's discrimination in academia,

since women academics might be unwilling to implicate old mentors in gender discriminatory acts or attitudes.

One might think that the situation would be different in women-dominated engineering faculties. However, this is not the case. One woman full professor told me that in the selection and hiring of research assistants, even if the exam scores of the male candidates are a bit lower than the female candidates, the selection committee would choose the male candidates in order to get a gender balance in the number of employees. This suggests that whereas in the past male candidates could benefit from overt prejudices against women, now they can benefit from a gender balance argument, while women academics would still face obstacles relating to the expectation that they should be able to combine the responsibilities of wives and mothers with making an academic career – obstacles that the gender balance argument does not address.

3.2. Womanhood as a Disadvantage in Promotion

Being a woman is not only a disadvantage in hiring, but it could also work as a disadvantage in promotions. For instance, a research assistant at the time, an associate professor now, was discouraged from applying for an assistant professorship position and was instead offered an instructor's position because she had children:

I had finished my Ph.D. and was working for assistant professorship. The head of my department called me only because he was concerned about me and told me "You have two children, and a woman with two children could not do this job, so let's make you an instructor instead". What he really said was: "Don't bother yourself with publications, what is the use of it?" This was bad. ... I told him "No, thanks, I will not take it" and continued to publish. ... While all this was going on, I thought it was all about a mix of good intentions and narrow-mindedness in these people and I never wanted to believe that I was being discriminated against because I was a woman. I was uncomfortable about using these kinds of experiences as excuses.

Here, we see how the university as a gendered organization reveals itself in the words of the head of the department. In this gendered setting, the head of department, under the disguise of protecting her, tries to prevent a woman Ph.D. from climbing up the academic ladder. The woman academic is unwilling to recognize the gender discriminatory nature of his offer at the time it takes place. As it is humiliating to think of herself as the victim of an act of discrimination, she represses the recognition of what is going on. This unwillingness to recognize or outright denial of discrimination is an important obstacle for the elimination of gender discrimination as well as for the collection of data relating to this problem.

Another woman Ph.D. experienced an injustice in her appointment to assistant professorship. Still, she thinks that this negative incident was unrelated to her gender:

As I was going to be appointed to assistant professorship, sad things happened. My appointment was delayed with one year ... They matched me against another person, a male. There were two positions. Neither of us was appointed. Me, with three positive reports and the other friend with three negative reports. ... For six or seven months or perhaps almost for a year, I could not get the position of an assistant professor. With three positive reports, I wasn't appointed. ... I suffered a certain amount of financial loss as a result of this and my pride was hurt as well. The dean at the time even told me not to take this personally. How could I not take this personally? If this was not personal, then what was it? He didn't say anything. He just said that he would certainly take care of this in the next period. And he did, too. He could have fixed it already back then. I was the same then as I was later, when I was appointed. Three positive reports. Then what was it for, the jury of professors who wrote those positive reports?

This woman academic was asked not to take her unjust treatment personally. The "Don't take it personally" response of the professor suggests that the persons responsible for the act of discrimination do not themselves see it as a violation of anyone's rights. It is more like an unfortunate but inevitable side effect of how the system works, and they do not feel obliged to apologize for it. However, this woman academic took it personally. Although she was unwilling to label it as gender discrimination when I asked her if she was treated differently at the university because of her gender, she chose to tell me about this incident. This suggests that there is a gap between her discourse and her deeper beliefs.

While this person was unwilling to present the above incident as a case of gender discrimination, another woman academic provided me with a narrative of an incident which illustrates an overtly gender discriminatory practice in promotions:

Two people, one man and one woman, both good friends of mine, went on parallel career tracks from the beginning. The man got the 3rd degree assistant professorship and the woman got the 5th degree assistant professorship. Then both of them were given the title of associate professor. And then there was a position as associate professor available to the division and it was given to the male. According to what people said, this was done because he was a male. I and

my friends even made this issue public, telling the management that "You are doing this because of the gender identity of the applicants and this is nonsense". That time I was married. My woman friend was divorced. So she was in a worse position than the male – she needed housing. We told the management "Base your selection on a more objective criterion, don't make it on the basis of gender". But nobody took us seriously. This was seen as a natural selection, an exact natural selection. I also think there is such a thought: If a male is appointed, he will be more useful. ... If a woman and a man apply to the same position, the woman can get this position only if she is twice as qualified, academically speaking. ... Especially in a male dominated field like ours.

The gender discrimination in this case begins at the assistant professorship level, when the male is given the more valuable 3rd degree assistant professorship which brings with it a green passport, allowing the holder to go abroad for up to three months without a visa. The woman Ph.D. was given a 5th degree assistant professorship, which does not come with similar benefits. While this might be seen as a minor case of gender discrimination, we see that later, at the associate professorship level, the same woman was discriminated against, again. Both the man and the woman acquired the title of associate professor but only he was given the associate professorship position, in all probability because he was a male and supposed to be the breadwinner of his family. Although the woman was divorced and herself the only breadwinner of her family and in need of housing, this was disregarded and those who questioned the decision were ignored and dismissed.

The same woman professor, who told me about this incident, also mentioned a point which I had heard from other interviewees as well: "If there is a woman and a man who is applying to the same position, the woman needs to be twice as good as the man to get the position". She added that sometimes even this might not be sufficient. This statement obviously differs from the prevailing belief in the literature that there is no gender discrimination against women in Turkish academia.

One may wonder about the coping strategies of Turkish academic women. Although this question was not prominent in my study, it surfaces in the respondents' accounts. For instance, one woman professor who suffered a lot in her early career from gender discriminatory practices, explained how she became a professor:

Maybe others thought that the salary is low and asked themselves "Can one live on this money?" They asked themselves how patient one should be about this. But my husband's work was not bad. My income was not needed in the household. As I am good at dealing with negative conditions, we were

patient and waited for the time when there would be a promotion.

At least in this case, the woman academic used the strategy of patient waiting for promotion. She waited for a time when those people who were likely to discriminate against female academics had retired and the conditions had changed. And in the end, she became a full professor. But for this strategy to work, she still had to rely on the fact that her husband was employed and had a good income. One wonders why the price of being a woman professor should be this high in Turkey.

3.3. Discouragement and Belittlement

Academic women often experience discouragement and belittlement in their work environment, especially in their early career years. The impact of this discouragement and belittlement differs from one case to another and can have detrimental effects on a woman's career, as in the case of this woman professor:

I do not know if it was a coincidence but the other research assistants were male, and the head of the department used to work with male research assistants. They would be one step ahead of us in everything. For instance, they were the first to gain the master degrees and to become senior engineers. ... They were the first to become doctors. We received these degrees later than them. The approach of the head of the department to women was important in these matters. ... He thought that women do not understand much. He could tell a woman something and then ask her "Did you understand?" as if she was slow in catching up. He had such a style. ... I felt this in a few conversations that I had with him when he asked me if I understood, that it was as if he thought I had difficulties in getting his point. Several times I felt there was a warning in this question of his as well [that she did not deserve her academic position].

Although it is possible to think of other reasons for academic belittlement, such as inter-departmental rivalry or personal envy, in this case, as explained by this woman academic, it is certain that the constant target of mistreatment was women. The gendered mistreatment questioned the intelligence of academic women and it corresponded with a delay of their academic titles while male academics were being favoured.

One location where discouragement and belittlement against women take place is departmental meetings. When one woman academic opposed the male professor once in a meeting, she was verbally assaulted due to her gender:

Once I got a very ugly warning from a professor that I liked very much. In the faculty there were meetings and discussions about some new

regulations. It happened in one of these meetings that this professor said "I am used to women's misbehaviour". Maybe he did not use the expression "misbehaviour" but it was a word with that meaning. It was in vain that I tried to explain to him the problem with some of the new regulations. I left the meeting. I left because he was acting in a discriminatory manner. Discrimination against women. When I took part in a discussion like a man, I several times encountered the warning "Your husband stands you well" [meaning that the husband must be a patient man to stand such a wife]. In a very ugly way. Actually this is more like psychological oppression for the purpose of silencing women and I also told this to their faces. ... I don't know if this had any effect on them.

Speaking of how her criticism was labelled as a case of women's misbehaviour, this woman academic was able to see this as "discrimination against women". Still, in the end, it was she who had to leave the meeting. This incident shows how women's discrimination can be firmly embedded in everyday interactions.

There are many lighter versions of discouragement and belittlement taking place in Turkish academic settings. For instance, one woman Ph.D. recounted how women are often given public relations assignments that involve activities like presenting the university at exhibitions and similar events, rather than being given significant academic assignments in the faculty. Another woman Ph.D. experienced belittlement several times. One of these incidents was related to her future post-doc studies:

Another difference which I felt in relation to gender occurred when I told the dean about my wish to do post-doc studies abroad. As he was informing about his views on this, he also took the opportunity to tell me that "They might deceive you abroad". Moreover, he asked me whether my husband would give me permission to go abroad. This was another instance which made me freeze.

The dean's response to this woman Ph.D. implies that he did not think of her as capable of looking after her own interests and this approach can be seen as a case of underestimating and belittling her. Moreover, rather than treating her as an independent researcher, the dean assumes that she is a wife under the patriarchal control of her husband and that she needs his permission to go abroad. Instead of taking a supportive approach to a young woman academic, the dean treats her as a child, and on top of that he emphasizes the patriarchal nature of the marriage culture in Turkey, thereby expressing an even more conservative interpretation of her opportunities.

Belittlement based on the marital status of women academics could prevent access to university benefits. For instance, the

application documents for subsidized housing of the university of one female assistant professor who was single at the time, got lost many times:

When I returned to Turkey after almost 15 years abroad and wanted an apartment for myself the rent would cost me 60–80 per cent of my salary. ... I was desperate. At the age of 30, I was staying with my family, being treated as a child, my comings and goings constantly observed, and so on. I had no time for myself and I was disturbed by all this. To find housing subsidized by the university seemed like the best solution for me. I was applying for this repeatedly but somehow my application forms always disappeared. Now, we had a coffee/tea room and there, after having their meal, came our senior professors. One of them ... was a professor of whom I had a high opinion. ... But when I told him “Professor, whatever I do, this subsidized housing is not happening, it does not work”, out of the mouth of this man came these words: “There are many single male assistant professors in the subsidized apartments of the university. If you make arrangements with one of them, you will both have a subsidized apartment and a husband”. ... Present at the time was also another professor who had earlier told me that “Being an academic here is very easy. You can look after your child as well”. She now turned to me and said: “It is true. This is not a bad solution”, and then they began to laugh. How disappointed, how angry I was. I replied: “Then you give me a list of them and I will start visiting them”.

The experience of this woman academic illustrates how single women are overtly belittled by senior academics and how they become subjected to open mockery in public spaces like a university tea room. Here a woman’s traditional role as a wife and mother is being emphasized rather than her role as a professional academic. Once again it is implied that women cannot manage on their own: they need a husband, even to find subsidized housing for themselves. In other words, patriarchy beats the gender equality that should come with a Turkish university setting. A woman who tries to escape the everyday control of her family to be able to focus on an independent life as an academic cannot expect to find support even within the very academic environment of which she is a part. This also indicates how gender discrimination and gender inequality may attach to university benefits.

3.4. Masking Womanhood

One strategy women use to cope with the male-dominated Turkish academia is to mask their womanhood. For instance, one woman professor told me that she wore make-up at the university first after having reached her thirties, when she

was already married and had a child. Until that time, she left home for the university in the morning, collected her hair, washed her face, and dressed in jeans and a pullover. Women, who applied make-up and dressed in a more conspicuous manner, were underestimated because they were thought of as being looking for men. She conceptualized this situation as “veiling” her appearance. According to her, veiling is not only about covering one’s face or hair; one can veil one’s gender, too. Here one should note how this perceived need to “veil one’s gender” might be at least indirectly related to religious norms and values that support patriarchy. It has been observed that the normalization of the Islamic headscarf is at least potentially problematic to the extent that people are “socialized to endorse religious dictates and practices that attribute secondary status to women” (Arat, 2010: 873). In this research, the veiling metaphor in relation to dressing was also used by another woman professor. One might think that veiling one’s gender at the university would be a phenomenon of the past. But the experience of a woman Ph.D. tells otherwise:

I did not experience anything like sexual harassment in my faculty but I try not to impose my gender on others. For instance, I don’t wear skirts or dresses very often. I really do want to wear them, but at the same time I am reluctant to do it. This is so since when I attempted to dress up like this many years ago, friends asked me if I had “converted”. It is a silly joke suggesting that I used to be a man and had converted to become a woman by wearing feminine clothes. There and then I closed the case of wearing a skirt.

The conversion metaphor used here shows how dress frames one’s gender identity and position in the workplace. By implication, it also points to the ideal of the inconspicuous or even invisible woman, endorsed by a conservative (and patriarchal) understanding of Islam, according to which women should not only cover their heads, but also refrain from using perfume outside their homes and not flirt with men (Arat, 2010: 878). In this interview, the informant herself equals wearing skirts and dresses to “imposing” her gender on others. She avoids unwanted sexualized attention (and also makes it her responsibility to do so) by adapting a non-feminine dress code.

The experiences of these women academics reveal the boundaries of the covert gendered dress codes of the Turkish universities and this, in turn, once again, shows Turkish academia as a gendered institution where women cannot freely express themselves as regards the choice of what to wear. Women are expected to dress in a masculine way not to attract attention from males and not to break the dress code of an institution gendered according to male norms.

4. Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

One tentative conclusion that can be derived from this limited qualitative study is that academic women in Turkey are subjected to gender discriminatory actions and attitudes, and that they experience this as an obstacle in their academic life and careers. The gender discrimination in question is

often subtle, manifesting itself in belittling and discouraging reactions to academic women, especially when they try to assert themselves, demanding to be heard in staff meetings or applying for benefits such as subsidized housing. Occasionally, they can be subjected to explicit and overt gender discrimination, as when they are openly told that women are not being hired. Of course, the limited number of interviews do not admit of any generalizations, but the results from this study at least point to the need for further research into the genderized attitudes and expectations that women face in Turkish academia.

According to the existing literature on women academics in Turkey, women are not being discriminated against at universities (Acar, 1983; Köker, 1988; Acar, 1991a; Acar, 1996, Özkanlı & Korkmaz 2000a, Özkanlı & Korkmaz 2000b). This study, based on sixteen interviews, has provided reasons to question this assumption, arguing that women academics face various kinds of gender discrimination. Moreover, illustrations of when, where, and how such discrimination take place in Turkish engineering faculties have been provided. The findings of this study support the idea that the university is, in Acker's terms, a gendered organization (Acker, 1992a: 567).

The women academics interviewed here report that they were discriminated against in hiring and promotions. Women have been discouraged and belittled in their academic environment because of their gender. Sometimes even their intellectual ability has been questioned just because they are women. They have been reduced and diminished in accordance with the norms of patriarchy, being viewed as subjected to the control of their husbands and therefore not qualified for academic opportunities. Sometimes they have been thought of as being in need of a man and at the same time they have been belittled because they are thought of as looking for men. In male-dominated academic contexts, women academics have felt obliged to veil their womanhood. This metaphorical veiling is of course not very far removed from actual religious veiling, since in both cases the covering up of femininity is related to ideals of modesty and decency to which women have to conform if they want to be taken seriously and treated with respect. Here the findings of the present study confirm the concern voiced by Yeşim Arat, (2010) that religious norms may combine with the values of conservative patriarchy to limit the autonomy and agency of women.

The present study also illustrates overt as well as subtle gender discrimination as defined by Benokraitis and Feagin (1986). Overt discrimination is exemplified in the refusal to hire women academics, as reported by one informant. Subtle discrimination is exemplified in the discouragement and belittlement reported by other informants. Of course, whether or not these findings are representative of Turkish academia in general cannot be established only on the basis of this limited number of interviews with engineering faculty academics. However, the results of this study are at least sufficient to contradict the prevailing view that there is no gender discrimination at Turkish universities.

The findings of this research show that the universities might not be exempt from the patriarchal values and practices which exist in most of the rest of the society in Turkey and that the idea that universities are gender neutral fortresses

might be false one. Moreover, the results of the present study of discrimination and discriminatory attitudes within Turkish academia suggest a need for further research, specifically aiming at identifying sexist norms and practices that might contribute to women's experiences of gender discrimination. Such a line of research should also aim at placing such norms and practices in a wider social context, allowing researchers to test the hypothesis presented above, that patriarchal and religious worldviews combine to create a background for the gender discrimination that takes place at universities. More interviews with a larger number of informants are also required to further substantiate the findings of this research. It is also important that qualitative research methods are further developed to study gender discrimination at Turkish universities. Instead of just counting the number of male and female academics employed by universities, more effort should be spent on uncovering and analysing normative gender structures at play in academia, that is, how male and women academics are evaluated at their workplace, what academic expectations they have to live up to, what obligations regarding family and academic work, respectively, they are supposed to accept for themselves, and so on.

One recent major trend in women studies is to focus on best practices (see, for instance, Winchester & Browning, 2015; Wagner, 2018). However, as regards discrimination against Turkish academic women, I believe that without knowing more about the various expressions and forms of gender discrimination, it is impossible to devise practices that could improve gender equality. This should be true especially as gender discrimination appears in so many and sometimes subtle varieties. In the Turkish case, the documentation of problems facing academic women because of their gender has barely begun. This study could be regarded as an early step in the direction of conceptualizing and addressing problems relating to gender discrimination at Turkish universities.

References

- Acar, F. (1983). Turkish women in academia: roles and careers. *ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi*, 10(4), 409–446.
- Acar, F. (1991a). Women in academic science careers in Turkey. In: V. Stolte-Heiskanen, F. Acar, N. Ananieva, & D. Gaudart in collaboration with R. Fürst Dilic (Eds.), *Women in Science, Token Women or Gender Equality* (pp. 147–173). Oxford/New York: Berg.
- Acar, F. (1991b). Role priorities and career patterns: a cross-cultural study of Turkish and Jordanian university teachers. In: S. Stiver Lie & V. E. O'Leary (Eds.), *Storming the Tower, Women in the Academic World* (pp. 129–143). New York: Nichols/GP Publishing.
- Acar, F. (1994). Turkish women in academia. In: *Proceedings of the 7th Annual International Conference: Women in Higher Education*, 6–8 January 1994, Women Studies, The University of Texas at El Paso, Florida, 1–8.

- Acar, F. (1996). Türkiye’de kadın akademisyenler: tarihsel evrim ve bugünkü durum. In: H. Coşkun (Ed.), *Akademik Yaşamda Kadın* (p.78–87). Türk-Alman Kültür İşleri Kurulu Yayın Dizisi No. 9.
- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: a theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4, 139–58.
- Acker, J. (1992a). Gendered institutions: from sex roles to gendered institutions. *Contemporary Sociology*, 21, 565–69.
- Acker, J. (1992b). Gendering organizational theory. In: A. Mills & P. Tancred (Eds.), *Gendering Organizational Analysis* (pp. 248–260). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Adak-Özçelik, N., & Cömertler, N. (2005). Türkiye’de Akademi ve Akademik Yönetimde Kadınlar. *Sosyoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 8(2), 5–22.
- Arat, Y. (2010). Religion, politics and gender equality in Turkey: implications of a democratic paradox? *Third World Quarterly*, 31(6), 869–884.
- Benokraitis, N. V., & Feagin, J. R. (1986). *Modern sexism, blatant, subtle and covert discrimination*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Blaikie, N. (2009). *Designing social research* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction: the discipline and practice of qualitative research. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.) (pp. 1–19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ergöl, Ş., Koç, G., Eroğlu, K., & Taşkın, L. (2012). Türkiye’de Kadın Araştırma Görevlilerinin Ev ve İş Yaşamlarında Karşılaştıkları Güçlükler. *Yükseköğretim ve Bilim Dergisi*, 2(1), 43–49.
- European Commission. (2013). *She figures 2012: Gender research and innovation*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/she-figures-2012_en.pdf
- Güvercin, G., & Nohl, A-M. (2015). Belgesel yöntem ile biyografik görüşmelerin yorumlanması. In: F.N. Seggie & Y. Bayyurt (Eds.), *Niteliksel Arastırma Yöntemleri* (pp. 298–322). İstanbul: Anı Yayıncılık.
- Husu, L. (2001). On metaphors on the position of women in academia and science. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 9(3), 172–181.
- Husu, L. (2005). Women’s work-related and family-related discrimination and support in academia. *Gender Realities: Local and Global, Advances in Gender Research*. 9, 161–199.
- İstatistiklerle Kadın 2015. (2016). *TÜİK Haber Bülteni*, Sayı: 21519. Retrieved March 3, 2017 from <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=21519>.
- Jones, J. M., & Lovejoy, F. H. (1980). Discrimination against Women Academics in Australian Universities. *Signs*, 5(3), 518–526.
- Lewin, A. Y., & Duchan, L. (1971). Women in Academia. *Science, New Series*, 173(4000), 892–895.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Özel, A. (2007). The status of female academicians in Turkish universities during the process of EU admission. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 7(23), 3678–3686.
- Özkanlı, Ö., & A. Korkmaz (2000a). Turkish women in academic life: attitude measurement towards gender discrimination in academic promotion and administration. *Emerging Economies: Academy of Business Administrative Sciences 2000 International Conference Proceedings Book*, St. Bonaventure University Publication, Prague, Czech Republic, 10–12 July 2000, p. 56.
- Özkanlı, Ö., & Korkmaz, A. (2000b). *Kadın akademisyenler*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Yayını, No:586.
- Özkanlı, Ö. (2007). The situation of academic women in Turkey. *Eğitim ve Bilim*, 32(144), 59-70.
- Özcan, E., & Doğan, S. N. (2015). Akademinin cinsiyeti: Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi örneği üzerinden üniversite ve toplumsal cinsiyet. *Çalışma ve Toplum*, 46(3), 191-221.
- Poyraz, B. (2013). Akademi kadınların cenneti mi?: Ankara Üniversitesi örneği. *Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 4(2), 1-18.
- Rees, T. (2001). Mainstreaming gender equality in science in the European Union: The “ETAN” Report. *Gender and Education*, 13(3), 243-260.
- Şentürk, İ. (2012). Üniversitede kadın olmak: akademik örgütte toplumsal cinsiyet sorunu: nitel bir çalışma. *Kadın/Woman 2000*, 13(2), 13-46.
- Tripp-Knowles, P. (1995). A review of the literature on barriers encountered by women in science academia. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 24(1/2), 28-34.
- Türkiye’de 2010’dan beri 1675 kadın öldürüldü.* (2017). Retrieved February 15, 2017, from www.kadincinayetleri.org
- Wagner, C. Z. (2018). Change from within: using task forces and best practices to achieve gender equity for university faculty. *Journal of Law and Education*, 47(3), 295-379.
- Winchester, H. P. M., & Browning, L. (2015). Gender equality in academia: a critical reflection. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 37(3), 269-281.
- Ünnü, N. A. A., Baybars, M., & Kesken, J. (2014). Türkiye’de kadınların üniversiteler bağlamında yetki ve

karar verme mekanizmalarına katılımı. *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 42, 121–133.

Yenilmez-İnce, M. (2016). Women in academia in Turkey: challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 14(28), 289-311.

Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2008). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Seçkin Yayınları.

YÖK. (2016). *Öğretim elemanları sayısı özet tablosu, 2015 – 2016*. Retrieved March 3, 2017 from <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

