

WHO TAKES CARE OF THE CHILDREN?

FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND GENDER

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Executive Summary

In this research brief, we focus on how childcare tasks are shared among parents. The distribution of childcare tasks is studied in relation to female labor force participation decisions. Our data shows that the childcare in Turkey is mainly determined by gender inequality. The sharing of childcare tasks is not only strikingly unfair from the point of women but also deprives children of their father's contribution to their development. For example, even among the women in the labor force, half of the women state that they have the sole responsibility of changing diapers. This share increases to 80 percent when women who usually are doing this task are included. Similar results were found in the tasks of feeding and preparing children. As children grow up and hence childcare tasks change, the share of women mentioning an equal share of childcare tasks among partners, increase. However, even in tasks where women report high equal sharing, the share stays below 40 percent.

Description of research

The data used in this research brief is a part of a broader research project funded by TUBITAK which we conducted in order to investigate the labor force participation decisions of highly educated women in Turkey¹. Within the scope of this interdisciplinary research, we performed in-depth interviews with 70 women, 8 focus group discussions and a survey with 3600 participants. Focus group discussions are carried out in İstanbul, in Antalya and Zonguldak where the female labor force participation rates are the highest among highly educated women, as well as in Erzurum and Urfa where the female labor force participation rates are the lowest among highly educated women. The survey's sample is nationally representative which designed as a result of face-to-face interviews with 3600 women participants. Data collected focuses on current and previous working life experiences of highly educated women, their approach to working life and their perception of gender roles.

In this research brief, the main focus is on how childcare tasks are shared between parents, which constitutes a narrower part of the collected data. During the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and the survey, questions were asked to participant women on how childcare tasks like diapering, preparing food/feeding child, playing with child and helping child's homework, etc.

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¹ We would like to thank Melike Kökkızıl and Yasemin Cansuz who are working as scholars in the TUBITAK project numbered 113K365

Therefore, the primary goal of this research brief is to analyze this part of the data. The distribution of childcare tasks was studied in relation to female labor force participation decisions.

The sharing of childcare tasks

The childcare tasks included in this research brief were determined with the view that children of different ages have different childcare needs. The tasks like diapering and feeding are considered for younger children whereas tasks like preparing food and helping child’s homework are included in analysis for relatively older children. Tasks like preparing food/feeding child, playing with the child and helping child’s homework were asked in the similar surveys. Even though it is not a part of other surveys conducted on childcare issues, the duty of changing diapers was mentioned consistently by women during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

“For instance my husband cannot change diapers. I mean, I don’t say he never changes it but he just can not (...) Even worse things can happen if he touches the diaper here and there. Therefore, he never changed baby’s diaper.” (university graduate, working, 27 March 2014)

“It is not like I am saying that he should change the baby’s diaper” (high school graduate, not working, 18 April 2014)

The data regarding task sharing of changing diapers has been summarized in Table 1. Even among women in the labor force, half of them state that they are the ones who always change their baby’s diaper. Including women who say they are “usually” the ones, 80 percent of women in labor force are the main responsible for diaper changes. Among the women who are not in the labor force, this rate is almost 90 percent. Another striking observation is that only 1.4 percent of husbands are the sole responsible of this task. As can be seen, changing diapers is the task which reflects gender inequality in the most dramatic way. Even being in employment does not change the sharing of tasks between couples.

Table 1 Task sharing for diaper changes, (%)

	Not in Labor Force	In Labor Force	Total
Always me	66.8	49.3	61.6
Usually me	20.4	29.6	23.1
Equally shared by me and my spouse	6.3	9.0	7.1
Always my spouse	0.0	1.4	0.4
Children on their own	6.5	10.8	7.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2 shows the data on task sharing for other childcare responsibilities between couples. Similar results to diaper changes were seen for the tasks of preparing food/feeding child. 73.4 percent of women who are in labor force stated that it is always or usually them for carrying out this task while this share increases to 84.2 percent among women who are not in labor force.

As children get older and tasks change, the share of women who report an equal sharing of childcare tasks increases. For example, 28.5 percent of women who are not in labor force share the task of playing with the child equally with their husbands. This share increases to 36.8 percent for the women

in the labor force. In terms of helping child’s homework, this ratio is 28.9 for women who are not in the labor force and it increases to 32.9 percent for women in the labor force.

Table 2 Sharing of other childcare tasks, (%)

	Not in Labor Force	In Labor Force
Feeding child/Preparing child’s food		
Always me	52.3	41.1
Usually me	31.9	32.3
Equally shared by me and my spouse	9.0	13.9
Always my spouse	0.1	0.5
Children on their own	6.7	12.2
Total	100.0	100.0
Playing with child		
Always me	32.0	24.3
Usually me	28.9	25.0
Equally shared by me and my spouse	28.5	36.8
Always my spouse	1.3	1.8
Children on their own	0.3	0.3
Total	9.0	12.0
Always me	100.0	100.0
Helping child’s homework		
Always me	32.7	29.4
Usually me	30.8	26.7
Equally shared by me and my spouse	28.8	32.9
Always my spouse	2.3	1.8
Children on their own	0.5	0.0
Total	5.0	9.2
Always me	100.0	100.0

The data shows that childcare tasks within the household are taken on primarily by women regardless of their labor force participation decisions. Even in tasks where women state equal sharing, the share stays below 40 percent. Within this context, it is important to ask what would women change in terms of their working lives and childcare tasks.

Table 3 What would you like to change regarding your working life and childcare tasks? (%)

	Not in labor force	In labor force	Total
I would not change anything	74.0	54.5	67.4
I would like to work / work more and spend less time on childcare	12.4	17.1	14.0
I would like to work less and spend more time on childcare	13.7	28.3	18.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

According to Table 3, 12.4 percent of women who are not in the labor force stated that they would like to start working and spend less time on childcare tasks. 17.1 percent of women who are in the labor force mentioned that they would like to dedicate less time to childcare and prefer to work more. On the other hand, a striking finding is that nearly the one third of women who are in labor force prefer to work less and spend more time on childcare tasks.

Table 4 Who do you think can take care of the children properly ? (%)

	Child between the ages of 0 and 3		Child between the ages of 4 and 6		Child between the ages of 7 and 14	
	Inactive	In labor force	Inactive	In labor force	Inactive	In labor force
Mother	9.,8	98.6	89.9	85.6	77.9	74.5
Father	2.79	32.1	38.0	39.8	41.4	41.1
Grandmothers	21.8	34.9	39.8	54.9	50.7	60.3
Nursery/kindergarden/school	7.0	12.1	36.6	51.5	28.2	61.5
Baby-sitter	3.7	5.8	4.2	8.2	4.8	6.8
Grandparents	2.1	5.0	9.3	13.3	19.0	23.2
Relatives/Acquaintance	1.0	1.8	2.6	4.3	5.7	7.1
Brother/Sister	0.5	1.3	2.8	4.9	9.5	11.9
Neighbor	0.2	0.5	0.6	1.3	2.8	2.8

Table 4 shows the answers to the question “Who do you think can take care of the children properly?” by different age groups. For the age group 0-3, around 30 percent of women state that the father can take care of the child properly. For the same age group, 21.8 percent of women not in labor force and 34.9 percent of women in labor force think that grandmothers can take care of child properly. The ratio of women who think nursery can provide a proper care declines to 12 percent for women who are in labor force and to 7 percent for the ones who are not. Moreover, the share of women who think baby-sitters can provide the necessary care is even lower. These data clearly reveal that, for the age group 0-3, women think that parents especially mothers should be the main responsible for childcare.

As children grow up, the idea of the father, the grandmother or the nursery providing proper childcare becomes more common among women. For example, 38 percent of inactive women and 39.8 percent of women in labor force think that father can properly take care of children aged between 4 and 6. As expected, the ratio of women who think childcare can be provided by individuals other than mother are higher among the women who are in labor force. However, the ratio of women who think that grandmothers can provide proper childcare is higher than the ratio of women who think fathers can (for the age group 4 to 6, these shares are 39.8 and 54.9 respectively). The findings for the age group 7-14 are similar to the findings of 4 to 6 age group. Strikingly the labor force status of women does not change this ranking. Generally, if the childcare tasks are not taken on by mothers, it is perceived to be more appropriate that other women in the family take on the child care tasks than the father.

The data clearly shows that childcare in Turkey is mostly determined by gender inequality. Childcare is mainly taken on by women. The mother’s care role is more pronounced especially for children aged between 0 and 3. Even for the tasks which are more equally shared, the share of equally sharing

parents is below 40 percent. This situation does not significantly change for women who work full time. The problem becomes more severe when the aforementioned practices are accompanied by the perception of mother being the best at childcare, which is frequently stated by women during the in-depth interviews as well. This finding implies that parenthood is perceived only as motherhood and the role of the father is rather ignored. Inevitably, a childcare model determined by gender inequality to such an extent presents an obstacle to women's participating in the labor force.

Defining childcare as mother's primary duty effects women's labor force participation decisions from two distinct channels. Firstly, a disproportionate share of childcare tasks damages household labor division and creates a "double shift" for women. Since women cannot assign their domestic tasks to someone else, they choose to stay away from labor market. On the other hand, the perception of "mothers as primary child care providers" causes an internal conflict for women. Due to feelings of not performing their motherhood tasks well enough, women in the labor force struggle from the same inner conflict. However, a similar conflict is not present for the fathers. The sharing of childcare tasks is not only strikingly unfair from the point of women but also deprives the children from father's contribution to their development.