

## Reflections on INGEV's Study, "Attitudes Towards Gender Equality"

Zeynep Gülru Göker, Bahçeşehir Univ. Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Faculty Member

Gender equality is essential for human development, which relies on enhancing people's choices and developing their capabilities. Despite many strides, the full realization of women's human rights is far from achieved. Persistent barriers to gender equality exist in critical dimensions of human development such as education, health, participation in economic, social, and political life, personal safety, and security.<sup>1</sup>

Across the globe, women disproportionately experience the adverse effects of economic, political, and environmental crises and, most recently, that of the COVID-19 pandemic. Age, socioeconomic status, income level, education, disability, and many other axes of inequality interact with gender, making gender inequality a complex phenomenon.

UNDP 2020 Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Turkey 68 among 162 countries in the medium-to-low-equality cluster regarding gender-based inequalities.<sup>2</sup> The WEF 2021 Global Gender Gap Report ranks Turkey 133 out of 156 countries.<sup>3</sup>

Given the importance of data-driven research and policy development for achieving gender equality, studies such as the "Attitudes Towards Gender Equality" research, a collaboration between INGEV TAM and Istanbul Bilgi University Faculty of Communication, are of critical importance. The findings reflected upon in this short paper are based on the Human Development Monitor – a nationwide survey<sup>4</sup> representative of Turkey conducted between December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021-January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. The findings also involve comparisons to the March 2020 period of the Human Development Monitor.

### 1. Violence is the most important problem women in Turkey experience.

When asked to identify the three most critical problems women experience, 60% in Turkey (including women and men) choose "violence." This is followed by "lack of education" (35%) and "family pressure" (24%). When it comes to issues *other than violence*, such as lack of education, family pressure, gender inequality, unemployment, community pressure, harassment, and pressure on the streets, there is little or no difference between women and men in terms of perceived importance. However, while 50 % of men believe that violence is the most important problem women face, almost 3 out of 4 women (72%) consider it the severest issue. Although the question does not specify forms of violence, nationwide research conducted by *the Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies* (2014) reveals that 4 out of 10 women in Turkey experience intimate partner violence, and only 1 in 10 reports it.<sup>5</sup> Reports prepared based on media coverage show that femicide is at alarming levels.<sup>6</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns, restricted mobility, economic insecurities, precarious

---

<sup>1</sup> More information on the UNDP perspective on human development and gender equality can be viewed at: [https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdro\\_issue\\_paper\\_on\\_gender\\_indices\\_with\\_cover.pdf](https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdro_issue_paper_on_gender_indices_with_cover.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Bia News (February 3, 2021). [UNDP: Turkey ranks 68th in gender equality](#). Human Development Report introduced the (Gender Inequality Index (GII) in 2010 to reflect on gender-based inequalities in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity.

<sup>3</sup> [World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2021](#).

<sup>4</sup> INGEV TAM conducted the survey in 26 cities utilizing a stratified sample in line with NUTS Level-2 criteria. 1506 computer-assisted telephone interviews were conducted. All reported numbers in this paper have a respondent base of 1506 and the margin of error is ±2.5 % in 95 % confidence interval.

<sup>5</sup> Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (2014). [Research on domestic violence against women in Turkey](#).

<sup>6</sup> See for instance reports prepared by the [We Will Stop Femicides Platform](#) and [Bianet](#).

work conditions, and dependency on partners and families increased women's risk of exposure to violence and intensified the violence against women.<sup>7</sup>

As a form of discrimination against women and a human rights violation, "Violence against women refers to all acts of violence that result in, or are likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private spaces."<sup>8</sup> Hence, it should be noted that what people identify as the third most important problem, family pressure, also intersect with violence against women.

Ending violence against women urgently necessitates:

- strengthening and effectively implementing preventive and punitive measures,
- supporting and including civil society in decision-making,
- acknowledging that violence against women is a gender-equality and human rights issue,
- continuing efforts for transforming patriarchal norms and practices leading to violence against women,
- systematizing data collection on different forms of violence
- the creation and enhancement of norms and policies in line with international standards.

In March 2021, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, which offered a critical framework for enacting measures by states to protect women against violence and prosecute the perpetrators. INGEV's study shows that 36% agree with the claim raised by the opponents of the Convention that it "ruined the social structure in Turkey," with 33 % of women and 38 % of men thinking this way. That said, the majority of the population either disagrees with the claim or is indifferent towards the issue. Given that people identify violence as the primary issue and family pressure as the third most important problem women in Turkey experience, the study reveals that the wellbeing of women, family, and society is threatened by the pervasiveness of violence against women and unequal gender norms and practices, as well as the barriers to women's equal participation to economic and social life.

## 2. Women across age groups do not feel safe on the streets.

According to INGEV's study, 38% agree with the statement that "it is not right for women to go out alone at night," showing an increase of 10 percentage points since March 2020. The attitude is particularly pronounced in the 35-54 age group: 31% of women in this age group agree with the statement, while only 19% of women in the 18-34 age group do so. To what extent women treat this as a moral issue or are concerned with safety requires further investigation.

Increasing violence against women, impunity, men's policing on women, and physical attacks on the streets render public spaces unsafe for women. Added to these are the lack or insufficiency of gender-sensitive policies regarding the arrangement of public spaces. Increased participation of women in decision-making promotes gender-sensitive policy perspectives. In this respect, supporting municipalities and civil society's efforts towards

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

<sup>8</sup> Definition is cited from the [Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) or the *Istanbul Convention*.

establishing women-friendly public spaces and making good practices visible are essential (e.g., practices related to street lighting and free/accessible transportation, among others).

### 3. There is a high level of support for gender equality, yet men retain decision-making power.

INGEV's study shows that positive attitudes towards women's participation in economic and political life have risen since March 2020. There is widespread support for equality and awareness of its lack thereof. 83 % think that, compared to men, women face more problems in social life (rose from 72 % in March 2020), and only 38 % believe that women have equal opportunities with men.

Support for women's political participation rose to 84% (from 70% in March 2020), and support for women's participation in the workforce has gone up from 75% to 87%. 90% believe that women and men doing the same job should be equally paid (rising from 78% in March 2020). In fact, the support for equal pay has increased more among men than women, bringing men's support to 89%, almost to the same level as women (90%).

However, 33% agree that "men's employment should be prioritized if there is widespread unemployment in the country" compared to 28% in March 2020. 26% of women and 41% of men think this way. Support for the priority of men's employment is higher among married women (31%) than unmarried women (14%), has dropped slightly by two percentage points for women in the 18-34 age group but risen significantly by ten percentage points for women in the 35-54 age group. Whether growing economic insecurity promotes a push towards favoring the male breadwinner model should be further investigated along with an analysis of the pandemic's effects on women's informal labor force participation.

29% (19% of women and 39% of men) agree with the statement that "a woman should not work without her husband's permission," showing an increase of 9 percentage points since March 2020. Agreement with the conditionality of women's work on husbands' permission is higher among married women (33%) than unmarried women (11%). It is also higher among women in the 35-54 age group (35%) than women in the 18-34 age group (23%). To the extent that the expectation of receiving the husband's permission to work gets normalized by women and men, it may become an invisible barrier for women's participation in the workforce. A recent study reveals that even though men do not always *explicitly* forbid their wives from working, some women still feel that they have no option because of their husbands' high (and unequal) standards, which impart the double burden of work and domestic life to women.<sup>9</sup> It would be interesting to see whether and how women's opinions diverge based on educational levels for future studies. Some studies show that higher educated women are increasingly less likely to marry men who constrain their freedoms and willingness to work outside the home.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, women's participation in the workforce is constrained by other reasons such as low earnings, lack of childcare, gender pay gap, and pervasive discrimination at work, as shown by INGEV's study.

### 4. Women are shouldering the economic burdens of the pandemic.

<sup>9</sup> Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı & Dissensus Araştırma 2021. [Kadına Yönelik Şiddet: Kadınların Deneyimleri, Kurumlar ve Mecralar.](#)

<sup>10</sup> A brief summary of Taylan Acar's research can be viewed at Bianet (March 1, 2021). Dilek Şen, "[Evlilik kadınların evlenme tercihlerini değiştiriyor mu?](#)"

INGEV's study shows that the pandemic hurt women's workforce participation, which is already at very low levels in Turkey (29.4 % according to TURKSTAT 2020 data). The study reveals that 41 % of women worked for a wage before the pandemic started and no longer do so. Among them, 67% had to quit their jobs, 27 % were laid off, and 4 % were pressured to quit by their families. The primary reason for quitting one's job is low earnings (23%), followed by distant workplace (20%), lack of childcare options (15%), and long work hours (8%). Further research can investigate the conditions of work and reasons for unemployment comparing married and unmarried women and female breadwinner families, as well as the effects of the pandemic on women's informal labor.

Across the world, women disproportionately carry the burdens of economic crises while economic and political insecurities trigger a private and public backlash against women's rights.<sup>11</sup> Women's higher rate of involvement in non-paid domestic and care work<sup>12</sup> (i); temporary, low-pay, precarious work conditions (ii); and insufficient (or nonexistent) access to social security (iii) negatively affect young and working-class women.<sup>13</sup> Excessive focus on market-oriented priorities at the expense of gender equality actually transfers social risks stemming from such inequalities onto women. It strengthens women's dependency on men and families, making women all the more vulnerable to violence.<sup>14</sup> Remote working during the pandemic seems to have its own gender traps, such as detaching women from professional work and consolidating their roles in the domestic sphere.<sup>15</sup>

For equal participation of women in the workforce (i), improvement of their labor conditions (ii), and prevention of further deepening of women's poverty (iii), civil society organizations generally call for:

- legal regulations that recognize domestic and care work as work,
- men's equal participation in domestic and care work,
- social policies geared towards poverty prevention and reduction,
- good quality public childcare,
- policies against the gender pay gap
- and legal and institutional measures for reducing women's double burden in carrying out wage work and domestic work.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Women making their own decisions will pave the way to gender-sensitive policies.

INGEV's study is significant for showing the complex and intersecting layers of gender inequality. The study points to an urgent need to design and implement policies that address this complexity and the differences between women's experiences due to multiple and intersecting inequalities. Increasing pressures and the negative impact of the pandemic on women and the intensified feelings of insecurity and vulnerability to violence attest to the urgent need to increase women's involvement in decision-making. This applies to various layers of social life, such as decision-making at home, in the workplace, and in policymaking processes at the local and national levels. Increased positive attitudes towards women's participation in

<sup>11</sup> Cited from Sevil B. Şahin (2021). "Combatting violence against women in Turkey: structural obstacles," *Contemporary Politics*, online first.

<sup>12</sup> Research directed by İpek İlkaraçan and Emel Memiş in the first year of the pandemic show that the time women spend for non-paid work at home rose from an average of 2,9 to 4,5 hours; for men, the rise was from 0,3 to 1,1 hours. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-53667650>

<sup>13</sup> Cinsiyet Eşitliği İzleme Derneği (CEİD). [Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliğini İzleme Raporu](#) 2019-2020.

<sup>14</sup> Feride Acar and Gülbanu Altunok (2013). The 'politics of intimate' at the intersection of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism in contemporary Turkey," *Women's Studies International Forum*, pp. 14-23; Şahin (2021)

<sup>15</sup> Sevgi Çoban (2021). "Gender and telework: Work and family experiences of teleworking Professional, middle-class, married women with children during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey," *Gender, Work and Organization*, online first.

<sup>16</sup> Burça Kızıllırmak and Emel Memiş (2020). ["Covid-19 Krizi ve Ev İçi Emeğe Etkileri."](#)

economic, social, and political life, when interpreted together with rising insecurity and unsafety, point to the urgency of developing structural solutions to structural problems which require the strengthening of women's decision-making power, the involvement of civil society in policymaking, implementation of measures to ensure inclusion and retention of women in education, and promoting women's financial independence and autonomy.