

Journal of Economy Culture and Society

ISSN: 2602-2656 / E-ISSN: 2645-8772

Review Article / Derleme Makalesi

Gender-based Economic Inequalities: A Review of Selected Concepts

Cinsiyete Dayalı Ekonomik Eşitsizlikleri: Seçilmiş Kavramların incelenmesi

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Submitted: 11.04.2019

Accepted: 18.08.2019

Published Online: 24.12.2019

Citation: Khan, M. (2019). Gender-based economic Inequalities: A review of selected concepts. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, 61, 371-382.

<https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2019-0039>

ABSTRACT

Economic inequality is a global phenomenon with all-encompassing implications. While inequality affects both men and women, due to the socially ascribed gender roles and expectations women are more prone to experience disparities. Based on a narrative review, the aim of this article is to provide a primer on four selected theories related to gender-based economic inequalities. The first section provides a brief overview of a) sexual division of labor b) the nimble fingers theory c) glass wall and glass ceiling effects and d) female-headed households and the feminization of poverty. The final section demonstrates the implications of these paradoxical economic phenomena in the Turkish context. The article explains how women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds are prone to labor market inequalities because of the intricate nature of structural biases. A plethora of literature is available on the Turkish context, highlighting the nuances of economic participation. The present article complements the existing body of literature, however, it adds a new dimension by offering the theoretical underpinnings behind the economic inequalities endured by Turkish women. Future research could explore the empirical evidence on the dynamics of economic disparity while considering the theoretical concepts discussed in this article.

Keywords: Economic Sociology, Inequalities, Turkey, Women's Studies

ÖZ

Ekonomik eşitsizlik, her şeyi kapsayan sonuçların içeren küresel bir olgudur. Eşitsizlik hem erkekleri hem de kadınları etkilerken, toplumsal olarak atfedilen cinsiyet rolleri ve beklentileri nedeniyle kadınlar eşitsizlikleri yaşamaya daha yatkındır. Bir anlatı incelemesine dayanan, bu makalenin amacı toplumsal cinsiyet temelli ekonomik eşitsizliklerle ilgili olarak seçilen dört teori üzerine bir primer sağlamaktır. İlk bölüm a) cinsel işbölümü hakkında kısa bir genel bakışı b) çevik parmak teorisi c) cam duvar ve cam tavan etkileri ve d) evin reisi kadın olan haneleri ve yoksulluğun kadınlaştırılması. Son bölüm, bu paradoksal



ekonomik olayların Türkiye bağlamındaki etkilerini göstermektedir. Makale, farklı sosyo-ekonomik geçmişe sahip kadınların yapısal önyargıların karmaşık yapısı nedeniyle nasıl işgücü piyasası eşitsizliğine eğilimli olduğunu açıklamaktadır. Türkiye bağlamında ekonomik katılımın nüanslarını vurgulayan bir literatür bolluğu mevcuttur. Bu makale, mevcut literatürü tamamlar, ancak, Türk kadınlarının katlandığı ekonomik eşitsizliklerin ardındaki kuramsal temeli sunarak yeni bir boyut ekler. Gelecekteki araştırmalar, bu makalede açıklanan teorik kavramları göz önüne alarak, ekonomik eşitsizlik dinamikleri üzerine ampirik kanıtlar keşfedebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekonomik Sosyoloji, Eşitsizlikler, Türkiye, Kadın Çalışmaları

1. Introduction and Background

Economic inequality is a global phenomenon and it is rising despite many initiatives and policy formulations (Atkinson, 2014; Piketty, 2015). Women persistently remain underrepresented in the global formal economy (UNESCO, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2019). What's even more prevalent is that they remain a common group among all categories when it comes to economic inequalities if we investigate through intersectional theoretical paradigms (Bhatasara & Chiweshe, 2017; Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012). For example, women from rural areas have been contributing in the production process since pre-historic times yet they still have comparatively less access to the organized formal markets when we compare them to women who are based in cities. The increasing urbanization and post-industrialization age is simply not designed to integrate rural women in the production system (Tansel, 2001). When we consider race and color or citizenship status, the difference of economic outcomes among women is striking (Khan, 2016). For example, in the USA for every USD earned by a man, White women earn 74 cents, African women earn 67 cents and Latinas earn the least, 54 cents (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015, 2017). The same discrepancy in income and outcome goes for the able-bodied women in comparison to women with special needs.

The already intricate patriarchal social structures pose more challenges for women who have learning difficulties or other physical shortcomings. However, according to (UNESCO, 2016), regardless of class and race, the motherhood penalty results in a 40 to 50 percent pay gap among women. Therefore, women remain a common group among all categories when it comes to economic inequalities. The connection between the rate of female labor force participation with GDP per capita shows a U-shape according to the World Bank. While the highest number of women in the labor market comes from both the richest and poorest nations, it is lowest in countries with average national incomes (The World Bank, 2019).

Since ancient time till present day, women have worked in production processes, especially in agriculture, across the world. The nature of women's work has changed due to several world events ranging from the industrial revolution, world wars to increasing urbanization (Pencho, 2016). Working for a wage is now a part of modern life. Even though women started their formal labor market participation in industries and factories during the First World War, they eventually formed the workforce in other sectors such as sales, clerical and secretarial jobs as well. However, as mentioned above, the wage remains low and sectors are gender segregated.

There are different debates surrounding the explanations of the reason behind this disparity. In *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels, 2004), we see that the historical root behind women's secondary position in modern society is the Sexual Division of Labor theory. The author argues that the division between the public and private domain of work following the hunting-gathering society is largely responsible for the gender-based double standards against women. Engels argued that as the idea of private property and family emerged, men started to take control of the outside world whereas women started to engage and take responsibility for the private world such as family (Engels, 2004).

On a more modern note, the Nature vs Culture debate points out how women were perceived as inferior to men in ancient societies due to their assigned gender roles and responsibilities (Ortner, 1974). This theory points out that women's abilities to give birth were considered as an 'awe' like nature, hence, we say mother nature. In contrast, men's capability for warfare is considered more influential in shaping and dominating culture. These ideologies of valuing culture over nature is another reason behind women's secondary status in societies despite their valuable contribution to families, communities and societies.

Women’s labor market participation is lower than men in almost everywhere in the world from Europe to Africa, with only a handful of exceptions such as Togo, Laos, Rwanda and Malawi (Atik & Khan, 2016; Khan, 2011, 2016; Khan & Atik, 2016, 2019). At the same time, it needs to be identified that there are trends and patterns of the slowly but steadily increased engagement that might also have downsides for women, as discussed below.

In this pretext, the aim of this review study is to broadly categorize macro-level factors that are underwriting the persistent gender-based inequalities. The contribution of this article is that it puts the major theoretical debates in one place to help the readers comprehend the key concepts regarding economic inequalities.

2. Methods of the Review

The article is an extended version of a seminar titled ‘Achievement and Challenges of Women in 21st Century Economies’ as a part of the 3rd Women’s Studies Seminar Series arranged by the Erciyes University Women’s Studies Research and Implementation Center in Turkey. To transform the seminar into a paper, I have conducted a narrative literature review based on three themes ‘economic inequalities’, ‘gender inequality’ and ‘women in Turkish economy’ (Baker, 2016; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016). Multilateral reports from organizations such as the World Economic Forum, World Bank and OECD data sets as well as peer-reviewed scientific journal articles and book chapters were included in the study.

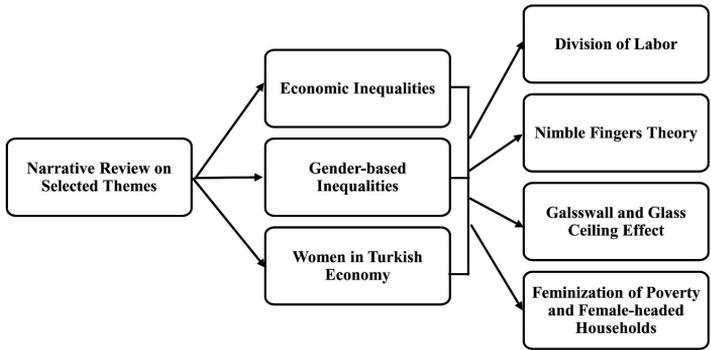


Figure 1: The Flowchart of the Narrative Review

There was no limit on the period of the publications, however, only peer-reviewed and internationally indexed sources were included. The recurring theoretical paradigms in these studies were then broadly categorized into the four sections. Since the aim of this article is to offer a brief introduction to key concepts to unpack gender-based economic inequalities, it did not utilize the metadata used in the studies under the review (Rother, 2007). The article demonstrates the connections between macro-level factors determining women’s economic outcomes.

3. What Socio-economic Forces are Underpinning Economic Inequalities?

Broadly and selectively there are four main problematic trends and challenges that could be identified which are the by-products of the increase in the economic participation of women. These are a) sexual division of labor b) the nimble fingers theory c) the glass wall and glass ceiling effect and d) female-headed households along with feminization of poverty.

3.1. Sexual Division of Labor

This implies that socially assigned roles and responsibilities are based on someone's biological gender. For example, work that is unpaid and home-based including cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for family members and communities are usually perceived as women's work, whereas earning money or work that requires greater physical strength is still considered to be only men's work. Such a gender-based dichotomy is still prevalent (Barron & Norris, 1991; Benería, 1979; Hakim, 1992). The sectors that require empathy, a caring nature, or those which are sometimes based on physical appearance are perceived as women's jobs as well. The higher female concentration in the nursing sector, elementary teaching, day care centers, administrative jobs, personal relationship (PR) and communications show us how the construction of gender underpins the mainstream labor markets. The increased number of women in the formal economic sectors has done little to shift this ideological paradigm. Several studies report on women's increased workloads even as they take up jobs in the public domain while continuing household chores (Khan, 2011, 2013; Sugur & Sugur, 2005). Unless there is a cultural revolution where men contribute equally to the essential but tedious jobs of household chores, the gender-based division of labor is hard to dismantle, be it in public or private domains.

3.2. The Nimble Fingers Theory

This theory suggests that young, rural women and children are employed for their said submissiveness, nimble fingers as well as attention to detail. This is particularly applicable in low- or semi-skilled and low-paid jobs. In this globalized world, borders are increasingly blurred when it comes to the economic production process. Throughout the last half-century, developing economies across South America, South and South-East Asia have opened their borders for foreign direct investments and have seen unprecedented growth. However, this development is built on policies that are exploitative to women workers (Elson, 1996; Karshenas & Moghadam, 2004; Pearson, 1998). Women are hired in the manufacturing sectors only in specific roles like sewing, cleaning, cutting, designing and other lower-tier positions, whereas research and development, and managerial positions are held by the men (Ecevit, 2005). The female workers in factories rarely reach decision-making positions within the industrial sectors. And this whole discourse is developed based on the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology that women possess so-called feminine physical features, consequently they will take part only in these specific jobs that are usually low paid and involve less educational requirements. The Nimble fingers theory implies the underlining idea of gender-based division of labor.

3.3. The Glass Wall and Glass Ceiling Effect

These are two more feminist concepts used to understand how the labor markets are biased towards women. Jobs based on gender segregation in the early career stage confine women into certain roles, especially in the professional service sectors. They are heavily concentrated into the communications, advocacy and administrative roles. Lack of experiences in diversified areas limit women's career hierarchy prospects into a box, which is called a glass wall. Subsequently, due to the glass wall situation, women experience extra deterrents to achieve the highest positions in the career hierarchy. This is called the glass ceiling effect and known as a structural barrier (Arulampalam, Booth, & Bryan, 2007; Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). The challenges remain an unseen yet unbreakable barrier for minorities and women regardless of their higher educational attainment, qualifications or achievements. The Glass wall and glass ceiling

effect are particularly relevant for the corporate sectors. For example, of all the Fortune 500 companies, only 4% of CEOs are women (World Economic Forum, 2019). It shows that not only rural or relatively less educated women but those who are privileged can also experience structural biases and discriminations concerning labor market participation.

3.4. Female-Headed Households and The Feminization of Poverty

These theories are generally applicable to developing country contexts. Across the world, except for a few indigenous communities, the notion of ‘head of the household’ refers to the adult male members of the families. Such an assumption is by default a gender-bias if it also applies to families where women contribute financially in a way similar to or greater than men. More women are becoming the key source of financial support for their families in the developing economies recently (Chant, 2006; Pearce, 1978). The rapid urbanization process fueled by the manufacturing sector through industrialization is causing a migration of male members to the cities in the hope of achieving a better income and finding jobs. Such internal migration can also be caused by climate change effects such as disasters, that displace communities and usually, the male members move to cities or other villages leaving the women behind (Khan, 2013). Moreover, factors such as death, divorce and separation all lead to the increase of female-headed households. However, markets and societies are still not prepared to accept female-headed households as norms. When women are the sole earners and decision makers they are often stigmatized. Particularly in rural areas, women are still discouraged from working in the public domain and are less likely to be recruited, so we can only guess what kind of suffering women heads go through when managing livelihoods when there is no male partner in the household. Often, they are exposed to sexual harassment, violence and abuse in the workplace. These are some of the factors that often force women to compromise their labor market choices and take up work that is low wage, with fewer benefits or better income prospects. This eventually leads to an increased number of women with less economic resources, which is then known as the feminization of poverty. It must be mentioned that female-headed households are empowering as well. The article by no means implies that female-headed households are victims. However, the aim here is to show the connections with inequalities.

The paradox of development here in the areas of economic empowerment is that different policies and programs often fail to address women’s strategic needs (Moser, 1989). Though women are being involved in greater numbers, a critical analysis through the theory of sexual division of labor and the nimble fingers theory shows us how such engagements are pre-conditioned to be low paid, less secure and often with no insurance or benefits and have lower prospects for leadership positions and higher incomes. Women’s access to the market, decision-making rights and wage parity remain as the greatest challenges even though we have achieved a higher number of participants over the years. There are also unresolved questions of workplace-related violence and harassment, which has only recently begun unfolding through different social movements like ‘MeToo’. We must understand that for an inclusive economy, women’s potential should be utilized not exploited. We have witnessed this exploitation of women’s labor through every wave of policy and events ranging from the industrial revolution, World Wars to Import Substitution Industrialization, Structural Adjustment Policies and more recently the export-based growth model. Except for the Scandinavian countries, the disparity remains both in the developed and developing regions of the world.

4. Women in the Turkish Economy: An Overview of Achievements and Challenges

Considering the four key concepts discussed above, this section provides an overview of women's economic outcomes in Turkey. The labor market situation in Turkey from a gender perspective is no exception to the challenges discussed above on a global scale. Historically, Turkish women have been contributing to rural agricultural and the home-based production economy extensively, in addition to care provision to their immediate family members (Özkanlı, 2001; UNECE, 2010). However, their contribution to the production process is not echoed in the official statistics of the formal labor markets (Bakirci, 2010). On the contrary, in comparison to the '90s with 34.5% of women being in paid work, the number has recently decreased as shown in Figure 2 below (*OECD Economic Surveys: Turkey 2018*, 2018).

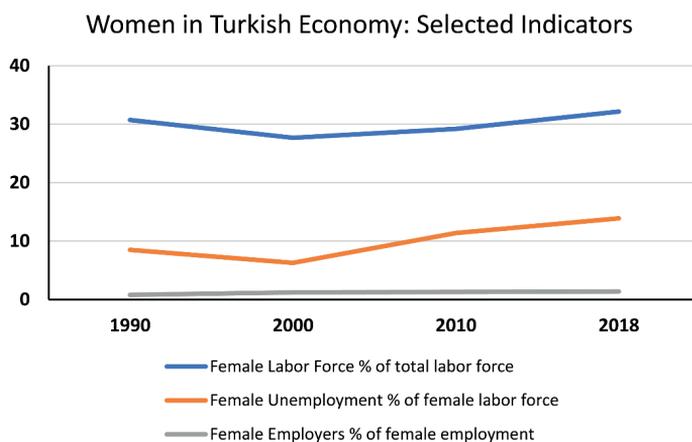


Figure 2: Turkish Women's Labor Market Participation

Source: Prepared by the author sourced from Turkish Statistical Institute- TÜİK, 2019

Figure 2 shows three indicators of the economic empowerment paradigm to explain the trend in past three decades. The first indicator shows a rather slow increase in female labor market participation since 2010. Moreover, the participation rate dropped at the beginning of 2000. The second trend shows the increasing unemployment rate in the female labor force. Finally, the trend in the number of female employers reaffirms the emerging number of female entrepreneurs in Turkey, nonetheless, the number remains low.

Turkey remains behind most of the European and some of the Islamic countries regarding women's labor market participation. Countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia have an upward trend in women's paid work with faster growth, whereas Turkish women have a slow upward and often reverse mobility. Existing literature argues that the rapid urbanization process that displaces women in the rural agricultural sector, among other factors such as extended years of education are responsible for this (Meltem & İnce, 2017; Tansel, 2001). Multi-lateral sources demonstrate the relative situation of women's labor market participation in the country. For instance, when we compare the gender-segregated labor market participation between Turkey and the G20 countries, Turkey ranks third from the lowest (Lansky, Ghosh, Meda, & Rani, 2017). Among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, Turkey ranks the lowest, while the average rate of female labor force participation is 63%. In 2016,

McKinsey suggested Turkey could benefit from a 20% increase in economic output by 2025 if it increased the female labor market participation rate to the average of the OECD (BBC, 2018).

In 2017, Turkey ranked 131 of 144 in the Global Gender Gap index by the World Economic Forum. The indices include political participation, educational attainment, economic outcomes and access to health services (World Economic Forum, 2019). Turkish men and women have the third largest difference regarding unpaid family works, just after Mexico and India according to the same report. This gap is also reflected in studies that highlight that 89.6 percent of Turkish children are taken care of by their mothers and only 2 percent are in daycare centers (İlkkaracan, 2012; İlkkaracan, Kim, & Kaya, 2015; İlkkaracan & Selim, 2007). Women in Turkish society usually marry in a later age and have fewer children if they are educated to the university level, nonetheless, this does not apparently help increase the labor market outcomes as the number of female paid workers is going down (Cansiz & Tekneci, 2018; Güneş, 2016). The scarcity of child-care centers along with the lack of flexible employment opportunities appear to be the major reasons behind this downward-spiral situation in labor markets for women, in addition to the ongoing social transformations such as urbanization and the emerging trend of conservative social policies.

Despite the existing challenges, entrepreneurship and higher education sector are two arenas where women's participation has increased recently in Turkey. Between 2007 and 2017, the number of female academicians in the higher education industry has grown from 40.1 percent to 43.1 percent. There is also an increasing number of women's entrepreneurial activities, especially in small and medium scale enterprises (TURKSTAT, 2015). Entrepreneurship is a newly emerging sector in the spectrum of the formal economy, and women are benefitting through small and medium scale initiatives. In Turkey, women are slowly but steadily moving towards self-employment and entrepreneurship similar to the rest of the world (Cansiz & Tekneci, 2018). Yet, the favorability of women entrepreneurship development is very low and the situation reaffirms the existing findings (Ecevit, 2007). For example, a 2015 international survey shows Turkey provides one of the least favorable environments for female entrepreneurs to excel in. It scores only forty along with Russia and Malaysia, whereas the high scoring countries are the USA, Australia and Germany scoring between 65 – 75 (Gender-GEDI, 2015). Theoretical paradigms in the first section of this paper highlight the intricate structural and often invisible gender-based labor market biases. This section analyzed the implications of these biases on the ground through key indicators of economic outcomes in Turkey. The final section of this article highlights the policy initiatives by the Turkish government to address these discrepancies.

5. Policy Frameworks Addressing Gender Inequalities in Turkey

Turkey has an elaborate legal framework to protect its workers' rights through different state and non-state mechanisms. There are several policy devices for the female labor forces as well. As a signatory of the CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), the European Social Charter, the ILO Agreements and the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, Turkey has enabled transparency in the process of ensuring equal rights for women (Özkanlı, 2001).

Nationally, the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey's article 10 ensures equality before the law irrespective of one's color, language, sect, political ideas, race, sex, philosophical beliefs, religion or any such considerations. However, at the same time, article 50 refers to women as being entitled to legal protection in relation to work along with children and people with special needs

(Bakirci, 2010). Thus, jeopardizing equal treatment, as women are preconceived as less capable by default in comparison to men in Turkish society.

Nonetheless, comprehensive labor market reform initiatives were undertaken by the government including - but not limited to - the following:

- The National Employment Strategy
- Small scale measures such as a subsidy for employers' social security contribution to promoting hiring women and youth, subsidy for employers
- A 2003 legislation for equal pay for equal work
- Training for mid-level managers on gender equality; establishment of the Directorate General on the Status of Women
- To support female employment in small and medium enterprises as well as in industrial sectors initiatives
- Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB)'s initiative for grants along with an interest-free loan for young people where female participants are higher than men as mentioned in the Employment Plan of Turkey, 2014 (G20-Turkey, 2014).

A wide-ranging discussion on the institutional framework to promote women's economic participation and especially women entrepreneurship can be found on Ecevit's report for the ILO (Ecevit, 2007). It critically analyzed different state mechanisms as well as international policy instruments in place in Turkey. Furthermore, A critical discussion by Bakirci on the much-discussed Employment Act of Turkey shows the legal loopholes and the compatibilities with the international labor laws particularly in comparison to the European Union laws (Bakirci, 2010).

6. Conclusion

This article stems from a seminar by the author as part of the Women's Studies Seminar Series at Erciyes University, Turkey in 2018. It explores some of the key concepts that underwrite gender-based economic inequalities, irrespective of a society's economic status or political system. The gender gap in the labor market is a global concern. Decades-long feminist movements for equal civil and political rights have put gender equality as an agenda on the map, but the present article shows that one of the most important indicators of women's empowerment - economic parity - remains a long-standing concern. Women's achievements in the social and political arena have been celebration worthy in the last half-century across the globe. A record number of women have joined politics, secured voting rights, been engaged in paid work and not to mention educational achievements. However, economic parity and empowerment remain as staggering problems to resolve in gender equality. Income and economic inequalities eventually lead to the cycle of poverty and other forms of discriminatory conditions regarding longevity, mental health, and access to rights, resources and opportunities. While every marginal community is prone to experience this mounting challenge, an intersectional analysis reveals that women remain the primary and worst sufferers (Walby et al., 2012). A similar situation can be found in Turkey. Indicators of economic outcomes such as the number of employments generated, the wage parity, the number of women as employers or the trend in unemployment show a staggering picture of gender-based economic inequalities in Turkey as well.

Elements ranging from formal rules and policies to informal socio-cultural practices are responsible for this gender-based double standard in the labor markets. Women's success in the la-

bor market will depend on taking radical measures to address these deep-rooted patriarchal structural and non-structural biases. Otherwise, the existing allocation of material, intellectual and social resources remains inadequate to address and resolve this economic inequality. Moreover, policymakers need to develop a mechanism to acknowledge unpaid care and domestic responsibilities that have trillions of dollars of opportunity cost, particularly by women. The labor market is a broad and complex subject. In this short review article, I aimed to highlight some of the key concepts that are topical and relevant to achieve structural equality in economic outcomes. The first section briefly discussed the sexual division of labor, the nimble fingers theory, the glass-ceiling and glass-wall effect and lastly, female-headed households and the feminization of poverty. Afterwards, the article provides a broad overview of women in Turkish labor markets considering the theoretical concepts discussed in the first section. Nonetheless, several significant issues such as education, political leadership and capabilities - among others - are not included in this review and remain open for future studies to address. Hopefully, the policymakers and institutional authorities concerning the economic sectors will be more accepting of feminist analysis and put in efforts according to their suggestions to lessen the discrepancies.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

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