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GENDER INEQUALITY AT WORK: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS BETWEEN 2007-2017

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Abstract

While gender inequality at both organizations and societies is one of the prevalent problems all around the world, distinct issues related to this problem come forward based on countries. Therefore, in this study, we aimed to find most salient dimensions of gender equality at work in organizations in Turkey because of the complexities in Turkish political and social life. With accordance to our aim, we examined some leading newspapers during years period 2007-2017 to reveal the outstanding issues which are mentioned by business environment on gender equality. The newspapers are Hürriyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet and the business magazine is Capital Turkey. We applied thematic analysis which is a qualitative method used for the analysis of large qualitative data sets. The analysis resulted in four themes called participation, underrepresentation, gender bias, work-family conflict. Despite many efforts which are said to taken by companies and government the participation of women to work life in Turkey remains as a major problem for Turkey regarding gender equality. Also, underrepresentation of women at upper echelons in Turkey is seen as another major issue on gender equality by Turkish businesses. Besides these equally important issues, bias and work family conflict also emerged as critical issues for gender equality at work in Turkey.

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1. Introduction

Burgeoning interest among governments, researchers, international organizations such as European Union, United Nations and non-governmental institutions in gender inequality at work exists all around the world and in Turkey. As international initiatives, Women Empowerment Principles (WEP) and sustainability goals including “ending gender inequality” by UN and as national initiatives, a “comply or explain” code is applied by Capital Markets Board of Turkey (CMB), the "Social Gender Equality in Work Life Award", “Equality at Work Platform” can be seen as fundamental endeavors to provide gender equality at workplaces. However, it seems gender inequality at work persist for organizations operated in Turkey context according to the data revealed by World Bank (Gender Equality..., 2017).

The term of gender was used with a different meaning from the term of sex which embraces the role of woman and man. The perception of gender emphasizes that the problem is not the sex of woman or man, since roles that are attributed to man and woman constitute problems (Aybars et al., 2019; Beşpınar & Topal, 2017). Applying the term gender as a concept without implying biological or physical traits have been widespread among sociologists and psychologists, it has been subject to organizational studies since 1970s (McCarthy & Moon, 2018).

With the growing number of women at workplaces, countries have begun to improve their own policies in order to reduce gender inequality in these settings. For instance, in U.S. gender bias has been declined with the creation of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Civil Rights Act (Tolbert & Castilla, 2017).

2. Problem Statement

Most of the countries all around the world struggle with the existence of gender inequality at the workplaces as a prevalent problem (Ismail & Nakkache, 2015). Both scholars and policy-makers are interested in gender equality with an intense agenda (Huffman et al., 2017). Since, the participation of women in labor market display a great increase during the 1970s and 1980s in many countries (Nyman et al., 2018). Although the situation may have improved in recent years, studies still point to the fact that men receive better rewards at work in terms of income, status, promotion and development opportunities among others all around the world (Ismail & Nakkache, 2015).

During the 1990s, Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as international organization showed up in the scene and by thus, gender equality become more visible in Turkey. Besides this, General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women (KSSGM) as a national actor is founded as an obligation of CEDAW adaptation period in 1990.

After being the official candidate for EU in 1999, Turkey started negotiations over main topics including gender equality. Since then, Turkey the adoption of new Civil Code (2001); constitutional amendment in 2004 and the new Labor Law (2009) are motivated by EU directives over gender equality (Dedeoğlu, 2012). Moreover, during the reconciliation period, new organizations such as Ministry of the Woman and Family, Woman’s Status General Management, Women’s Shelters, Woman Rights related NGOs were founded in the direction of movement’s demands. These institutions became different interlocutors in order to speak about women’s problems and to solve these problems. It has been observed

some minor changes in daily language and especially media's sexist language thanks to the endeavors over time in Turkey. Usages of different expressions and sexist terms like girl, female, lady was decreased in course of time. In 2000's, in modern organizations particularly in business world, woman-man equality practices have started to spread. Furthermore, quotas without legal foundations to increase the number of women and priorities for women in recruitment were used as tools for legitimation (Karahan & Özdemirci, 2017). However, it seems, these reforms do not beyond a checklist to comply EU standards or even pretend (Dedeoğlu, 2012).

In Turkey, there is no "hard law" which has a legal foundation as seen in US or EU member states in order to promote gender equality at work. However, some legislations regarding gender equality exist and also Turkish Constitution assure that women and men are equal and have equal rights (Özkanlı & White, 2008). Moreover, a "comply or explain" code is applied by Capital Markets Board of Turkey (CMB) that offers the percentage of women on boardrooms ought to be 25%. The reason why hard laws cannot be applied in Turkey is that soft instruments were preferred in areas of gender equality where it was difficult to reach agreement among stakeholders due to the cultural embeddedness of the issue (Aybars et al., 2019). Gender inequality is deeply entrenched in Turkey's socio-economic and political structure (Aybars & Tsarouhas, 2010).

National-level gender ideologies plays a crucial role over the course of period since these ideologies shape institutional and cultural practices (Dedeoğlu, 2012). Some international organizations such as European Union (EU), World Bank (WB) and United Nations (UN) have encouraged even forced to adopt policies to increase women's employment (Alnıaçık et al., 2017).

Among the international initiatives, one of the most important global initiatives of the private sector, targeting women's empowerment to ensure that they are able to take part in economic life in all sectors and at all levels, is the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) platform that initiated in 2010. According to this platform, the private sector plays a significant role in increasing the economic vitality of women and ensuring gender equality in business life. WEPs have been a joint venture of the UN Global Compact and the UN Women in an effort to help companies fulfill their responsibilities. The WEPs platform, created in partnership with the United Nations Global Compact (UN Global Compact) and United Nations Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Unit (UN Women) in 2010, is a private sector; provide important points to consider in order to ensure gender equality in the workplace, in the markets and in the community at large.

"Equality at Work Platform" was founded in June 2012 in Istanbul under the name of "Turkey Gender Parity Task Force" in cooperation with Ministry of Family and Social Policies of Turkey and the World Economic Forum. The "Turkey Gender Equality Task Force" turned into "Equality at Work Platform" with a press launch in Istanbul on 15 January 2013. Furthermore, the government added a goal to increase the participation of women in their working life for the vision of 2023.

There's a developing sense of conservation in terms of gender equality in Turkey, thanks to the progressing re-traditionalization of gender roles in our country over the course of final two decades (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011). To date, there may be a considerable amount of research on gender equality at work in developed countries; however, there have been very few in the Middle East region (Ismail & Nakkache, 2015). In Turkey, there is relatively little research at focusing this topic (Aybars et al., 2019)

although some scholars offer Turkish context as a vital setting to research continuity and change in gender issues (Yamak et al., 2016).

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. Keeping the complexities in Turkish political and social life, what are the most salient dimensions of gender inequality at work in organizations?

4. Purpose of the Study

Allegedly, the wide array of efforts aim to promote gender equality at workplaces in Turkey. However, it seems gender inequality at work remains a reality for organizations operated in Turkey context and based on this reality, main purpose of the study to explore issues come to the forth on gender equality at work in Turkey? To do realize this aim, this study examined some leading newspapers during 2007-2017 the years Turkey context experience a social and political transformation. The reason why the data gather from newspapers is as following; the mentioned considerable efforts are announced via media outlets. With this way, we aimed to demonstrate main issues which are mentioned by business environment on gender equality.

5. Research Methods

In order to explore main gender related issues, distinct materials from distinct sources have been gathered. As an outside data source, news from four distinctive newspapers were planned to collect. The newspapers are Hürriyet, Sabah, Birgün, Cumhuriyet and the business magazine is Capital Turkey. However, while searching the key words inside “Birgün”, it is recognized that both the quantity and content of articles related to the key words are not enough to include into the study. Therefore, “Birgün” is excluded from the study. The reason why these newspapers are chosen is that all of them represents different political ideologies and reflect in the news. Hürriyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet are thought to be proponents of centrist liberalism, centrist-conservative right, socialist-radical left views, respectively. Capital Turkey is chosen since it represents the business world. All of these newspapers and magazine had electronically indexed and archived news articles. Therefore, thanks to this situation, we are allowed to collect all articles containing key words.

While reading the articles from all sources, we excluded some of them since they do not contain any initiative on gender equality at work that we seek. We also removed articles primarily relating to countries outside the Turkey, since we were studying gender and work in organizations operating in Turkey.

The time-range is specified as between 2007-2017 since some international organizations such as European Union, United Nations and G20 with initiatives, funds and at least discourses regarding gender equality. During the past decade that we scrutinize, the efforts Turkey attempted are dependent on densely EU funding (Almıçık et al., 2017).

Between 2007-2017, there were 157 articles on media outlets on gender equality at work. Articles related to equality at home or any other fields of social life are considered as immaterial and omitted while

getting news from sources. At first the articles including key words skimmed through in order to understand the level of relatedness to the subject matter.

We applied thematic analysis which is a qualitative method used for the analysis of large qualitative data sets (Creswell, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data. Theoretically flexible means that it can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches.

Table 1. Data utilized in the study

Information	News and Media Coverage (2007-2017)
Examined Periodical Publications	Hurriyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Capital
Description of data	News stories and public opinion expressions reflecting the perceptions and attitudes gender equality
Type of information provided	Issues taking into consideration on gender inequality at work in Turkey by distinctive actors
Limitations of the data	Biases and partiality of media coverage, opinionated

Since we collected the data, we gained some prior knowledge about it by doing so. However, after gathering the data all together, we read through articles from all these three distinctive sources until no further sub-themes emerged. As a result of this reading process, we manage to identify sub-themes regarding key words “women”, “work”, “management-manger”, and “gender” over the course of chosen time. In our database, the very first emerged sub-themes are included discrimination, stereotype, participation of women into workforce, roles of women outside the workplaces, undeclared working underrepresentation at all levels. These sub-themes have assessed and aggregated into four themes called gender bias, work-family conflict, participation and underrepresentation. These are themes that organizations, national and international NGOs, governmental bodies, employer organizations, consultancy firms put their agendas mostly for gender equality at work.

The sub-theme of “underrepresentation” portrays women as at some management level to some extent but still unable to reach upper echelons. Moreover, most of the statements the relationship between number of women as decision makers and economic improvement both in the company and so in the country. First-order codes of sub-theme “underrepresentation” include statistics on the representation of women at top management and boardrooms, pipeline problems and unequal promotion.

The sub-theme of “bias” portrays the stereotype, unequal opportunities, discrimination based on sex, and sexual harassment as major problems hindering women’s advancement at work. Assuming them as first order codes of “bias” sub-theme, others are related to differential treatment based on sex and discrimination.

“Work-family conflict” sub-theme refers to non-work roles of women such as child or elderly care and other responsibilities at home. The main problem thwarting women from participation and advancement at work is seen as the quandary of women between work and other social roles attributed to them in particular.

Under the “participation” sub-theme, first order codes are not being at the workforce, statistics about low-participation and unregistered work. Within the sub-theme of “participation” some statements are also

related to “work-family” and/or “bias” sub-themes especially because of the statements that mention both inequality or work-life balance and participation. Therefore, the statements that only mention about inequalities and not related to participation of women at the workforce are placed under bias. However, the statements both mention about low-representation of women resulted by inequalities and issues over work-life balance have placed under all “bias” and “underrepresentation” and work-family conflict sub-themes. For instance; as reported in Hürriyet:

Women and Democracy Association mentions that “among the reasons why women's employment is seen in limited rates, especially in underdeveloped countries, there are many factors such as lack of education, gender-based division of labor, improper working conditions and non-observance of work-life balance.”(Hürriyet, 16.03.2016)

Above-mentioned excerpt is situated under subtheme “participation” since it asserts women’s employment is in limited rates, “bias” subtheme because it depicts the gender-based division of labor and it is related to differential treatment based on sex. Lastly the same excerpt declares the work-life balance as well and so it is placed under work-family conflict. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say the similar situation is also valid for other sub-themes.

Each signature or participation or promise to commitment for any international and/or national initiatives is regarded as practice for once for each organization. For example; Koç Group signed WEPs principles in 2015 and although this has been mentioned too many times since that day, only one of them taken into consideration as practice. All these initiatives have each own aim and by keeping in mind they generate practices to comply with their aims. Among the seven distinctive aims of WEPs, the related ones to this study is declining underrepresentation and bias. Another international initiative called HeforShe aims to boost the number of men who struggle for women’s rights and focused on the biases such as stereotypes that women confront. Both WEPs and HeforShe movement are endorsed by UN Gender Equality and Women Empowerment department. As for national initiatives, the most attracted one is Gender Equality at Work and the reason behind this entity is to increase representation and participation of women at work and also minimize biases and work-family conflict. These aims play a crucial role to determine the way how such practices are put under which sub-themes.

All articles read thoroughly and while reading the articles issues around women, gender and work are determined. Each article from all sources was assigned 0 or 1 for each of the four sub-themes. If an article received any of the first-order codes associated with a given sub-theme, the article was assigned 1 for that sub-theme; otherwise, it was assigned 0 for that sub-theme.

6. Findings

To determine main issues on gender equality at work in Turkey, we count sub-themes and their results collected in the table 2. According to the results, participation is the main problematic for Turkey on gender equality and also there are many statements about bias and underrepresentation sub-themes. Because, some articles may include more than one sub-themes articles numbers and total sub-themes numbers are not equal.

Table 2. Number of sub-themes: Media coverage(2007-2017)

Media Name	Under-representation	Work-Family Conflict	Bias	Participation
Hürriyet (29)	25	22	22	31
Sabah (40)	26	7	13	18
Cumhuriyet (70)	20	9	18	19
Capital (18)	9	6	12	12
Total Number of Articles (157)	80	44	65	80

7. Conclusions

Inequality is an issue for nearly all societies for a long time and nowadays it is thought one of the most inevitable problems (Nishii et al., 2018). These inequalities may base on religion, race, sex or age. Among these inequalities, we focused on gender inequality at work and revealed that gender inequality persist to be a major problem in work places and so in society.

This study aimed to answer the question that which issues are thought as major problems for Turkey society and especially for work environment and companies. In order to find a cogent answer to this question, we examined four different media coverage in a given time and we tried to understand main arguments that are discussed. As a result, some main problems seem to emerged. For instance, despite many efforts which are said to taken by companies and government the participation of women to work life in Turkey remains as a major problem for Turkey regarding gender equality. In qualitative studies, results not only show current relations of given arguments but also it can imply answers that go beyond. Therefore, future studies may try to find possible explanations for this emerged dilemma between endeavors and results of participation of women to work life in Turkey.

Turkey, as developing country, has inherent contextual differences (Özkanlı & Özbilgin, 2002). For instance, participation of women into workplaces may not be seen as a major problem by developed industrial countries. Thus, contextual effects of country may not be well documented because of biases of national media coverages. Future studies may try to find a way to demonstrate contextual differences of Turkey and its effects on ongoing gender inequality at work. Also, underrepresentation of women at work in Turkey is seen as another major issue on gender equality by Turkish businesses. The study showed that numerous efforts and discussions made by companies to understand and to abate unequal representation of women. However, it is clear that despite all of these endeavors and understanding, underrepresentation became an ongoing problem for women still in Turkey. As a result, it can be assumed endeavors exist to increase women at upper echelons, but intended results seem to be away. Therefore, future studies may explore possible solutions and practices which can augment the current unwanted situation. Other themes, bias and work family conflict also emerged critical for women at work in Turkey. Especially, bias against women is mentioned many times in media coverages. Also, nearly all articles and companies mention about some basic practices to provide work-family balance for women. However, these basic approaches without a broader consideration of bias did not create an intended outcome as a whole (Kossek et al., 2017).

Lastly, some limitations have to be mentioned for this study to suggest possible future studies. In this study, there was a time limit and also a limitation for selected material and media coverages. Therefore,

future studies may research internal data of companies and also may add magazines of companies which can reflect an inside perspective of companies in business world to rich articles to examine (Hooghe et al., 2015).

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Appendix

Table 3. Examples of sub-themes

Themes/Sub-Themes	Examples
Underrepresentation Women are not at the work-force Women aren't in leadership positions Women are not in pipeline Statistics about under-representation at all levels and participation at work-force	Turcas Petrol, with the slogan "More Women in the Executive Committees for Decision Quality", aims to strengthen the position of women on the board of directors with the project called "Independent Women Directors".(Sabah, 16.11.2013) Eczacıbaşı Group, which initiated the Women Leadership Development Program, provides the opportunity for women managers and employees to share their experiences by bringing together the role models.(Hürriyet, 06.03.2017) The lifestyle, emotions and responsibilities of women as part of their non-business responsibilities and sometimes as mothers can lead to changes in career plans or may cause short-term opportunities to escape. (Capital, 01.05.2017)
Work-family conflict Non-work roles Work-life balance	Women who have a problem in reconciling home and work life finish their working life in a short time or cannot reveal their full potential towards a career. The woman, who has to cope with obligations such as child, elderly and patient care, is experiencing difficulties due to the lack of sufficient number of social support institutions such as day care centers and day care centers. (Cumhuriyet, 05.02.2009)
Bias Differential treatment based on sex Excluding women in some industries Equal opportunities Unequal payment Discrimination	33 percent of the women participating in the research believe that mobbing or discrimination exist. 33 percent of women in the service sector says that they deserve better salaries and 47 percent of women mentioned they do not have equal opportunities with men in Turkey. (Sabah, 17.02.2016) We as AVİVASA do not include any statements in our job advertisements that could lead to gender discrimination. If there are women and men with equal qualifications, we are trying to choose a female candidate. (Sabah, 07.03.2016,)
Participation	Women and Democracy Association mentions that "among the reasons why women's employment is seen in limited rates, especially in underdeveloped countries, there are many factors such as lack of education, gender-based division of labor, improper working conditions and non-observance of work-life balance."(Hürriyet, 16.03.2016)