

Between Reality and Ideal: Gender Equality in the Family and Fertility in Turkey*

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ABSTRACT

Along with declining the fertility rate to below-replacement levels in Turkey, especially in Western Anatolia, Turkish society witnesses a drastic transformation in family structure, particularly in regard to gender relationships within the family. Informed by theory of Gender Equity (McDonald, 2000), this study investigates the influence of household gender division of labor and decision making on individual's actual and ideal number of children. Using Poisson regression analysis and recent data from the 2011 Turkish Family Structure (n= 4,200), we found that fertility preference and behavior of Turkish families can be understood through gender division of labor and decision making, and economic problems within families. Results of this study inform Turkish policy makers who are currently formulating policies to prevent the adverse economic and demographic effects of declining fertility in the country.

Keywords: Family Change, Gender Equity, Fertility, Turkey

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Introduction

Fertility levels have fallen drastically to below replacement level (below two children per woman required to maintain the population) in most Western industrialized countries. A growing number of developing countries, including Turkey, have also mirrored this trend (PRB, 2015). Over the past two decades, the fertility rate in Turkey dropped from 4.6 children per woman in 1980 to 2.06 in 2010 and remained the below-replacement level up to now (TURKSTAT, 2015). The persistent low fertility has become an increasing concern for countries with low fertility, as it leads to rapidly ageing populations, a declining labor force, and smaller overall population size. As a result, increasing attention is being paid to policies to reduce the social and economic burdens of the negative consequences of low fertility. One policy strategy is to focus on raising fertility rates so that a larger number of younger, productive members of the population would be available to balance the increasing numbers of older people and promote economic development. The success of any policy attempts to raise fertility levels relies on improving the understanding of the factors associated with the individual's actual and ideal number of children. Studies investigating the determinants of fertility behavior and preference, especially in Turkey, have less examined the influence of gender equity in the family in regards to household division of labor and decision making. Given the important changes that occurred in women's socioeconomic status in Turkish society over the past decade, including a rapid rise in female employment rate from 12% in 1990 to 37% in 2011 (TURKSTAT 2015), it is imperative to examine the association between gender equity in the family and reproductive outcomes.

Gender Equity in the Family and Fertility Behavior and Ideal

According to population economic theories, low fertility is largely a function of economic insecurity, increasing opportunity costs of childbearing for women (Mills et al., 2005; Kohler et al. 2002), and increasing women's financial independence (Becker, 1981) through improved education and greater work participation. The economic independence of women reduces the gains from marriage based on traditional gender division of labor in the family, where women engage mostly in childbearing and household works, and increases childbearing costs. This in turn limits women's actual and ideal number of children. Although gender and women's employment are two key explanatory factors in the theories of low fertility, scholars have overlooked two important conceptual issues. First, high female employment rates can be

combined with relatively high fertility when couples' gender roles in the family are similar (reducing women's work burden at home), and when *spousal gender relations* facilitate paid work and parenthood (Bernhardt, 1993; Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000). Second, it is not the mere participating in paid work that influences women's fertility behavior and preference, but the *amount of work* that they do at home in their "second shift" (Mills et al., 2008:4). In fact, women who engage in paid work and do a large portion of domestic work are expected to have lower number of children, since such a double burden of work can harm their participation in labor market and hinder individual development prospects. This study attempts to fill in these conceptual gaps in the literature by utilizing and expanding on the theory of gender equity in fertility, proposed by McDonald (2000).

The gender role system within the family is an indirect determinant of fertility that is increasingly looked at as the "missing link" in understanding the persistence of low fertility (McDonald 2000 & 2006; Mason, 1997). McDonald (2000) argues that variations in gender systems in a society accounts for why women in some highly advanced societies decide against having children and women in some other countries have higher fertility levels. Drawing a distinction between gender equity in individual-oriented institutions and in the family, McDonald argues that women with equal access to higher education and careers in the paid economy, and who equally share in the domestic work with their partners, have higher number of children. In fact, in countries where both gender equity systems are in place (e.g. the United States and most Scandinavian countries), the total fertility rate tends to be higher than it is in societies (e.g. Spain, Italy, some Mediterranean and Asian countries) with stronger patriarchal gender-based systems. Recent evidence also shows a positive relation between the equality of gender roles within the family and fertility intentions (for example see Mills et al, 2008; Duvander and Andersson, 2006; Neyer et al., 2011).

In the case of Turkey, women have equal access to higher education, though their access to job opportunities is limited. Therefore, many families in Turkey follow a male-breadwinner family model, which makes it difficult for employed women to combine work and parenthood. In such a context, women's fertility behavior and preference could be largely related to their spouses' behaviors in terms of the gender division of household labor and decision-making. Hence,

Turkish women who perform the large share of domestic work and have little say in the household decision making processes are more likely to limit their actual and ideal number of children.

Data and Methods

This study utilizes data from the 2011 Turkish Family Structure survey (TFS), conducted by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies of Turkey. The survey was conducted in a representative sample of 24,647 individuals over the age of 18 who were living in urban and rural areas of Turkey. In this study, the sample is limited to only married or living apart individuals ($n = 4,200$). The dependent variables are actual and ideal number of children, and two main independent variables include gender equity in the household division of labors and decision making. Specifically, “gender equity” in division of household works will be measured by seven indicators regarding household works, including cooking, ironing, laundry, washing dishes, serving tea, preparing meal table and shopping. Gender equity in the household decision making is measured by five indicators pertaining to household selection, house management, shopping, and relative relations. Since the number of children is a count variable, Poisson regression models will be developed to model the net effect of two main determinants of actual and ideal number of children, while controlling for socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of individuals.

Expected results

Two regression models will be produced to examine the influence of gender equity in the household division of labor and decision making on actual number of children and ideal number of children, while controlling for other covariates.

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