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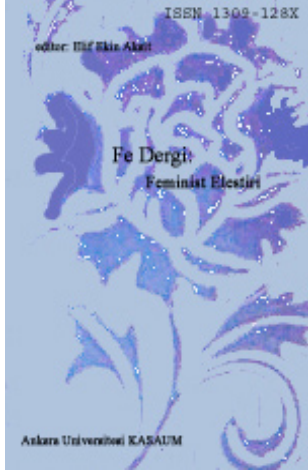
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**Balance between work and family life: Middle class working mothers in Turkey**

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### Balance between work and family life: Middle class working mothers in Turkey

İdil Safiye Soyseçkin\*

*This article analyzes strategies developed by middle class mothers to establish balance between their work and care responsibilities in Turkey where no extensive public services are available and childcare is socially and culturally constructed as women's sole duty with a limited male involvement. The fieldwork of the study is based on accounts of in-depth interviews conducted with nineteen working middle class mothers in the capital city of Turkey, Ankara. Gender inequality results in experiencing work and family conflict heavily. Middle class women's care responsibilities come into conflict with their work and their strategies mostly depends on profession, working place, colleagues, and employer/manager.*

*Key words: Working middle class women, care responsibilities, working life, gendered division of labor*

#### İş ve aile yaşamı dengesi: Türkiye'de çalışan orta sınıf anneler

*Bu makale yaygın kamusal hizmetlerin olmadığı ve çocuk bakımının toplumsal ve kültürel olarak yalnızca kadınların sorumluluğu olarak görüldüğü Türkiye'de çalışan orta sınıf annelerin işleri ve çocuk bakım sorumlulukları arasında denge sağlamak için geliştirdikleri stratejileri incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın alan araştırması profesyonel meslek sahibi on dokuz orta sınıf anne ile yapılan derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği iş ve aile yaşamı arasında yoğun bir çatışmaya neden olmaktadır. Orta sınıf kadınların bakım sorumluluklarının işleriyle ne kadar çatışma içine girdiği hanedeki cinsiyetçi işbölümüne, kadınların mesleklerine, işyerlerine, meslektaşlarına ve yöneticilerine bağlı olarak değişmekte, ve bu durum bu çatışma ile başatma stratejilerini de belirlemektedir.*

*Anahtar sözcükler: Çalışan orta sınıf anneler, bakım sorumlulukları, çalışma hayatı, cinsiyetçi işbölümü*

#### Giriş

Policies underlying the balance between work and family life aim to solve the inherent conflict between work and family responsibilities embedded in the gender division of labour and gendered disparities in the private sphere.<sup>1</sup> These policies should “ensure the adequacy of family resources, enhance children's development, and facilitate parental choice regarding work and care and gender equality and employment opportunities” (Masselot ve Caracciolo di Torella 2010, 5). In Europe, although many policies are implemented to tip the balance of this unequal division of labour between sexes, most of them failed to change the balance of gender equality but are used as tools to channel women into labour market activities.

In Turkey, recently, the policy target of increasing women's participation into the labour force has been discussed and taken place in almost all policy documents concerned with economic and social development as the result of Turkey's European Union membership process in the early 2000s (İlkkaracan 2012). Although women's employment has been high in the public agenda since the early 2000s, the work and family life balance policies, mostly the relationship between women's employment and childcare arrangements, could not climb on the public agenda as high as women's employment. Increasing women's employment is seen parallel to increasing part-time and flexible work opportunities because women are needed to care their children and work at the same time. In other words, in an environment where childcare services are insufficient, women are mainly responsible for childcare. Especially early-age childcare services for 0-2 years old are limited and children between 3-6 years old cannot widely access to low-priced and good quality nursery services. In this regard, childcare area has been mostly left to the private sector, where the public sector has been withdrawing from any form of institutional care provisions in Turkey (KEİG 2014). In addition to childcare, leave policies targeting women to have babies and work at the same time such as paid maternity leave, is limited to 16 weeks and only women working in formal registered jobs have a chance to use it. Men, on the other hand, are almost absent from the picture when the leave arrangements were concerned. Unpaid nature of parental leave encourages neither men nor many of the women to use it.

The Turkish literature examines the work and family reconciliation/balance from different aspects. The issue is focused in field of management widely and it is discussed mostly from the point of job burn-out, job and

life satisfaction and organizational loyalty (Özdevecioğlu and Çakmak Doğru, 2009; Efeoğlu and Özgen, 2007; Gerçek, Elmas Atay, Dündar, 2015; Küçükusta, 2007; Kapız 2002, Yüksel 2005) However, despite the fact that care and household responsibilities are mentioned in the course of work and family conflict, mainly a genderless worker is supposed. In other words gender dimension is ignored. Studies in English on the other hand, discuss the issue within the context of social policy implementations, and gender equality is the most significant element that these policies are shaped accordingly (Aliprani-Maratou and Nikalou 2008, de Silva de Alwis 2011, European Commission Report 2005, Eurostat 2009, Gregory and Connolly 2008, Lewis, 2007, Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport 2007, Stratigaki 2004). In Turkish literature, as well, there are studies focusing work and family balance from the point of social policies and gender equality (Bakırcı 2010, Ecevit 2010; İlkcaracan 2010, 2012). The common conclusion of all analyses is the insufficiency of reconciliation policies and it shows how the absence of these policies negatively affects women and their likelihood of labour market access. The lack of sufficient care services and arrangements is the most commonly highlighted area while some other studies discuss the issue through welfare regime in Turkey (Dedeoğlu 2012, 2013; Tılıç-Rittesberger and Kalaycıoğlu, 2012).

However, no study is conducted analyzing how working women succeed to balance between their work and childcare responsibilities in an environment where no extensive public services are available and childcare is socially and culturally constructed as women's sole duty with a limited male involvement. Therefore, the aim of this article is to bring experience of middle-class women about reconciliation policies in Turkey and strategies they develop to establish balance between work and care responsibilities. In this study reconciliation issue refers to all legal, institutional and social arrangements and supports for families with young children and care responsibilities (Ilkcaracan, 2010). However, it is the fact that not all women meet with similar situations and insufficiency of public facilities for childcare does not affect them in the same way. Therefore, the main focus of the article is on middle class working mothers since they are the single group that is capable of developing various strategies due to their social, cultural and economic resources. This will show that the reconciliation of work and family life in Turkey is almost sole duty of women. This is highlighted by a recent research on the Turkish Family Structure Survey (Aile Yapısı Araştırması) (2013), which shows that women handle the 88 percent of childcare. Other than mothers, grandmothers share 9 percent of childcare responsibility and only 2 percent of childcare is handled by fathers. Hence, it is not surprising that no structural changes regarding men's roles in the household take place in men's lives after they got married and had child. After marriage, women's unpaid labour increases by 38 percent, but men's decreases by 49 percent (Başak, Kingir and Yaşar 2013). On the contrary, women's double burden increases with marriage and childbirth. In a society where insufficient care services and short period of paid leaves dominate the reconciliation policies and social expectations placed on women to perfectly fulfill their motherly roles, lead them to develop strategies to provide the best care they can. Even timing of giving birth has been shaped depending on these plans which are mostly shaped within the limits of the Labour Law or the Civil Servants Law.<sup>2</sup>

The following part presents the methodology, then the next section briefly explains balance between work and family life policies in Turkey and how these policies affect the ways in which middle class working mothers arrange their family life, their decision to have children and childcare.

## **Method**

This study is based on a fieldwork research realized within the scope of my PhD dissertation. In total, 41 in-depth interviews were conducted between February 2013 – January 2014, in the capital city of Turkey, Ankara, of which 19 were with child minders and 19 were with urban middle class working mothers with at least one child between the ages of 0 and 6 years cared for by a child minder. Furthermore, three interviews were conducted with manager women working in agencies matching families and child minders.

The mentioned dissertation pointed to paid child care work in informal sector in Turkey as working middle class mothers' strategy to be able to allocate appropriate time and labor to their domestic responsibilities and obligations of work. It aimed to understand reasons behind women's preferences of employing a child minder, and dynamics of the work and working relation.

There were two central questions of this study and thus two levels to be focused. The first question was that how did commodification of child care in informal labor market shape nature of the work and dynamics of

relations among middle class mothers and child minders? The second was that what was the relation between social welfare implementations on early child care and education and commodification of care labor?

According to results of mentioned study, childcare to be performed in the informal labor market shapes boundaries of the work and how mothers and child minders associate to each other. In addition to dynamics of the informal labor market, working place to be home and object of care to be child move working relation to a kind of family relation, and affects strategies and negotiation power of both women. Child minding to be considered as a kind of mothering reinforces establishment of a family relation. Furthermore, devaluation of care work performed by women in home as unpaid keep both sides of the relation from reflecting on it as a job. Commodification of child care does not easily bring market logic into the relation between child minder, mother and child. Yet due to existence of money, hiding/turning black eye to market relations is not easy. Emotions are embedded in all tasks executed within the frame of the work. This situation complicates simple employer-employee relation found in other jobs, blurs scope of the duties and becomes source of its low status.

Influence of poor welfare implementations on women, on the other hand, becomes visible in every stage of organization of child care. Even when they decide on timing of having child, they have to make plans accorded with alternatives of child care and their career path. Owing to insufficient welfare arrangements parents –especially mothers– have to develop “individual reconciliation strategy” (Cassirer and Addati 2007:4) to handle work and domestic responsibilities.

In this article I would like to focus on middle class mothers’ strategies developed for balancing requirements of their work and family. Therefore, only their accounts were given a place throughout the study.

This article is based on accounts of 19 middle class working mothers living in capital city of Turkey, Ankara. Therefore it does not have any claim of representing whole area, but aims to be able to present a small picture.

To define class position of interviewees, their occupation, educational level, familial sources, social networks, total income entering their household and location of their living place were taken as criteria.

Middle class mothers I interviewed were between 31-46 years old. 11 of 19 mothers were university graduated, five women had master degree and three had PhD. 15 of 19 mothers had one child, and ages of children varied from 15 months to 4 years old. Four women had two children between 6-11 years old. Ten of all mothers were employed in public institutions, while nine were working in private sector. All of their partners were working and 9 of them were university graduates, 7 had master degree. Two partners were holding PhD. Total income entering into their household was varying from 5000 TL to 25000 TL.

### **(Un)balance Between Family and Working Life in Turkey**

There is a direct relation between women’s employment and childcare responsibility and as many researches exhibited that the lack of childcare services is decisive on women’s decision to work or not. Possibility of women with children to participate into labour market is less likely compared to women with no child (İlkkaracan 1998; KSGM 1999; Uşen and Delen 2011). In the literature, providing a balance is mostly discussed within the frame of childcare responsibility, especially, care of 0-6 years old children.

In Turkey, high quality and widespread early childcare and education services are not available for the most of population. In the early years of the construction of Turkey as a nation-state, primary school education had been promoted in accordance with “new citizenship model” of the Republic (Gül-Deretarla 2008, 272). Pre-school education, on the other hand, had been taken into the agenda within the scope of protecting children from the damages of having a working mother –which had been normalized only with family’s financial needs (Ecevit 2012). Today the primary school education still has the central importance but the schooling ratio of children between 0-5 years old has remained to be limited. Until 2009 there is no data to measure the number of pre-school places, and data became available for only schooling ratio of children between 3-5 years old after 2009. In other words, in Turkey the care of children –especially the ones between 0-2 years old– has been not left to the family not only throughout the period of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government but also from the very beginning of the Turkish Republic. Yet, here, family refers to women owing to the fact that they are perceived as main responsible from childcare. The Ministry of National Education (MNE) data shows that net schooling ratios are 38,61 percent for 3-5 years old children, 49,27 for 4-5 years old and 70,19 for 5 years old children in 2015/2016. The direct result of this can be seen in the ratio of women’s employment in Turkey. Compared to OECD 2013 average, women’s employment rate having at least one child between 3-5

years old is very low (21,4 percent for Turkey and OECD average is 63,3 percent). Regarding local childcare services, municipalities have no legal responsibility of establishing nurseries. A regulation introduced in 2008 obliging public institutions to meet whole expenses from their own local budgets, has resulted in the closure of nurseries and other social facilities.<sup>3</sup> The most comprehensive piece of regulation for childcare services for working women is for those working places having female workers more than 150. They have to establish nurseries or to buy these services from private providers. However, no information is available on how many employers fulfill this obligation because the provision of services is only controlled when there is any complaint about firms. Furthermore, even if a violation of law is found, amount of the penalty is too small to have deterrence.<sup>4</sup>

Another dimension of reconciliation policies is paid and unpaid leaves given after birth. In Turkey, maternal leave covers 16 weeks. At the end of this maternity leave, a period of leave is granted for breastfeeding. In the Labour Law, one and half hours of leave per day is granted for mothers until the child reaches one year old. Yet, Civil Servants' Law gives breastfeeding leave as three hours a day during first six months and then it decreases to one and half hours a day during the second six months. In the Labor Law paternity leave is defined as five days while Civil Servants' Law states ten days paternity leave for fathers after birth if requested. Parental leaves are designed for workers and civil servants separately. In the Labour Law, mothers can use unpaid leave up to 6 months, but no arrangement for fathers. A new arrangement was realized in 2011 in the Civil Servant's Law Article 108, so both mothers and fathers have the right to use twenty four months unpaid leave<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, according to the latest Program for Protection of Family and Dynamic Population (Ailenin ve Dinamik Nüfusun Korunması Programı) of the government, announced by the Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, following the maternal leave, mothers will have choice to work part-time for two months for the first child, four months for the second child and six months for the third child. During this time, women can work part-time but will be paid in full-time wage, which will be paid by employer and the state together. Because it starts immediately after maternal leave, breastfeeding period will be shorted. On the other hand, parents will have chance to work part-time until child gets five and half years old. However, this means that parents, mostly women, will be paid a part-time wage and social premiums associated with part-time work, which will render entitling to a pension more difficult. In the same program, there will be only five days paternal leave for those fathers working under the Labour Law. With respect to childcare services, the program provides a legal arrangement for municipalities with 50 thousand and more population to open nurseries. However, there is neither any arrangement about smaller municipalities nor any sanctions for those not obliging with the regulation have been defined. Another aim of the program is to promote private nurseries. As all arrangements display, the government has not developed any policy to provide free/cheap and accessible child care and education services of high quality; or to financial support parents who would like to care for their children and to encourage men to share childcare responsibility.

Social policies on female employment in Turkey have a focus on increasing the flexible employment opportunities through which it is believed to increase female employment as well. In a society where public childcare services remain to be very low or absent in many areas, working parents have to meet whole expenses of childcare. This also means that women -especially in low-level income families- either cannot participate into working life or temporarily or permanently stay out of labour market, which have a lasting effect on the level of female employment in the country. Women's class differences generate different effects on different policies. Women from lower income families need labour of other female members of their families to be able to take up paid jobs. In absence of this family-based support, many have to work as home-based informal workers with a low level of earning potential and open to occupational hazards and diseases. Therefore, while they work as home-based workers they can care for their children. However, the situation is different for the educated middle class women who mostly have formal jobs in well-paying occupations. But, these women may also need the support of other female members of their families as a result of insufficient childcare services. Although middle-class professional women have more opportunities to use unpaid care leaves and ability to pay for childcare, irregularity of using unpaid leaves, lack of quality daycare services and widespread gender inequality lead middle class women to experience problems while trying to establish balance between work and care tasks. They have to find different ways to continue working and provide a good care for their children. Their case is the best to show that men take very little part in childcare in Turkey, no matter how well their education and income level. Whole process of organization of care and solving problem appears during this process have been executed by women. Therefore, it is not surprising for women to undergo work and family conflict. Motherhood

experiences of middle-class women enable us to analyze how unbalance between work and family life accelerate gendered inequality in the family life as well as in the workplace.

### **To Be Middle Class Working Mother**

Limited availability childcare services and the dominance of traditional gender roles are the main reasons for middle-class women to plan having child according to their career path and existence of care alternatives. They have to find ways to decrease the negative effects of existing care and leave arrangements on their family responsibilities. It is evident that how women's care responsibilities come into conflict with their work mostly depends on profession, working place, colleagues, and employer/manager. Therefore, this section of the article has a focus on effect of limited childcare alternatives on timing of having baby, problems women experience between their work and family responsibilities and strategies they adopt within the limits of existing policies and services.

In Turkey, different from men, the level of education for women is one of the main determinants of their labour force participation. As educational level increases, the rate of women in labour force gets higher.<sup>6</sup> In accordance with these data, all of my informants are minimum university graduates and they all have professional jobs. This is why, except for three women, all of them had child after their 30s. They told that they waited for the right time, which is very much related with keeping their professional jobs secure otherwise they might have lost it. In addition, husbands' career paths might also be influential in planning the right time for having a baby.

Women try to arrange their lives as suitable for raising children. Ceylan (34) gave birth after completing her PhD, defined it as an intervening period of time. The case of Meliha (31) is an interesting one. At the time, her job required lots of traveling. This is why having a child seemed not possible for her. But after her job had been moved to a secure position, she considered doing masters for further promotion and she did not want to have a baby before completing the courses. Olcay (39), working in a public institution, gave birth after 6 years of marriage, when her husband got a master degree and transferred from public to private sector. Banu (41) waited for settling in a city since her husband was government attorney moving very frequently. Like Banu, Burcu (38) had child after she and her husband managed to work in the same city.

The findings of the study show that women's decisions to have children mostly depend on their own or husbands' career paths or how secure their employment is. As women are the solely responsible for the care of children and men do not share care responsibility, all women needed to make sure that their children had the best care they could provide and could go back to work without losing their secure jobs. After giving birth, women spend the first six months, or even more, with the child before they go back to work. Because of the fact that having a child leads to a significant change in women's lives which is mostly the result of insufficient care services and unequal gender division of labour in the family, they try to arrange timing of delivery in such a way that their career would be less negatively affected and they would spare much more time to care. Educated middle class women strive to guarantee their future in employment while at the same time provide the best care for their children.

### ***Paid and Unpaid Leaves***

Women's main aim is to provide the best care for their new born and stay with them as long as possible. Since the duration of maternity leave is not enough for one to recover after the delivery and spend enough time with their new born, as all informants said, women adopt various strategies to extend the unpaid leaves and use them without jeopardizing their position at work. Almost all the middle class mothers think that -at least- six months is essential for them and their children to pull themselves together. This duration seems to be considered along with minimum breastfeeding leave. Therefore, women find different solutions, which may vary depending on whether they work in public or private institutions, their position and responsibilities at work, income level of their household, help of other female family members, husbands' occupation and work, and the division of labour at home. All factors affect how women choose to spend time with their newborn babies.

Although the length of the maternity leave is the same for private or public sector employees, working in a public institution enable women to extend the duration more easily compared to the ones working in private institutions. Women, after deciding to have a baby, save their annual leaves and add them on the maternity leave. The other strategy is to get medical reports from an acquainted doctor to get sick leaves.

Another strategy women deploy is to add breastfeeding leave onto their maternity leave period, which is three hours for the first six months then as one and half hours in the second six months and which may add up to forty five days extra. This is not defined through the Law, yet it appears to be used by women in some cases. If breastfeeding duration is not added onto maternal leave, women use it in two ways: starting workday later or finishing it earlier.

According to the Civil Servants Law, both men and women have right to use leave up to two years. Yet this is not defined as a parental but as unpaid leave. On the other hand the Labour Law only allows women to use unpaid leave up to six months. That is to say depending on if they work in public or private sector, women's ability to spend more time with their children changes. Using unpaid leave seems widespread among women I interviewed. Especially for mothers working in public sector, unpaid leave is also another strategy used to spend more time with their children if their financial situation is sufficient enough. Furthermore, this is an only alternative for women in private sector to have chance to be with their children after maternity leave finishes. Yet, this depends on their financial situation and most importantly on the attitudes of their employer. Furthermore leave arrangements generate inequality among women as rightly expressed by Monique Kremer (2007). In addition to public and private sector differentiation, among middle class women financial difficulties could be reason for going back work earlier than they wish. Dilek told that she could use only four months leave for her first child owing to the fact that they had been paying home loan.

In Turkey, establishing a balance between work and family responsibilities is a woman's task as shown in the leave arrangements of middle-class professional women. Even though my informants were positive that men should be included into care work, cultural values burden women as primary care providers. In a similar vein, Rabia (35) correctly put forward: "Society in general considers that men continue their lives as nothing has changed even after having child. However, women should leave everything behind and only care for her child." Therefore, they have to plan everything about the balance between work and family life by presuming their partners are absent in the picture. As a result of unequal division of labour at home, working women perform double burden no matter their level of education and type of profession. This is legitimized by society and by women as the first criteria of good motherhood. That is to say if a woman would like to be in employment, then she should not impede any of her responsibilities to be able to escape blames of bad mothering.

The next section closely looks what kind of problems the middle class mothers encounter after going back to work. Traditional gender roles are very powerful in Turkey and as mentioned before, working women expected to execute all responsibilities belonged to home and family at the same time. On the one hand motherhood is perceived as sacred; on the other hand it functions as the biggest obstacle in front of women participating into different areas of social life. Despite the fact that whole society considers reconciliation of work and family life as main responsibility of women, they experience this situation in a negative way. The level of this impact varies depending on working place, employers/managers and colleagues.

### ***At Work Again***

The narratives of women about their experiences after the maternity leave when they go back to work bear significant clues about the reflection of traditional gender roles on their paid employment. Due to childcare responsibilities, some employers/managers might not prefer to hire women no matter whether public or private sector. Practicing gender discrimination in the recruitment is easier in private sector, yet in public sector there are ways to exclude women as Meliha's (31) case proves it.

Our team is consisted of mostly women. (...) Except two, all of us are married and have children. The deputy of the general director said: "When employing personnel, I will prefer men". I heard this with my own ears. (...)The director also says, "Enough" to this many women, because it is hard to deal with their problems. (Meliha is university graduated, specialist in a public institution, has two and half years old child)

This narrative is a significant example showing how men and women encounter family responsibilities on work differently. Employing female workers means accepting the idea that at the end she will have a child and break off from work for some time. Furthermore, her care responsibility will mean additional day-offs during her working life and 'inefficiency' in executing tasks. What Asiye (43) told me displays that this might turn into a pressure on a worker.

You have to work more. He [the manager] expected me to show a performance apart from the Law 657 [Civil Servants' Law]. Yet I have a child. I have to take her [from the school]. I mean he does not have a legal right to ask. It says [in the Law] a civil servant cannot to be forced to work overtime. [...] For instance, he claims



that I avoid duties out of Ankara, by using my child as an excuse. Yet, there is no such a thing. I went to every assignment in other cities. [...] I have never neglected any of my duties using my child as an excuse. However, he uses it as a reason of pressure. This is because I am woman with a child. (University graduated, architect, has a two years old child)

In a similar vein, the attitudes of colleagues towards women workers' childcare responsibility are a significant way to show how women live the post-natal work experience. Depending on the requirements of a job, a woman's care responsibility could mean for increased workload for others in the workplace as they may shoulder a larger. Semiha (38) works in a public institution in which there are many travels to other provinces. Therefore, childless workers are unhappy about undertaking tasks cannot be performed by those staff with children.

There [working place] people do not get pleased when you are pregnant because they have an opinion that you cannot leave Ankara for supervision. Yet, our main duty is not in Ankara. [...] Therefore other people have an impression that task you should do fall on them. [...] Thus, despite the fact that we [women with children} work in Ankara in a very high tempo, we attract their attention. Thanks god, since number of women is not too many that we can escape from their anger. (University graduated, supervisor in a public institution, has a one and half years old child)

Different from other cases, colleagues of Canan supported her during the period after birth and she could go back to the same position at her job.

I hesitated about using maternity leave [for the second child] because of the [...] I appreciate people supplied my place. I mean, I could go back to my recent department at the end of the 8th month. [...] I was in an ongoing communication with a colleague. I wished nobody to be employed instead of me. I appreciate her that she managed the situation. She handled my duties as well. She said: "I will execute the tasks till Canan come back to work." (Canan is university graduated, Senior Chief in a Public Institution, has three and eleven years old children)

Similarly, Olcay's friends and department director showed tolerance even in time of pregnancy. This is why she defines herself "very lucky", which proves that where women work affects their level of dealing with difficult situations with respect to care and household duties.

As these examples put forward, how women experience balance between their care and work responsibilities, depends on the sector, working place, employer/manager and colleagues. Because of the fact that traditional gender roles are widespread, in addition to the lack of services and supports to lighten care responsibility on women, there is no women-friendly approach in working places. Implementations and attitudes changes depending on people work with. In other words, speaking of standardization is not possible. Women have to know internal balance in their working place and colleagues and managers, and make a plan accordingly to not to lose their job or seniority and/or reputation. That is to say professional women have to calculate every small detail in their life while deciding on having child.

In addition to efforts for reconciliation between work and family responsibilities, women experience gender inequality and traditional gender roles understanding in their private life deeply. Having child changes their life totally contrary to men. Therefore, the next part focuses these changes and the effect of them.

### **In-between Work and Family**

For mothers, working means to shoulder double burden till the end of their lives. In-between work and family, they also experience an isolated life. Women cannot spare time for other activities other than household responsibilities. On the other hand, in case they find possibility to do different activities they fight with feeling of guilt. The main source of this feeling is widespread understanding that working women are the ones who do not prefer to care their children. For instance, Beyhan (34) considers sparing time for herself as unfair.

[...] I can't say I never have nervous breakdowns about this issue. I want to go to the hairdresser, etc. occasionally, but I feel like it would be better if I spent the time with my child instead of going to hairdresser. But believe me, I would like to turn back home as quick as possible. (...) If I hadn't been working, if I had been with her the whole day, I would have spent more time for myself. (...) I feel like it would be unfair if I spend time for myself instead of having time with her. (Beyhan is university graduated, architect, as a seventeen months old child)

Meliha (31), having master degree and a specialist in a public institution, mentioned a similar feeling.

[...] I could ask to [the child minder to stay longer with child] but I already have this feeling of guilt. I work, and hardly come back home around 7:00-7:30 pm. I can see the child three hours in a day in total. Thus I cannot go to the cinema in the evenings for the sake of my own pleasure by at the expense of leaving the child alone at home. Hence, social life equals to zero. (Meliha has a two and half years old child)

In addition to general understanding that considers women as main responsible for childcare, men play little role to strengthen mothers' feeling of guilt. Dilek (35) complains about unequal share of care tasks between her and her husband.

I cannot go shopping. Even going to hairdresser is a problem. (...) Now, getting dressed and going out is a big problem. We wake up at 5.30 am together with my little. He wakes up early. Sometimes I have a bath together with him. My husband continues to sleep. At the end I took my all make up materials and carried them to working place.

Middle class working mothers make an extra effort for compensate for time they spend far from their children. Nalan (34), despite the fact that, thinks both mother and father should spend enough time with child, and in case they could not, she believes she is the one who have to atone the situation.

I am at work while she sleeps. For instance I may not go home at lunch break time. Now, grandmothers are there. But, since home is close to work (...) I go and check the child. If I don't go, I can spare time for myself. Yet, there is always a feeling of guilt. I mean, because of spending time somewhere, instead of being with her. This time I consider her position, because she sees her mother and father less.

The meaning of becoming mother for middle class women is giving up things they had done before, or changing their future plans. On the contrary, for fathers the situation might be different. As Olcay (39) told, to behave as a father does is not possible for a mother.

My husband comes home 7.30 pm earliest. I go shopping after work, come and send the child minder her home. Of course I will care for Kaan (son). Of course this is my responsibility. I do not have a chance to say, "I will come home late tonight". My husband can do this, because I am already with the child. (...) I, necessarily, have to go home at that time.

Semiha as well, complains about the selfishness of men and while she tells that her husband has started to go sports after child was born, she indicates a significant situation: "If we were talking about cleaning, I would do nothing. However a woman cannot sacrifice her child. (...) Yet we are talking about a child, you have to make a move".

As Semiha correctly underlines women to make sacrifice: If they want to work then they have to shoulder double burden. They have to establish a balance between work and family life. Otherwise, they are subjected to claims of bad mothering because they 'prefer' to work instead of staying home to care for children. Yet, as it is explicit, men do not experience fatherhood and working in a negative relation. In Turkey, disregarding womanhood and lumping women with being wife and mother in family underlies insufficient reconciliation policies. Gender regime of Turkey reinforces inequality between men and women and leaves no place for women other than being mother. As it is clear in the narratives above, middle class working mothers encounter high level of work and family life conflict.

Despite the fact that women take place in employment, no matter they internalize traditional gender roles or not, gendered structure of society cause them to deal with both the claims and myths that children need their mothers more, and the unequal share of care responsibility. Therefore, in addition to duties of family and work, they struggle organizing their lives within the framework of expectations with respect to being mother. They overcome this difficulty through limiting their social lives, rather than pushing men for taking more responsibility. Keeping family unity is a significant matter in Turkish society and women are aware that womanhood/motherhood tasks to be performed 'completely' play a key role in this unity.


## **Conclusion**

As the findings of fieldwork study display, in Turkey middle class mothers beginning from early stages of their marriage start to consider the childcare alternatives due to insufficient reconciliation policies and gender inequality widespread in society. Their decision of having child is taken according to occupation, career plans, place of living, and availability of other female family members and existence of different childcare alternatives. Moreover, husbands' occupation and career could be influential on those decisions.

Especially first three years, mothers would like their children to be cared at home. Insufficient childcare services and doubts about quality of existing ones might lead women to seek the support of the female members

of family or employ child minders whose work is mostly informal with no formal education on childcare. In addition, since men rarely take up domestic and care roles women are alone to establish balance between work and family life. This is most visible in the women's accounts, almost all middle class women do timing of giving birth according to how they handle the first year of childcare. Women usually like to be at home at least six months up to a year. The value placed on breastfeeding and difficulty of breastfeeding while working, play a significant role in women's desire to stay at home during the breastfeeding period. Furthermore, there is a strong discourse in Turkey that the best care for children is the one given at home especially until they turn three. This idea overlaps with insufficient childcare services.

Mothers have to calculate every detail about childcare, which is almost a life-long process. After having a baby, it is mostly women who have to arrange their life according to needs of the child especially in the first two years. The difficulty of reconciliation between work and care responsibilities has always been a matter for women and women become the target of discrimination coming from the managers and/or colleagues as their care responsibilities may require flexibility in the workplace. In other words, in organization of childcare and education, the reconciliation policies do not support women as much as desired, especially when women encountered problems at the workplace. Yet, depending on the place, profession, colleagues and employers/managers women experience these problems differently. Other than work and care duties, women's social lives undergo a fundamental transformation and they live an isolated life in addition to feeling of guilt. On the contrary men can continue their life without encountering any break. Gender inequality intensifies work and family conflict that women experience. Therefore, discussing reconciliation policies through supports and services provided by state will be insufficient. Due to the fact that gender relations are the defining factor underlies these policies, the arrangements should target to transform gender inequality.



<sup>1</sup>In the EU texts and literature on the issue mostly the term family is used to define responsibilities regarding care of children and elder/sick people and other domestic works. This is the nucleus family in which heteronormativity is the norm. Thus for some feminists, family is a category reproducing gender inequalities and is main responsible of women's secondary position in society.

<sup>2</sup>Data used in this article belong to in-depth interviews, which were conducted with 19 middle class working mothers having at least a child between 0-6 years old. To define class position of interviewees their occupation, educational level, familial sources, social networks, total income entering their household and location of their living place were taken as criteria.

<sup>3</sup>While in 2007/2008 number of nurseries was 492, in 2013//2014 it fell to 109.

<http://sgb.meb.gov.tr/www/milli-egitim-istatistikleri-orgun-egitim-2013-2014/icerik/95>

<sup>4</sup>According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security Ministry, in Turkey there are 9000 public and private working places having more than 150 female workers. Yet, only 300 of them were controlled and it was detected that while in 65 percent there was no room for breastfeeding; 45 percent did not have a nursery. [http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/isyerinde\\_krese\\_yer\\_yok-1145289](http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/isyerinde_krese_yer_yok-1145289)

<sup>5</sup>While mothers can use this leave after maternity leave, fathers have right to use it beginning from birth. With this addition to the Law the leave seems to acquire category of parental leave although it is very much behind the arrangement in most of the EU member States.

<sup>6</sup>According to the 2013 TURKSTAT data, 29,5 percent of primary school graduated women participate into labour market while this rate goes up to 72,2 percent for university graduates. Yet for men educational level does not make this much effect on labour market participation. In 2013 data, 73,3 percent of primary school graduates take part in the labour force while it is 86,1 percent for university graduates.

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