BEING A WOMAN IN ACADEMIA: RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF CAREER EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This study was carried out to understand why women academics, who are adequately represented and have an advantageous position, are subject to various obstacles. **Methods:** In the research, phenomenological research design – one of the qualitative research methods – was used. The research's study group consisted of 20 female faculty members, including three research assistants, six teaching assistants, six assistant professors, two associate professors and three professors working in various cities in Turkey. The branches of the participants and the institutions they work vary. The study group was determined by using the snowball sampling method. In this study, a semi-structured interview type was used. As a data collection tool, a semi-structured interview form was prepared by the researcher. **Results:** After, expert opinions were taken, and final corrections were made and used as a data collection tool. As a result of the research, the obstacles that female academics face in their work lives, the reasons for these obstacles and the coping strategies that female academics have developed to cope with these obstacles have been revealed. **Conclusions:** The results of the research indicate that even academics, who have a status in society and require a high level of education, are exposed to various career barriers. Therefore, it is possible to say that gender discrimination affects all women regardless of their status and education level, albeit at different levels and forms.

Key words: gender, female academics, career barrier

JEL codes: J160, J710, J810

INTRODUCTION

In Turkey, especially with the increase in the number of universities after 2006, the number of female academics has increased quantitatively [Arslan, 2014]. The share of women in the total number of academics in Turkey, including all professors, associate professors, assistant professors, research assistants, specialists, translators and lecturers is 43.5% – which is above the world average [Demir, 2018].

Legal, socio-cultural, technological and sectoral changes in working life [Yorgun, 2010] caused physical strength to begin not to be seen as an advantage in business life. The fact that knowledge-based power was at the forefront made it easier for women to be included in business life. [Sarı and Çevik, 2009]. Thus, knowledge and, therefore, education took the place of muscle strength. Education is one of the most important factors in empowering women. Educated women can have more power and resistance against gender inequality and various social pressures. Education does not only affect women's employment; it also affects issues such as living standards, self-determination and even social communication [Günday 2011, Keskin 2018].

In countries like Turkey, where the classical patriarchal mentality is dominant, education level is considered a tool for social and individual change and a key that can reduce inequalities between the sexes [KSGM,

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2017] and can even play a decisive role in women being victims of murder. 300 women were killed in Turkey in 2020; 171 women were found 'suspiciously' dead [kadincinayetleridurduracagiz.net]. It is seen that 74% of female victims are uneducated or primary school graduates, while 77% of male perpetrators are uneducated or primary school graduates [Sarıoğlu, 2019]. In the segments of society with a relatively low socioeconomic status, economic dependency due to not participating in business life, unpaid intensive labor in home life, precarious work and high rates of femicide can be explained by the lack of education factor.

Due to the nature of the profession, female academics appear as the group of women with the highest education level in society. Women academics are defined by Kandiyoti [2015] as "an advantageous group within a disadvantaged group of women". It is known that higher education facilitates the ease of some difficulties related to gender perceptions [Bourdieu, 2001]. Owing to their high education levels and professional life, which signifies a high status in society, women academics paint a picture free of the aforementioned gender-based discrimination experiences. However, studies reveal that female academics are also exposed to some barriers or forms of gender-based discrimination stemming from their female identities [Coşkuner, 2013, Arslan, 2014, Bingöl, 2014, Öztan and Doğan, 2015, Şentürk, 2015, Gerdek, 2017]. At this point, factors such as education and status – which are seen as the advantages of academic women – also make gender discrimination behaviors invisible and, thus, become a disadvantage. Therefore, the discriminatory behaviors that women academics are exposed to should be further investigated and made visible.

This research was designed to understand the career barriers of female academics, the small groups that cause these barriers (e.g., managers, the person themselves, etc.) and how women cope with the main reason that causes these barriers – namely the patriarchal social structure.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study. According to Creswell [2018], qualitative research should be used when a problem or issue needs to be explored. The qualitative study method allows the researcher to generalize by revealing the basic characteristics of the social or individual situations and events that individuals have experienced throughout their lives.

MODEL OF THE RESEARCH

In the study, phenomenological research design – one of the qualitative research methods – was used. The phenomenological study defines the common meanings of individuals' lived experiences about a phenomenon or concept. In this research design, the researcher focuses on the common characteristics of the participants who experience a phenomenon. The phenomenological study pattern begins with defining the phenomenon with which the study is concerned [Creswell, 2018]. The phenomenon defined in this research is "being a female academic". Afterwards, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants – namely female academics – who experienced this phenomenon. Additionally, their experiences and opinions about the described phenomenon were learned.

WORKING GROUP

In this study, the snowball sampling method, one of the non-probabilistic sampling types frequently used in qualitative research, was used. In the snowball sampling method, the next person is reached as a result of the information provided by the first person. In the snowball method, the researcher – who does not know anyone before – is directed to another person whom they do not know after reaching a person. When sufficient information is reached, the research ends. Thus, the growth of the snowball is completed [Kozak, 2017].

The participant group of this study consists of 20 female faculty members, three of whom are research assistants, six are lecturers, six are doctoral faculty members, two are associate professors and three are professors. The branches of the participants vary and they work in different institutions. In the presentation of the research findings, each participant was given a pseudonym to hide and protect their identity.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

An interview is a qualitative data collection tool that establishes mutual communication in the form of questions and answers with the person whose observation is deemed appropriate in interviews, body language, etc., as well as questions and answers. Elements can also be observed as data collection tools [Kozak, 2017]. The interviews were recorded while being conducted and were then transcribed as they were.

Before starting the interviews, the participants were given brief information about the general research and the topics. The researcher committed [to the participants] that their personal information would be kept confidential and that the data they provided would be used only for scientific purposes. The participants were also asked whether they wanted to participate in the study. Afterwards, the interviews started by asking for permission to record the interview.

At the beginning of the prepared interview form, the participants were asked to provide information about themselves and their careers, and their demographic data was collected. In the interviews, 13 questions consisting of semi-structured questions were asked. These questions were presented to the expert opinion while they were drafted, and they were finalized as a result of comments by the lecturer. Within the scope of the research, a total of 20 participants were interviewed. The shortest interview with the participants lasted 25 minutes and, the longest, 75 minutes.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

According to Creswell [2018], the core of qualitative data analysis is defining, classifying and interpreting data and creating codes and categories (themes) within this cycle. At this stage, researchers develop themes and dimensions by creating detailed descriptions; they develop an interpretation in light of their views of different perspectives in the literature.

In this study, where data was collected through semi-structured interviews, the content analysis method was used to analyze the data. In this direction, first of all, the data was divided into certain codes and these codes were then associated with certain themes.

Finally, the relationship between these themes was determined. While interpreting the research findings, quotations from the participants' statements were frequently included. This is also a useful method to increase the internal validity of the study.

Immediately after the interviews with the participants, the interview records were transcribed by the researcher in a computer environment. The obtained data was read twice, the concepts and opinions emphasized and codes were created in light of this information. Codes and related themes were determined by making detailed additional readings and it was checked whether any data had been overlooked. In the analysis of the findings, the inductive content analysis method was used. Using this method, the aim is to reach codes and categories in the light of research findings rather than pre-formed codes or categories. The researcher also themed the findings and aimed to help the reader by quoting the participants' statements. In addition, the researcher interpreted the findings by using the concepts in the literature and aimed to provide an additional perspective to the reader.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY STUDIES

Within the scope of the study, the codes created by the researcher and the theming process of the codes are as follows (Figure 1):
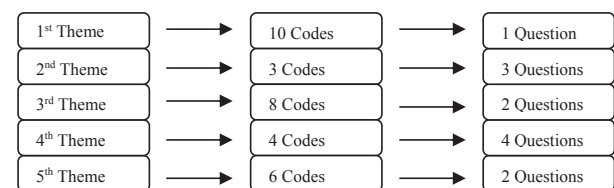
1st Theme	→	10 Codes	→	1 Question
2nd Theme	→	3 Codes	→	3 Questions
3rd Theme	→	8 Codes	→	2 Questions
4th Theme	→	4 Codes	→	4 Questions
5th Theme	→	6 Codes	→	2 Questions

Fig. 1.   Theming Process

Source: elaborated by Authors.

To increase the internal validity of the study, the research findings were shared with 14 participants, and their opinions were taken. Participants were asked to confirm whether the research findings matched their statements. In this process, it was observed that the participants' statements and research findings overlapped to a large extent, and necessary corrections were made. In this way, it was ensured that the participants'

views were conveyed correctly. In addition to these, to increase the reliability of the research, raw data has been archived to be submitted for an audit if needed.

ETHICAL PRACTICES

The main ethical principles that are universally accepted are: respecting and not harming private life, not deceiving/misleading and staying true to data [Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016]. The data obtained from the participants were not shared with third parties in accordance with the principle of respecting the private lives of the participants and ensuring their privacy. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, the names of the institutions where they work were not included in the study. In the study, only the data that is important for interpreting the study findings – such as title and experience, and demographic data that provides general information about the participant, such as age and marital status – is included. In addition, to protect the confidentiality of the identities and data of the participants, the ages of the participants are specified as an age range. Instead of specifying the fields of specialization of the participants, only the branch of science to which the participants belong was cited; thus, no demographic data that is not important for the study was included.

To be faithful to the data, the data was meticulously collected, and the original interview was completely faithful to the transcription. At the stage of collecting and analyzing the findings according to themes, the statements of the participants were adhered to and this situation was supported by one-to-one quotations. In addition, the 'Volunteer Participation Form' – which gives general information about the research and undertakes that their data cannot be processed and used for any purpose other than scientific purposes – was presented to the participants who accepted the interview. Additionally, their signatures were obtained.

RESULTS

In this chapter, the participants' expectations about being an academic and the strategies and behaviors developed by the participants to cope with the difficulties they encounter in their work-life will be discussed.

BEING A WOMAN IN BUSINESS: THE SIEGE OF FEMALE IDENTITY

In this section, the participants' experiences regarding the difficulties encountered in business life through the identity of women are presented in Table 1.

GENDER-BASED ASSIGNMENT: EMPHASIS ON FEMININE QUALITIES

Although it is assumed that professional identity in academia is not affected by the gender variable, it has been stated that job distributions based on gender roles are made from time to time in some internal assignments. Kübra's statement confirms that gender-based assignments are made in the academy; however, from the participant's point of view, this situation is positive and normal.

"It seemed a bit strange to me then, but our first dean said to me: 'Madam, I see you fit for student affairs because you are a woman because of your speaking abilities and so on.' So, a window is searched somewhere. Courtesy and style are sought.

(…) so, I don't see this situation as bad; I think it should happen. When women aren't there, things get a little ruder and uncivilized..." (Kübra).

Bourdieu [2001] indicates that women are almost always assigned duties involving representation, welcoming and hospitality. According to Bourdieu, this assignment is based on "symbolic capital" activities carried out by the woman for her family. Generally, everything related to aesthetics and the management of the public image and social appearance of the domestic unit is the responsibility of the woman. Therefore, women who manage the symbolic capital of the family are invited to work life to continue this role.

MANSPLAINING AND MOBBING: THE SHADOWING OF EXPERTISE BY GENDER

The presence of women in business life in Turkey has been increasing for a long time. As a result of this increase, the development of which has been examined in detail in the literature, women can maintain their existence in all areas of business life and expand their areas of existence. However, no matter how qualified

Table 1. Difficulties faced by the participants in business life over female identity

Category	Code	Defne	Özlem	Manolya	Dilek	Songül	Esra	Burcu	Yasemin	Hülya	Sevim		Leyla	Nur	Hatice	Elif	Meryem	Zehra	Merve	Kübra	Tuğba	Sibel
Difficulties faced by female identity in business life	assignment based on gender roles						√	√												√		
	mansplaining																√		√			
	gender-based mobbing																			√		
	work-life loneliness				√			√									√					
	sexist behavior and expressions by male colleagues/counsellor					√			√							√	√		√	√	√	
	sexist comments and expressions by students						√		√								√					
	non-recruitment/preference based on gender								√								√		√	√		
	negative attitudes and behaviors by female colleagues													√		√						

Source: elaborated by Authors.

or professional, a woman's identity can sometimes override her professional identity. Sometimes, the behaviors and expressions targeting the female identity of academics are manifested in a way hidden in jokes or attitudes.

"For example, this is what I observed with students. Let's say a male teacher acts much more harshly and treats angry to students. I read comments about him stating that 'he is a very angry, very disciplined, very harsh teacher' and so on (...). So, they say good grades are scarce. But, for example, if there was a female teacher with an attitude, what do you think the same students would say? I am leaving this open-ended and up to your imagination" (Esra).

"For example, a student of mine once wrote something about me which made me sad: 'Anyway, I won't say bad word. I wonder if there was a male teacher instead of me, would he have said the same thing again?'" (Yasemin).

Esra and Yasemin's experiences indicate that not only colleagues and administrators, but also students have different perceptions of "female teachers" and "male teachers". Students not only tolerate some harsh behaviors of male teachers, whom they see as "authority figures", but also develop various behavioral strategies in order not to "make them angry". However, when a similar situation is experienced with a female teacher, it is seen that the same students do not avoid verbal attacks.

WOMEN'S VIEW OF WOMEN: REPRODUCTION OF MASCULINE DOMINATION WITH THE COOPERATION OF WOMEN

Blaming only colleagues or male managers for certain sexist behavior patterns that women encounter in business life carries the risk of creating stereotypes and an incomplete analysis. As mentioned in the literature, it is a well-known fact that executive women can put some obstacles in front of other women. Queen bee syndrome has been defined as "jealousy between women" [Gökkaya, 2014]. However, the findings indicate that women may have somewhat negative ideas about other women for different reasons and without a superior-subordinate relationship as with the queen bee syndrome:

"Whether having a child affects a person or not depends on the person. Because, around me, I see academics who come from 3-4 months of maternity leave, do almost all their work and go to their homes normally again like working hours. But some may not want to return with unpaid leave for up to two years. On the one hand, it just seems a little more personal to me" (Hülya).

For example, Hülya's comment on whether having a child affects the careers of female academics negatively is positioned towards the impact of having a child on a career as "preventable by women". If this thought is read backwards, it is concluded that the woman does not try enough or does something wrong.

"The only thing I care about in terms of management is to be solution-oriented. So, whoever finds the best solution should be it. Since we are more detailed with women, or rather women, we cannot reach a solution more quickly. Therefore, it was softness and so on (…). I think it is more difficult to work with women. But this is because, as I said, it is necessary to be solution-oriented. Otherwise, sensuality can happen to anyone. There are men like women (…). There are men who tell fortunes, so they are in this school. Therefore, I do not see such a distinction as correct. It is a little difficult in case of problems since only women have elaboration" (Sibel).

Words embedded in everyday language appear as one of the important indicators in understanding the perception of gender. The participant states that as a manager, she prefers working with her male colleagues to working with her female colleagues. The participant

bases this preference on the fact that women are more detail-oriented and, therefore, delays the work – thus legitimising this request in a way. Another important point here is that the participant sees the act of "fortune telling" as a feminine act. To mark fortune-telling and sensitivity as feminine qualities are, in a way, that men also have their share of masculine domination. Because masculine domination is a trap for men who build it and think it works for its benefit as much as its victim. As a result of this domination, masculinity; has been put on a point that needs to be proven and even deserved. This, paradoxically, makes masculinity fragile.

INDIVIDUAL STRUGGLE: COPING STRATEGIES

The first of these coping strategies (Table 2) is that participants develop behavioral patterns specific to their work life.

"(…) We had to act more authoritatively, so we had to take that stance. For some reason, we had to show that we were more determined (…). Inevitably, there is pressure on us, and disdain is formed. Let's just say I had to be more controlling and tougher" (Merve).

The need for women to behave by the social codes of men when they are in managerial roles arises due to the imposition of the male-dominated structure. As a result of the concept of power associated with masculinity, even a woman in power is expected to behave by masculine behavior patterns. According to Bourdieu [2001], since being "feminine" means avoiding all kinds of masculine features and practices – and

Table 2. Coping strategies of the participants

Category	Code	Define	Özlem	Manolya	Dilek	Songül	Esra	Burcu	Yasemin	Hülya	Sevim	Leyla	Nur	Hatice	Elif	Meryem	Zehra	Merve	Kübra	Tuğba	Sibel
Coping strategies	differentiating behavior patterns at work due to female identity			√			√	√					√		√	√	√	√	√		
	pushing mental/physical limits for success				√		√	√								√	√	√	√		
	working during rest hours			√												√					

Source: elaborated by Authors.

especially since the concept of power is considered a masculine sensitive – telling a woman in power that she is "too feminine" also means that she is not able to fulfil her duty properly. Therefore, this saying subtly reminds us that power belongs to masculinity.

From time to time, women are perceived as women before their colleagues in business life and, therefore, have to cope with a series of prejudices. It was seen that another coping strategy of female academics was to exert more effort than their male colleagues and, sometimes, even to push their own physical and mental limits for this purpose.

"I'm in favour of non-discrimination. On the contrary, I think this so-called 'positive discrimination' contributes to the fact that women always (I observe this in other places, at least for myself) make more of an effort to prove themselves. For example, I had a child, but I still went back to work. I say even though I am a woman, and I say this again in quotation marks, I am still successful. I went abroad even though I have ties – it seems like I still fulfilled the criteria I had to (…). I feel a lot of pressure [on me] compared to a man" (Esra).

Esra tries harder to prove that she does not need such tolerance, despite the insinuations and statements that even if she makes a mistake or is not academically competent, she will be treated with tolerance because she is a woman. Because of this situation, the participant feels pressure and makes more effort than her male colleagues, both for herself and to equalize the general stereotypes about women.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research is limited to the opinions of female academics working in various provinces of Turkey with different academic titles. The research was conducted to holistically reveal the career barriers of female academics in Turkey. In this respect, it differs from other studies conducted in Turkey in that it addresses the barriers originating from both male and female colleagues and includes coping strategies.

Advancement in an academic career is only possible with the fulfilment of certain objective criteria. This feature of the academic career makes it difficult to understand the existing barriers and fight against

them by suggesting that academia is a field free of gender-based discrimination. Within the scope of the research's findings, it is seen that the participants sometimes fail to notice the signs of gender-based discrimination they encounter in their business life.

Although the awareness of female academics about career barriers is insufficient, the research findings are in line with some results in the literature. Participants' statements confirm that female academics are exposed to various career barriers – especially mobbing [Öztan and Doğan, 2015] – and that female academics sometimes experience work-life loneliness [Demir, 2018]. As a result of a study conducted with female academics in South Africa [Dlamini and Adams, 2014], the fact that women experience superiority, disempowerment and disrespect proves that the harms of patriarchy are universal for female academics.

Some participants stated that they pushed their physical and mental limits to cope with the discrimination they experienced. Participants used this strategy to override negative prejudices against women and demonstrate that there is no need for discrimination where positive discrimination exists; in short, they adopt the female identity to separate it from the professional identity. A similar result was revealed in a study conducted in Nigeria, and it was determined that female academics at management levels had to make a series of sacrifices based on home and work life [Ekine, 2018]. In addition, studies conducted in Ethiopia [Ademe and Singh, 2015] and India [Gaikwad and Pandey, 2022] reveal that female academics at management levels in these countries are also affected by patriarchal attitudes and behaviors in business life. In both countries, women are suffering by not seeing respect from their male colleagues and tend to make an extra effort to prove their competence.

The fact that women have to push their physical limits from time to time, even in a profession based on mental labor such as academics, shows that the distinction between women's work and men's work is not based on valid reasons. The main reason for this distinction is that the patriarchal social order considers business life more suitable for men than women [Bourdieu, 2001].

As a result of this research, it is seen that gender discrimination in academia has gained power to the

extent that it is invisible, and patriarchy is a universal problem that affects even highly educated women. Therefore, the first step to overcoming career barriers should be to gain awareness. Otherwise, as Bourdieu [2001] stated, as can be understood from the findings – women not only become aware of the patriarchal system but also engage in behaviors and discourses that feed this cycle.

In this direction, future research should be done on how to raise awareness regarding the signs of patriarchy in business life – especially among academic women. In addition, it would be appropriate to conduct studies on what policies higher education institutions should follow to prevent sexist approaches.

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KOBIETA W ŚRODOWISKU AKADEMICKIM: BADANIA W KONTEKŚCIE DOŚWIADCZEŃ ZAWODOWYCH

STRESZCZENIE

Cel: Celem badań było wyjaśnienie powodów barier rozwoju zawodowego kobiet pracujących w ośrodkach naukowych. **Metody:** W badaniach wykorzystano fenomenologiczne projektowanie badań jako jedną z jakościowych metod badawczych. Grupa badawcza składa się z 20 osób, w tym trzech asystentek naukowych, sześciu asystentek nauczycielskich, sześciu adiunktów, dwóch profesorów nadzwyczajnych i trzech profesorów pracujących w różnych miastach Turcji. Branże uczestników i instytucje, w których pracują, były różne. Grupę badaną wyznaczono metodą doboru próby kuli śnieżnej. W badaniu wykorzystano jeden z typów wywiadów częściowo ustrukturyzowanych. Jako narzędzie zbierania danych zastosowano pół ustrukturyzowany formularz wywiadu, a po wykonaniu ekspertyzy dokonywano ostatecznych poprawek i wykorzystano je jako narzędzie zbierania danych. **Wyniki:** W wyniku badań ujawniono przeszkody, jakie kobiety napotykają w akademickim życiu zawodowym, przyczyny tych przeszkód oraz strategie radzenia sobie, jakie kobiety opracowały w celu radzenia sobie z tymi przeszkodami. **Wnioski:** Wyniki badań pokazują, że nawet pracownice akademickie, które mają wysoki status społeczny i mają wysoki poziom wykształcenia, narażone są na różne bariery rozwoju zawodowego. Dlatego można powiedzieć, że dyskryminacja ze względu na płeć dotyka wszystkich kobiet bez względu na ich status i poziom wykształcenia, choć na różnych poziomach i formach.

Słowa kluczowe: płeć, kobiety akademickie, bariera kariery