

Conversations with Unionized Female Textile Workers in Türkiye: Lingerin Struggles with Gender Norms, Wage Disparities and Discrimination¹

Rana ÇAVUŞOĞLU²

ORCID: 0000-0003-3878-9396

Sarp ÜNER³

ORCID: 0000-0002-9880-8811

DOI: 10.54752/ct.1604400

Abstract: The textile sector involves some of the most intensive, fast paced and repetitive work amongst all fabricating sectors, and low wage-earning women employed by the garment industry are the subject of current labour discourse in Türkiye. This study explores the personal experiences of women working in Turkish textile production by interrogating how women see themselves within the labour force, and how they construct a framework for identity and recognition as union members working alongside men. A qualitative research method and focus group interviews technique were used to investigate women's work experiences. In total, three separate focus group interviews were conducted with 24 women, providing personal stories that illuminate problems faced by thousands of their co-workers. The study concludes that women's experiences in the textile sector continue to be shaped within the framework of gender norms,

¹ Araştırma makalesi Rana Çavuşoğlu'nun doktora tezinden hazırlanmıştır.

² Dr. Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Enstitüsü Halk Sağlığı Bölümü Doktora Mezunu. rana9.cavusoglu@gmail.com.

³ Prof.Dr. Lokman Hekim Üniversitesi, Tıp Fakültesi Halk Sağlığı Anabilim Dalı Öğretim Üyesi, sarp.uner@lokmanhekim.edu.tr

ÇAVUŞOĞLU, R., ÜNER, S., (2025) "Conversations with Unionized Female Textile Workers in Türkiye: Lingerin Struggles with Gender Norms, Wage Disparities and Discrimination", *Çalışma ve Toplum*, Sayı: 85, C.2, s.693-724

Makale Geliş Tarihi: 20.12.2024- Makale Kabul Tarihi: 27.03.2025

low wages, and difficult working conditions. Attitude of the management of their union, the hardships of the work, and the unspoken pressure to fulfill the requirements of caregiver roles while also working this sector are also discussed. The interviews provide further insight on women's views regarding the glass ceiling, pay gaps, patriarchal roles, and the barriers they face in being part of decision-making processes in the workplace.

Key words: gender, female workers, textile sector, labour union

Türkiye'de Sendikalı Kadın Tekstil İşçileriyle Söyleşiler: Cinsiyet Normları, Ücret Eşitsizlikleri ve Ayrımcılıkla İlgili Sürekli Mücadeleler

Öz: Tekstil sektörü, tüm imalat sektörleri arasında en yoğun, hızlı ve tekrarlayan çalışma süreçlerinden bazılarını içerir. Hazır giyim sektöründe istihdam edilen düşük ücretli kadın işçiler, Türkiye'deki mevcut emek söyleminin önemli bir konusu haline gelmiştir.

Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı bu çalışmada, tekstil üretiminde çalışan kadınların kendilerini işgücü içinde nasıl gördüklerini ve erkeklerle birlikte çalışan sendika üyeleri olarak kimlik ve tanınma için nasıl bir çerçeve oluşturdıkları irdelemek amaçlanmıştır. Kadınların iş deneyimlerini sorgulamak için yürütülen çalışmaya binlerce iş arkadaşlarının karşılaştığı sorunları aydınlatan kişisel hikayeler sunan farklı illerden çalışmaya katılan 24 kadınla üç ayrı odak grup görüşmesi yapılmıştır. Araştırma, kadınların tekstil sektöründeki deneyimlerinin cinsiyet normları, düşük ücretler ve zor çalışma koşulları çerçevesinde şekillenmeye devam ettiğini göstermiştir. Üye oldukları sendikanın şube yönetiminin tutumları, işin zorlukları ve bu sektörde çalışırken annelik ve bakım veren rollerinin gerekliliklerini yerine getirme konusunda dile getirilmemiş baskılar da tartışılmaktadır. Görüşmeler, kadınların cam tavan, ücret farkları, ataerkil roller ve işyerinde karar alma süreçlerinin bir parçası olmada karşılaştıkları engeller hakkındaki görüşlerine dair de fikir vermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet, kadın işçiler, tekstil sektörü, işçi sendikası

Introduction

The study of women's employment predates the Industrial Revolution and traces back to primitive societies. Evidence for women's primary role in the manufacturing of textiles is found in abundance in archeological, social and

sociological research (Wilson, 1979). In early human societies, the first division of labour emerged, with women gathering plants while men hunted. During the New Stone Age, women's contributions to nutrition and childcare granted them an essential role in society, leading to matriarchal structures. However, with the transition to settled life, men took on physically demanding jobs while women were confined to domestic responsibilities, thus reinforcing patriarchal structures (Deniz& Kuloğlu, 2019; Yüksel & Ören, 2018).

In the feudal period, women actively participated in agricultural production but remained unpaid family workers. Religious institutions limited women's engagement in business, restricting them to low-wage labour (Leventer & Altun, 2023; Zengin & Koçoğlu, 2018). Despite these limitations, prior to the Industrial Revolution, women contributed significantly to crafts, particularly in textile production at home and within guilds (Leventer & Altun, 2023; Deniz & Kuloğlu, 2019; Soysal, 2006).

The traditional work of sewing, embroidery and weaving were not only tasks done by women in the household, but also an activity where many women came together to chat and produce handcrafted products (English, 2013). Women have long contributed to household income with their skills by doing such manual piece-work labour while also performing household duties, but developments over the centuries led to more and more intensive production and demand for goods. In another words, the textile industry has historically relied on female labour. Women engaged in sewing, embroidery, and weaving for both household and commercial purposes (Wilson, 1979; English, 2013). The industrialization of textile production shifted work from the home to factories, altering the work-life balance of women (Maynes, 2005).

With the industrial revolution, textile work moved from the home to the workplace (Maynes,2005). No longer being an income with their skills by doing such manual piece-work labour while also performing household duties, industrial textile production meant the balance of women`s home and work life over time was forever changed (Maynes, 2005; English, 2013) and the need to cope with the physical and mental stresses brought about by industrialization emerged.

The Industrial Revolution (late 18th century) introduced mechanized textile production, significantly altering women's employment. Women began working in textile factories under harsh conditions, enduring long hours and low wages (Leventer & Altun, 2023; Engels, 2019; Aytaç et al., 2002). The Second Industrial Revolution (1860-1920) further expanded industrial production, incorporating women into sectors such as textiles, chemicals, and metallurgy, though still at low wages (Leventer & Altun, 2023; Kahraman, 2017). By the early 20th century, women's wages remained significantly lower than men's, increasing male workers'

job insecurity (Leventer & Altun, 2023; Peker & Kubar, 2012). Economic crises, such as the Great Depression (1929), led to the dismissal of female workers, reducing their labor force participation (Leventer & Altun, 2023; Yılmaz, Bozkurt, & İzci, 2008).

World Wars I and II marked a turning point in women's employment. As men were drafted, women entered previously male-dominated industries (Leventer & Altun, 2023; Şahin & Develi, 2021). However, after the wars, many women were forced to leave their jobs, once again subordinating their labour to patriarchal structures. Despite these setbacks, industrialization continued to increase female labour participation over time.

Today, in 21st century, the garment sector still employs a predominantly female workforce, particularly in Türkiye, where it plays a crucial role in the economy. However, women face dual burdens long working hours in factories and unpaid labor at home, including childcare and elder care responsibilities (Maynes, 2005; English, 2013).

On the other hand, The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, had a significant negative impact on the global textile industry, affecting various aspects from production to retail. Lockdowns and restricted access to retail outlets led to a substantial drop in consumption, resulting in excess stock, decreased sales, and challenges in disposing of unsold items (Leal et al., 2022). This situation was exacerbated by supply chain disruptions, as many factories worldwide halted operations to contain the virus's spread. Furthermore, the pandemic prompted the textile industry to innovate, developing materials with antimicrobial, self-cleaning, and antibacterial properties to limit virus transmission. However, these advancements could not fully offset the broader economic challenges faced by the industry during this period (Seudi et al. 2022). Meanwhile, inside factories, female workers are pressured to fulfill growing industrial demand for products. For example, the female workers who participated in this study indicated that they had to work over time during the pandemic, comparing to before Covid-19 pandemic period, as textiles were in greater demand throughout the world not for garment mainly but for developing self cleaning and antibacterial properties, so textile workers logged more hours than workers in other sectors.

The positive attitudes and outcomes of women's growing labour-force participation are contrasted by their struggles for equality in the workplace. One study shows us the on-going power struggle between women and men is particularly apparent in gender-based power relations in the workplace (Dedeoglu, 2000). This gendered division of labor is further influenced by economic factors, as financial pressures within households shape women's employment opportunities and decisions. The division of labour responsibilities for men and women both in

the public sphere and in the private sphere also differ according to cultural and historical development of humankind. (Agarwal, 1994).

No longer being an income with their skills by doing such manual piece-work labour while also performing household duties, industrial textile production meant the balance of women's home and work life over time was forever changed (Maynes, 2005; English, 2013; Ecevit, 1991) and the need to cope with the physical and mental stresses brought about by industrialization emerged. Nevertheless, the female workers continue to face systemic inequalities in wages, working conditions, and career advancement. While employment outside the home has contributed to women's financial independence, it has not led to true workplace equality.

The fact that women now commonly work outside the home and provide financial support to the family is noticed and approved of by other family members, including their spouses. Employment outside the home is also effective in increasing the perception of women's empowerment (Gönüllü ve İçli, 2008; Dedeoğlu, 2000; Aytaç ve Sevüktekin, 2002; Özer ve Biçerli, 2003). But, as families around the world struggle to make ends meet, it is clear overall household income has an impact on women's employment (Dedeoğlu, 2000). Since cash earnings have become the most important means of income for families residing in cities, when there is only one wage earner in the home, other family members begin a more active job search (Dedeoğlu, 2000). However, this trend does not necessarily lead to social or economic freedom for Turkish women. Employers benefit from women's lower wages, reinforcing economic inequality (Dirgar, 2009; Eraydın and Erendil, 1999; Gönüllü and İçli, 2001), and men retain social control of women despite their out of home employment.

In Türkiye, which has a globally important place in textile and garment sector production and export, a study conducted with women working in the garment field observed that women typically cannot work outside the home without permission of their spouses (Eraydın ve Erendil, 1999). Kıray, (1985) further found that it is easier for women to be involved in business life if they worked where relatives or family members were already employed. In this way, women outside the home can be observed and monitored to ensure adherence to cultural norms, with the added benefit of providing a constant supply of employees for cheap industrial labour via the snowball technique. In other word, women as sisters, mother-daughters, close friends or neighbours find jobs to eachother in their workplace.

Despite their majority, in industrial workplaces, management jobs are scarce for women, and positions of responsibility in trade unions are mostly occupied by men. This exclusion is not just a coincidence but reflects a deeper fear of women

challengin male authority in decision-making roles. Whether in boardrooms or union leadership, women's presence is often resisted, as it threatens traditional power structures and long-standing hierarchies. Female employees*⁴ constitute an important part of the trade unions, especially in collective unionization and membership issues inside food production and ready-to-wear factories. The presence of women ensures the strength of the union with increased membership dues and a greater number of members in the organization. Nevertheless, one researcher stated that the discrimination experienced by women in trade union life is caused by senior management, and female employees have almost no place in decision-making mechanisms in trade unions in Türkiye (Keleş, 2018).

When the union membership numbers for men and women in Türkiye and their relative positions in management are taken into consideration, it is clear the trade union movement has a male-dominated structure. Trade unionism, which is considered a man's job, is rooted in gender discrimination where physical differences between men and women result in social and employment barriers for women (Acker, 1990). Working women are expected to take jobs that reflect the responsibilities of being a biological mother, or housework-related and other maternally related jobs (Özkaplan, 2009). Industrial and factory settings, therefore, remain difficult sites for female workers. Gender, as a continuous social structure that touches on the physical differences between men and women, not only polarizes men and women at home, but also separates male and female workers as coworkers with common goals. This situation cause a competition between women and men hides the problems women face at home, such as taking care of the family and equal pay.

In the workplace, gender decoupling exists at the organizational level and is seen especially in income and status inequality between men and women (Acker, 1990). Decoupling is observed when women are placed in jobs requiring patience and understanding jobs which are typically low-wage positions rather than managerial positions where rationality is more valued. Since such sexist thinking indirectly manifests itself at the macro level is refers to work life in general while the micro one refers to workplace. Trade union management is no exception. In one study, a union executive states that in general, trade unionism is a male business (Urhan, 2014; Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2013; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023).

The persistence of gendered power structures in the labour force participation, alongside traditional cultural expectations, limits women's professional mobility. Where there is a prevailing masculine mentality at work,

⁴ "Some feminist writers prefer the use of "woman/man worker or woman/man employee." The author has chosen "female/male worker", "female/male employee" to highlight that workplace discrimination is based on specific sex-related characteristics."

women are seen to behave like men in order to stand out less. For instance, women may take on physically demanding tasks and adopt the more vulgar language habits of their male co-workers. Women are expected to act as men, or at least with a gender-neutral identity, in order to participate in the public sphere (Kandiyoti, 1997).

A report on the placement of women and men members within trade unions, mentions that women are more often promoted to positions of higher responsibility when their union activities are closely evaluated (Toksöz and Erdoğan, 1998). Despite the successes of women trade unionists, male managers control decision-making mechanisms and they remain uncertain in responding about gender inequality in the workplace (Yavuzçehre, 2014).

Women make up most of the workforce and are therefore the engine behind the profitable textile industry in Türkiye, the largest employer in the country. Because there are no prior educational requirements to start working in the sector, socially and economically disadvantaged women can be easily employed in the factories. Women working in textiles do not have the time, equipment or socio-economic power to compete with men for a better job, as most come from culturally diverse backgrounds that place less value on the education of their children (Arıkan and Aktaş, 2008). For their part, employers welcome uneducated women because they are willing to work for low wages, and textile or garment work requires attention to detail and patience, so women are preferred in this field (Dirgar, 2009; Eraydın and Erendil, 1999; Gönüllü and İçli, 2001; Esin and Öztürk, 2005). By contrast, it is widely believed that men are suitable for jobs that require technical skills and physical endurance.

While female workers call for playing a more active role in unions, their responsibilities related to family and home add to the vast complexity of social factors (Keleş, 2018) that hinder their progress toward workplace equality. Additionally, the absence of suitable conditions such as exposure to heavy smoke, the lack of play areas, and the unavailability of children's rooms creates further barriers, making it even more challenging for women to balance their dual roles as workers and caregivers.

The textile sector is important for national economies both in the world and in Türkiye. In the early 1980s, the importance of the textile and apparel sector in Türkiye increased with the adoption of neoliberal economic policies (Yüksel Oktay, E. & Özmen, İ. 2023). In Türkiye, the majority of small and medium-sized textile facilities not only produce products for the domestic market, but also for export (İTKİB, 2018). According to the data of the Ministry of Industry and Technology (Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2024), Türkiye ranks seventh in textile exports with a 3.3% global share. Competitiveness in this sector is driven by

low-cost mass production, so industry profits depend on low-wage employees delivering maximum production levels with efficient labour practices (Türkmen, 2010).

Service sector work is seen as suitable for women and has broad acceptance in Turkish society (Yavuzçehre, 2014) but many women work alongside men in intensive manufacturing jobs, with food products, ready-to-wear clothes and other textiles being the most common industries to employ women. For instance, some 64,3 % of working women in Türkiye are employed in the service sector, while another 17,8 % work in agriculture and 17% are found in the industrial sector (TURKSTAT 2025, metaanalysis data for 2024)

In addition, Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MoLSS) 's union membership for 20 sectors based on the 2025 January statistics showcase the data as follows total number of female workers are 609.731 with rate of 24,2% and total number of male workers 1.910.497 with the rate of 75,7%. The unknown gender number and rate respectively 4.319, 0,2% The same statistics document revealed that total number of union membership in textile is 99.775, this number is consist of total number of 33.393 female workers with rate of 33,4 %, and 66.574 male workers with the rate of 66,59 % yet again with unknown 8 people by the rate of 0,001 % (MoLSS,2025).

According to this stastics, The Turkish Textile, Knitting, Clothing and Leather Workers Union (TEKSİF) maintain the highest number of union members with total number of 46.084. Followed by Öz İplik İş with total number of 38.559 and TEKSTİL with 12.783 members, regardless of being female or male workers (MoLSS,2025).

The authors would like to draw the attention of the reader to say that this qualititave study was conducted in 2022 due to the Covid 19 pandemic, while the quantitative data was conducted in 2020. Therefore, the authors retrieved tha latest available data in 2020. Statistics provided by the Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security (2020) show the largest union in Türkiye in 2018 was TEKSİF, the Turkish Textile, Knitting, Clothing and Leather Workers Union. TEKSİF encompasses 68 workplaces and includes 9486 women on their membership rolls. Without shadow of doubt, there are female workers who work in informal sector, however, the authors opted for a research study with the female workers who are member of the union which has the highest number of members among textile unions in Türkiye. The first goal of this study is to examine the effects of gender norms in the work environment of women registered with TEKSİF, while the second goal is to gather information for future related studies.

Method

The study included three one-hour focus group interviews with 24 women aged between 18 and 56 who were members of the TEKSİF trade union. Focus group interviews were conducted by the researcher March 6-8, 2022 in Ankara, using a qualitative data collection method. The researcher was granted special access to these workers and had the consent of the Turkish Textile, Knitting, Clothing and Leather Workers Union. (TEKSİF), the labour union with largest members who work in many textile premises in Türkiye. Semi-structured questions were prepared and asked to three age groups which consisted of 18-29, 30-40, and 41-56 years-old. Each of the three groups included eight women who met the age and provincial criteria. The women were invited to Ankara from all provinces within the scope of the women's day activities organized by TEKSİF for the March 8 International Women's Day event. They worked in weaving, yarn, and garment production in Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Isparta, Bursa, İzmir, İstanbul, Tekirdağ, and Kayseri provinces.

During the focus groups, two sets of questions were directed to the interviewees. The first part of the qualitative data collection inventory consists of a total of nine questions pertaining to the women's socio-demographic characteristics. The second part consists of seven questions focus on questions about gender discrimination at work.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of female workers participating in qualitative interview (2022)

Pseudonym	Age	Department	Income	Marital Status	Number of Child/Children	Branch Name
W1	18	Weaving	Minimum Wage ⁵ + commission	Single	No Children	Çerkezköy
W2	21	Weaving	Minimum Wage + Commission	Engaged	No Children	Çorlu
W3	20	Yarn	Minimum Wage +Commission	Single	No Children	Isparta
W4	23	Garment	Minimum Wage +Commission	Single	No Children	Pilot
W5	26	Garment	5500 TL+ Commission	Married	1	Eyüp
W6	29	Weaving	5000 TL+ Commission	Married	2	Adıyaman
W7	26	Garment	5500TL+Commissi on	Single	No Children	İzmir
W8	26	Weaving	5000-5500 +Commission	Married	No Children	Gaziantep
W9	37	Weaving	6000 TL +Commission	Single	No Children	Gaziantep
W10	33	Garment	5800 TL +Commission	Married	1	Çorlu
W11	36	Weaving	5300 TL +Commission	Married	2	Adıyaman
W12	35	Garment	5800 TL +Commission	Married	1	İzmir
W13	31	Yarn	5200 TL + Commission	Married	No Children	Isparta
W14	38	Weaving	6000TL +Commission	Divorcee	1	Çerkezköy
W15	32	Yarn	5200 TL +Commission	Single	No Children	Kayseri
W16	39	Garment	5600 TL+Commission	Divorce	2	İzmir

⁵ During the interviews conducted for this study, it was noted that the minimum wage, announced on December 17, 2021, and effective from January 1, 2022, to June 30, 2022, was set at a net amount of 4,253.40 TL and a gross amount of 5,004.00 TL.

W17	42	Yarn	5000-6500TL +Commission	Married	2	Isparta
W18	44	Garment	5000-7000TL +Commission	Divorcee	1	İzmir
W19	45	Weaving	6000 TL +Commission	Married	2	Gaziantep
W20	53	Yarn	6500 TL +Commission	Married	4	Kayseri
W21	56	Weaving	7000-8000 TL +Commission	Married	3	Adıyaman
W22	48	Yarn	5000-7000 TL +Commission	Married	2	Isparta
W23	51	Weaving	6000TL +Commission	Married	1	Bursa
W24	43	Garment	6500 TL +Commission	Married	1	Çerkezköy

Findings

Difficult Realities in The Workplace

In three separate focus group discussions, participants emphasized working hours, night shift allocation and discrimination between white-collar and blue-collar workers in response to the question "What are the situations that cause you discomfort at work?". Women mainly reported that they were uncomfortable with the early start of work, getting on the bus early in the morning and the long working hours, as well as the privileges and benefits granted exclusively to white collar employees at the workplace. They stated that their social lives were restricted since they had to go to sleep early in order to get up for work, and that they were tired due to the long working day. They also emphasized that shift work, especially the night shift, tires them physically and mentally, and that rest, social life and spending time with their families are more valuable than material things. The fact that there are separate meal and tea breaks for white-collar workers left the impression that their workplaces do not treat all employees fairly.

Going To Work Early

Factories are located outside the cities in industrial zones and working hours start early, so shuttles pick female workers from their homes. A common problem voiced by women in the three focus groups was that some are forced to ride the shuttle service hours before the start of work because large vehicles with long

routes are used, instead of small groups of women getting on shuttles with shortened commutes.

In response to the questions about their discomfort and workplace environment during the focus group interview, interviewees emphasized that transportation, for example shuttle service, food and long working hours were common problems.

W24 (43): "We get on the shuttle early in the morning, indeed very early in the morning, we leave the work in an exact time in the evening, but going early is something I can't get used to. It's too early and we get on the bus at 5:30 in the morning because our workplace is far away..."

W23 (48): " For example, we get on the shuttle early, the shuttle goes around a lot to pick up those who work the same shift with us. I feel dizzy at work if I go to sleep late in the evening. I must sleep around 22:30-23:00 at the latest every night. There is no social life left... that is a huge problem for me."

W4 (23): "We go to work very early because of the shuttle, once we arrive home, we cannot spend time with our families, we become very tired. We go to bed early... Otherwise, there is no other way to wake up and to go work the next day in the morning, so there is no social life in our work."

W24 (43): "The issue of food and shuttle majority of us are unhappy about these two issues. It would be better if they improved at workplaces."

W18 (44): "When I started to work years ago, we had issues in the shuttles, male coworkers were talking loudly and they were not very kind to their female coworkers in the shuttles, we brought this issue up to the attention of the union, they found a solution for it. The female workers always sit on the first seats in the shuttle and the male workers at the rare of the shuttle. It is quite and safe for us as women. It is a kind of rule in our shuttles, women are sitting in front men at the rare"

W13 (31): "We are lucky comparing to other textile workers in other factories where there is no unionization. We have shuttles to arrive for our shifts during the day and night. Our only complaint would be that we have only one shuttle so we must leave the house way too early than it suppose to be, perhaps it could be another option to provide two shuttles for workers who live in different locations, but our union informed us that that would be an extra expense for the employer. And the employer does not accept this."

Long Working Hours

Collective bargaining agreements on equalization and compensation can lead to longer working hours to meet customer orders and finish production on time.

Equalization in labour law refers to ensuring that employees are treated fairly and equitably in terms of working conditions, wages, and benefits, particularly when there are differences in work hours, shifts, or pay structures. It is often applied to balance inequalities that arise due to variations in work schedules or employment conditions. And, compensation refers to the total financial and non-financial benefits that an employee receives in exchange for their work. It includes wages, salaries, bonuses, benefits (such as health insurance and retirement contributions), and legally mandated payments like severance pay or overtime (Turkish Labour Law No. 4857)

W16 (39): "I have problems with working hours and so do my other women friends. When we become mothers, some of us have responsibilities at home. When you work overtime, you say you can't stay once or twice, but then you have to work overtime to avoid problems with the supervisor. Otherwise, they don't like workers who don't work overtime."

W18(44): "You get tired, [and] there are more important things than money. You want to rest. We are exposed to a noisy work environment for more than eight hours daily. I personally can't take it anymore. I want to go home and rest."

W23 (51): "We also have shift problems; we worked single shifts for years and now we have switched to double shift. It is difficult to work at night, we used to have regular working hours for years before."

Discrimination in the Workplace

During the interviews, issues of discrimination mentioned by the women came from their personal experiences and perspectives. Several women stated that they were subjected to discrimination due to the type of factory work available and the corporate approach to job distribution. Some interviewees complained that they did not have the same breaks and rights as white-collar workers in terms of meals or rest breaks, while others stated that they were discriminated against in terms of division of labour and responsibility. The lack of wage increases over time was also an issue:

W21 (56): "For example, you may say that maybe this is not discrimination, but it bothers me. When it comes to salaries, the senior

staff and the new staff are always paid the same... I am uncomfortable with this."

W20 (53): "Those who know the job get paid the same amount of salary with those who don't know the job. [T]he one who doesn't know the job is living at our expense. There are also colleagues who don't want to learn the job. Thinking of these, I don't know whether the union is a benefit or a drawback, I mean... there are these kinds of things."

W9 (37): "Yes, we only get smoking breaks, but white-collar workers get tea and coffee breaks. My mental health is crucial for me. If I feel discriminated [against] at my workplace, I never give one hundred percent of myself to the work. We work shifts and inevitably we feel sleepy, especially at night. I am not happy with not having a coffee or tea break. I would like to have coffee, and tea breaks just like the white-collar employees in the workplace."

W16 (39): "We have the same thing; we eat lunch separately as white collar and blue collars. The white collars' food is specially made and of higher quality than ours. There are two catering companies, the white collars' catering company provides better quality food than ours."

Characteristics of the Workplace Environment

In response to the question "Are you able to express what you think could be better at work?", participants draw attention to the physical conditions of the working environment, especially the need for improvements in shifts, working hours and the elimination of discrimination. Again, early shuttles, long working hours and separate lunch menus for white-collar workers make them feel excluded and worthless. In addition to their basic demands such as working hours being more standardized and not starting too early so that they do not have to get on the bus before sunrise, female workers also have problems with the lack of rest breaks, prayer and breastfeeding rooms in their workplaces, and they called for improvements to address these problems.

In some workplaces, a small common area is allocated to men and female workers for rest, and the fact that smokers cannot go out to the garden during resting hours or that the smoking section is not separate creates a new risk factor, in addition to the dust that workers are exposed to in the workplace environment. They also stated that employers remembering them on special occasions (holidays, birthdays, weddings or birthdays) and making gestures of recognition would be an indication of appreciation. The women said they were demanding that employers

avoid discriminating between men and women employees in terms of responsibility, appreciation of work and salaries.

Physical Conditions at Work

Female workers stated that although most of the factories they work in were built many years ago and the buildings' capacities had been expanded over time, workers are uncomfortable with the physical conditions of their jobsites. Their duties as mothers, which they are expected to fulfill even while working outside the home, are affected by the architecture of their workplaces. Notably, only workplaces with more than 150 women employees are required to provide childcare centres.

W6 (29): "We often meet with our union-member friends in other provinces thanks to the union. We have the chance to exchange our work experiences and sometimes we have pleasant conversations. We usually know each other's problems. I can say that the breastfeeding room can get better... It's not needed for myself right now, but at some point when my daughter was little, I used to breastfeed her in any place [I could] without being seen by the men workers inside the workplace. For example, there was no private room at my workplace... sometimes when I see pregnant friends, I think of those old days."

W8 (26): "There are also pregnant female workers at our workplaces. They need to rest because they are standing on their feet all day at work. It doesn't matter to me, I don't have children for now, but I will have my own children in the future, this often crosses my mind."

W13 (31): "We had problems with ventilation before, but we also talked about it there, and a door was made for ventilation. It took a long time, but we tried very hard... We told the supervisor many times... how many times we have been sick, we have constantly told them, and they have finally done it. There is no other problem for now, in other words, there is no big problem for now."

W20 (53): "At my workplace, the changing room, the relaxation room and the smoking room are in the same place. It's not nice... There's no place to sit... Of course, it's private, but we use the same place for prayer. We are not happy about it, but unfortunately, we can't do anything about it... They can't open a new place for us, the factory is too old, new construction or rooms can't be built. That's how we have to manage, but we're not comfortable in that sense.

W23 (51): "We have a daycare centre at our workplace. I raised my child with childcare provided by my workplace. I was able to see my son at the

nursery during my break and took him back home with me after my shifts end. Of course, I was also lucky that I was not working the night shift as many of you have to work.”

W5(26): “I am having difficult times with my parents-in-law and with my own parents regarding my child’s babysitting arrangement. My husband also works with shifts, and we are really feeling guilty that our son has to stay with either of our parents while we are both at our nightshifts. I believe workplaces should also consider fixing female workers shifts... [to exclusively] day shifts until 17.00 hrs. My son is missing us while we are at work, and we don’t have any family life left. Childcare facilities should either operate 24 hours for parents who work shifts or at least let female workers to work only during the day. Of course, I know that we need certain number of female workers for having a childcare at workplace. On the other hand, another solution could be our union could bargain about our rights as mothers with young children to work only during the daily shift.”

Expectations for the Workplace

Due to their unionization, women employees in some workplaces are able to share their problems and wishes with employee representatives, but interviewees stated they want to meet with the employer representative or the workplace owner directly on issues when they cannot get results by other means. They emphasized that they can find a more precise and faster solution to their problems by speaking to the owner directly.

W17 (42): “We cannot meet with our employer regarding our requests because we are all members of the trade union. The Union represents us while bargaining with the employer for our salaries and employment rights. We cannot suddenly appear in front of our employers and tell them to increase our salaries.”

W21 (56): “It is very easy to conciliate with a worker. For example, give a bunch of flowers or any other present during a special day or the New Year. They could even buy a pair of shoes for our kids. Yes, they pay us our salaries, but on the other hand we would like to feel appreciated in other ways as well. I used to get a flower during my birthday at my previous workplace... It was so precious for me because I never got a flower, even from my husband.”

W14 (38): “As male and female workers, we do the same work. However, the male workers get paid 6000 TL and female workers are paid 5000TL.

There is a situation that our employer calls the structuring of positions outside the union. The white-collar chiefs are designating the employees [for promotion] and informing the managers. I have questioned this issue many times. The employers and employers' representatives informed me that they need to keep the core workers in the workplace."

Employee-Employer Relations

"Do you think you can participate in the decisions made at work?" This question illuminates how readily female workers can take on greater responsibility at work and take part in decision-making processes. During the interviews, it was observed that women participate more voluntarily and/or indirectly in decision-making processes as their age and their work experience increase. Some women state they are more active in management and in workplace decisions as their experience increases. However, some of them state that where age or experience is not important, management consults men more in the decision-making process and attaches more importance to men's ideas. Other interviewees said that although they were fewer in number than men, they were sometimes consulted in the name of positive discrimination. Still, women's ideas were not taken into account much by management when making decisions or taking action.

Involvement of the Employee In Decision-Making Processes

Among female workers in this study, some state that they are consulted in decision-making processes according to their age and experience, and that the corporate culture of the workplace also parallels this. The female workers are not in management of the union in their work place, however, they explained that their union representatives in the workplaces are in contact with them providing feedback upon their meetings with employers and/or workplace managers. Their union representatives hold regular meetings to get their complains or wishes.

W1 (18): "We only hear about the decisions that are made... the management or the trade union representative don't share or ask us because we are new [and only have] second-hand information... Maybe we are not as experienced as others, I don't know sometimes I get upset because I hear things that have happened, and then I say to myself to mind my own business."

W4 (23): "We are not consulted much either... We only meet with our trade union representative...he will decide on our behalf. I don't want that, let them ask me. Someone older than me doesn't have to know more. I'm an employee. I can make decisions, or I should be free to express my opinion. I should express my opinion even if it doesn't suit them."

W19 (45): "Of course, they ask us everything. We chat and make decisions together during our lunch or dinner breaks at work, or even while in the shuttle. We even discuss [work] over the phone on our days off. We make the decisions together, for our own sakes."

W21 (56): "We usually take part in decision-making processes such as the catering company, placing a bench in the garden and so on and so forth. However, they never consult us regarding our salaries or overtime or our work conditions."

W18 (44): "When we ask for something, the employer's representative and our trade union's representative come and join us during our lunch break and give feedback to us about our demands, and make an explanation even if their response is positive or negative"

Work Relations

When asked, "What are your expectations, especially from who are your male coworkers?" the interviewees spoke of the attitudes and behaviors of men in the workplace and their patterns of communication with each other. The communication between female and male workers and their expectations as colleagues differ according to their ages and experiences. Older women with more experience do not have problems with men workers, and they claim men workers are respectful and distant towards them. Younger women emphasized that they expect more respect and care from their male colleagues. Female workers between 18-29 stated that they are uncomfortable with men swearing amongst themselves and they felt the use of vulgarity isolates women, setting them apart from the men. All female workers, regardless of age and experience, stated that employers treated them kindly and respectfully, and in fact treated them better than male colleagues.

Communication and Expectations from Male Co-Workers

Interviewees had varying expectations of their men co-workers. While some female workers emphasized that their own behavior needed improvement in certain areas, they also expressed that they have expectations of their male coworkers that have direct impact on their lives behind the factory door.

W5 (26): "I expect [men] to be more respectful... I expect them to give me space during meals or empty some buckets of ours just because we work side by side. Sometimes we lift sacks of heavy materials and bales. They can hold them by the end. They are stronger than us. We are more

practical, we do it faster and more carefully than they do. At the least, I think they should compensate by carrying loads.”

W16 (39): “I want them to be willing to stay for night shifts as well... They usually find excuses for not staying on shift as much as women... We are not able to finish our housework while at home, and I believe that men should stay more night shifts as they are more able-bodied. We shouldn't [always] stay on shift, but of course [men staying for the night shift] doesn't happen... there is no such practice.”

W10 (33): “We expect to work together as family members. We work side by side, shoulder by shoulder during our work shifts... we produce more work than men workers. We are faster.”

W11 (36): “Male workers should not utter profane language... especially on night shifts, they think no one hears them because our supervisors are not working during night shifts. Their language irritates us.

Violence in the Workplace

Another question asked as part of the focus group interview was, “Have you ever been subjected to or witnessed verbal or physical violence at work? Responses concerning verbal or psychological violence experienced at the hands of men workers were shared. Among the three focus groups, the experiences of women aged 18-29 and 31-40 differ from those of women in the 41-56 age group. Younger women spoke of being sexualised, often couching their negative experiences in dismissive language that minimizes the harassment they endured. Meanwhile, female workers between 41-56 echoed those statements by sharing similar negative experiences from when they first started working and discussing how they dealt with the problem.

W10 (33): “In other words, our male co-workers are trying to get closer with female workers especially [those] who are just starting out. Once a woman sets her boundaries, a man could not approach her. He does not dare to do anything again.”

W20 (53): I had an experience during my first year of working life. ... The coil reels coming out of the same machine fall into the same basket, the wrong ones we take and put back... There was a male co-worker next to me, we touched the bucket at the same time, and then I quickly pulled my hand out... He tried me there then I told him that we are siblings, and I was sure that he touched my hand by mistake Actually, I wanted him to understand that I noticed what he was trying and I also gave a message

to him which means that I am not interested in such things. He got my message, and he has always kept his distance ever since.”

W1 (18): “I haven't come across it, but men harass with their looks sometimes... For example, when we pass by them during break or lunch, they follow us with their eyes until we disappear.”

In addition, instances of outright violence suffered by women 31-40 and 41-56 could be interpreted as threats and intimidation for being in the same job and being more experienced. Women aged 18-29 experience other types of intimidation.

W3 (20) We have shuttles, you know, they bring us to and from the factory during shifts. Sometimes there are very few people left on the night shift. When I started usually a man sat next to me in the shuttle. He was squeezing me on the seat, opening his legs, touching my leg. At first, I didn't understand, a few weeks later I realized that he was always harassing me when the same person did this every night shift. I had to speak with our supervisor. We had a new set up; female workers started to sit on the front seats of the shuttle and men workers at the rear. I feel safer with this arrangement.

The Attitude of Supervisors and Managers Towards Male and Female Workers

When participants were asked, "Do you think that the supervisors, managers, or workplace owners at the business treat male workers better?" some said they had experienced more positive discrimination by employers and managers compared to male workers. The size of the enterprise, the ratio men to women working, plus a change in the attitudes of men towards female workers are all factors that make a difference in women's experiences. While commitment to gender sensitivity and positive discrimination in favor of women are applied in large enterprises, these strides toward inclusivity are less common in workplaces where men dominate.

W16 (39): “When the bosses/employers see us, they open the door to us... they give us priority during the meal... even though there are men at the machine while we are working, they come and ask about our condition.”

W18 (44): Yes, there is courtesy, but deep in my heart I believe that they treat men differently. We don't know what's going on behind closed doors... We're all members of the union, but since the master work [supervisor] is usually a man, he gets more friendly with men workers, and they have male bonding.

W19 (45): “We are experienced, we know the job, that's why factories need women... The bosses know this, but they don't tell us directly, but they are kind and express their satisfaction with us... I think so, of course, I respect other people's opinions.”

W21 (56): “They don't raise a voice to us...they don't criticize the work... They already see that we are very tired, there is a lot of work, and we need to catch up. Who will do it if we don't? So they are behaving well, but we don't see much more... It's not enough to be polite.”

Responsibility Levels of Male And Female Workers

During the focus group interviews, participants were asked, ‘Do you think male workers are given more important responsibilities at work than you are? The women answered that although men and women work side by side in the weaving yarn and garment departments in the textile sector, men are assigned to more responsible and higher positions. Thanks to workplaces addressing issues such as gender sensitivity, equal pay for equal work and gender equality in employment, and corporate efforts to ensure workers also adopt this sensitivity, some female workers participating in the interview work reported that responsibility is doled out more equally for men and women.

W11 (36): “We have three women master supervisors. The rest are men, but the employer does not want to deal with women masters because men are the majority. It is easier for them to solve problems by dealing with men. I mean, I think so personally.”

W18 (44): “We have some people who make models for our products, but only men are in charge. Even though men and women do the same work, the master only chooses men for important roles. This has been happening for a long time, so women don't get the chance to have important jobs in this area.”

W20 (53): “I can say that women are given more responsibility... We work meticulously clean... We work carefully so that there are no problems with the machines.”

W23 (51): “We work harder... In fact, no one gives us responsibility [explicitly] sometimes, but by nature we are mothers or we move around the house... Next thing we know, responsibility has become our duty... It has always been expected of us.”

Opinions on Salaries

Participants were asked, "Do you get the same salary as men workers? Do you have any information about the salaries received?" Here, being unionized appeared to be beneficial because respondents said they received the same salary as their male counterparts. However, with the recent increase in the national minimum wage, the chances of negotiating higher salaries have paradoxically decreased. Experienced and inexperienced, senior and junior employees all speak about the disadvantages of receiving almost the same wage. In December 2021, the annual minimum wage hike came early with the highest level in the history of the Republic, but the base wages of unionized workers have not been increased further due to the financial burden on employers. For this reason, the wage gap between new workers and those who have been working for many years has almost disappeared. During the focus group interviews, experienced female workers were aware of the financial loss caused to them by the increase in the minimum wage.

W22 (48): "We are either unionized or we get the same salary...Only some departments may be different, they fall into a slightly different job category ... Fabric dyeing for example... There are raw materials, there are chemicals. We need a qualified employee there, and they write that in the collective bargaining agreement... [T]hose who work in that department are usually more able-bodied, and they get a different salary than us."

W24 (43): "Everyone who knows the same job gets the same, and those who don't know get the same. A beginner gets the same, gets the same money for 20 years. I think it's unfair."

W20 (53): "I've been working for 29 years, okay, we have a little bit of seniority difference, but actually, my co-workers who started in the periods after me don't have much difference [in salary] ..."

W23 (51): "Well, it's never been so good. The minimum wage has increased... We used to take the current minimum wage money as salary and bonus... Now the [overtime] premium is also falling because the minimum wage is high... Employers, our boss complain about the cost increment, and that they could not increase our salaries accordingly. Otherwise, their business might go bankrupt. Everybody looks out from her/his own window."

W17 (42): "If the last minimum wage hadn't increased so much, maybe the change in our salaries - the increase would have been higher... Our salaries would have been based on seniority, namely work experience, but now the minimum wage is already too high Half of us are new, half

are senior workers. If they give salaries to the old ones according to their working years - I don't know how to solve this problem - but we also want to experience the advantage of being unionized... Our union already deducts member subscription fees from our salary every month.”

Assessment and Conclusion

The data we obtained as a result of this qualitative study of unionized women working in the textile sector is mostly parallel to the data of previous studies conducted, meaning little has changed this century for the large number of working women in Türkiye. Today, the textile sector remains the largest labour-intensive sector where women work, but being a union member does not always provide women with better working experiences or income. Unionization also fails to address the wider scope of social rights in terms of childcare, or relieve them of the responsibility to care for their aging parents. Even in the workplace, interviewees use the language of motherhood and caregivers to describe the gender norms on the shop floor; traditional caregiver duties are still expected of them and this reflects the ongoing gender norms they face in the home and in their working lives. It is assumed female workers will still fulfill the demanding roles assigned to them by society while also toiling under the same strenuous conditions as unionized men.

The individual stories and problems that women who are union members have experienced in different workplaces and in different cities tell us that unions have not eliminated the problems inherent with their male-dominated perspective, and that the working and social rights of women are disadvantaged by this reality. The unionized women in this study report a host of problems, namely, conflict with male colleagues and managers, difficult working conditions, their struggles to be part of decision-making mechanisms, promotion problems at work, motherhood and care issues, wage disparity, and physical or psychological violence. It should be noted, however, that women who are not union members in the textile sector also experience these issues.

This study reveals that despite the efforts of their unions, gender role expectations affect the daily lives of female workers. Young women participate less in decision-making mechanisms at workplaces than experienced and older female workers. Women work long hours, and coming to work early and arriving late negatively affects their private and social lives. Women who continued their work intensively during the pandemic also frequently touched upon the lack of flexible working hours, equalization, and non-payment of overtime during focus group interviews. Because of the intensity of labour expected of them, respondents stated

that unions or workplaces do not adequately provide the wages and benefits they deserve.

The male-dominated nature of trade unions and industrial management further restricts women's influence in shaping labour policies. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions, including enforcing policies, improving workplace conditions, promoting female leadership in trade unions, and challenging traditional gender norms in labor markets. By implementing fair labour practices and advancing gender equity, the textile industry can become a more inclusive and sustainable sector for women worldwide.

Efforts can be made to address the issues cited by our interviewees. The importance of womens' participation in decision-making mechanisms can be conveyed to workers, as well as to the managers of the unions and owners and managers of the workplace. Specific measures should be taken to ensure the equal representation of women in decision-making mechanisms. Furthermore, training and seminars on gender equality and violence/harassment in the workplace would make the issues better understood, especially with the participation of workers, trade unions and managers. Such efforts would increase the empowerment of female workers who are the backbone of the industry, and may be instrumental in improving mental health concerns and their overall quality of life.

In further studies, the direct effect of the working environment, working hours and income on psychological empowerment, quality of life and depression levels can be investigated by broader quantitative and qualitative research. Any further work must include the cooperation of the unions and workplaces, but the results of this study may be used a stepping stone to increase awareness of the ongoing problems faced by women in this demanding sector.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de tekstil sektöründe çalışan sendikalı kadın işçilerin toplumsal cinsiyet normları, ücret eşitsizlikleri ve ayrımcılık ile nasıl mücadele ettiklerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma aynı zamanda kadınların iş gücünde kendilerini nasıl tanımladıklarını ve sendika üyeliğiyle nasıl bir kimlik ve tanınma çerçevesi oluşturduklarını da sorgulamaktadır.

Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı çalışmada Türkiye Tekstil, Örgü, Konfeksiyon ve Deri İşçileri Sendikası'na (TEKSİF) üye yaşları 18 ile 56 arasında değişmekte olan ve farklı illerden (Adıyaman, Gaziantep, İzmir, İstanbul, Tekirdağ, Kayseri) çalışmaya katılan 24 kadın işçi ile üç farklı odak grup görüşmesi yapılmıştır.

Yapılan odak grup görüşmelerinde, kadın işçilerin vurguladığı öne çıkan sorunlar şu şekilde özetlenebilir:

Kadın işçiler, uzun çalışma saatlerinden, gece vardiyalarından ve işyerlerinin şehir merkezlerinden uzak olmasından yakınmaktadırlar. Kadın işçiler, sabah erken saatlerde iş servisine binmek zorunda kalmak, sosyal yaşamlarını sınırlamakta ve kendilerinde fiziksel yorgunluğa yol açtığını belirtmiştir. Ayrıca, vardiya sonrası ev ve aile sorumluluklarını yerine getirmeleri gerekmektedir. İşyerlerinde kadınların beyaz yakalı çalışanlara kıyasla daha kısa mola hakkına sahip olması, yemek kalitesinde ayırım yapılması gibi durumlar, kadın işçilerde eşitsizlik algısını artırmaktadır. Kadın işçiler, ücret artışlarının kıdemle orantısız olmasından ve aynı işi yapan yeni başlayanlarla aynı maaşı almaktan rahatsızlık duymaktadır. Kadın işçiler, erkek çalışma arkadaşlarından fiziksel yardımlaşma ve saygı beklediklerini belirtmektedir.

Kadın işçiler, iş yerinde erkek işçilerle ilişkilerinde yaşadıkları sorunlara da değinmektedir. Erkek işçilerin, kadın işçilere karşı tutumlarında saygı eksikliği ve cinsiyetçi davranışlar sık görülmektedir. Kadın işçiler, işyerinde erkek işçiler tarafından sözlü ve/veya fiziksel tacize uğradıklarından söz etmektedirler. Özellikle genç kadınlar, yeni başladıkları dönemde daha fazla tacize maruz kaldıklarını ifade etmektedir. Bu durum, kadın işçilerin iş ortamında daha fazla stres yaşamasına neden olmaktadır.

Kadın işçiler, ayrıca sendika ve işyerinde, erkek çalışma arkadaşlarının daha fazla sorumluluk ve karar alma rolü üstlendiklerini, sendikal karar alma mekanizmalarına ve sendikal faaliyetlere katılımda meslektaşları olan erkek işçilere kıyasla daha az söz sahibi olduklarını ifade etmektedirler. Kadın işçiler, sendikal faaliyetlere sınırlı katılımlarında karar alma süreçlerine genellikle deneyimli veya yaşça büyük kadınların nispeten etkili olduğunu ancak sendikanın erkek yöneticilerinin, kadın işçilerinin fikirlerini çokda fazla dikkate almadıklarını belirtmektedirler.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, tekstil sektöründe kadın işçilerin karşılaştıkları zorlukları ve sendikaların bu sorunları ele almada yetersiz kaldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet normları, iş yerinde kadınların üzerindeki yükü artırmakta ve onların iş-yaşam dengelerini olumsuz etkilemektedir. Çözüm önerileri arasında kadınların sendikal ve işyeri yönetim süreçlerine daha fazla katılımının sağlanması, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği konusunda eğitim programlarının düzenlenmesi ve şiddet ile taciz vakalarına karşı daha güçlü önlemler alınması bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca, çocuk bakım hizmetlerinin yaygınlaştırılması, kadınların hem iş hem de aile yaşamlarında olması gereken eşit işe eşit ücret ve özel yaşam iş yaşamı dengesi için elzem bir durum teşkil etmektedir.

Gelecekteki araştırmalar, kadın işçileri güçlendiren sürdürülebilir çözümler geliştirmeye odaklanarak, bu çalışma koşullarının psikolojik ve ekonomik etkilerini daha fazla araştırmalıdır. Bu çalışma, herkes için adil ve kapsayıcı bir iş yeri

sağlamak için ele alınması gereken kritik sorunlara ışık tutarak bu tür çabalar için bir temel sunmaktadır.

Extended Summary

The textile sector in Türkiye is a significant industry where women constitute a large portion of the workforce. Despite their critical contributions, women in this sector face persistent challenges related to gender norms, wage disparities, and challenging working conditions. While balancing traditional caregiving roles at home, female workers endure long working hours in physically and mentally demanding environments. This study explores the lived experiences of female textile workers in Türkiye, focusing on gender-based discrimination, labor conditions, and the impact of union membership on their professional and personal lives.

The research utilized qualitative methods, involving three focus group discussions with 24 women aged between 18 and 56, all of whom were members of the Turkish Textile, Knitting, Clothing, and Leather Workers Union (TEKSİF). Participants were from diverse regions, including Adıyaman, İzmir, and Tekirdağ. The discussions aimed to understand participants' socio-demographic profiles, experiences of workplace discrimination, and involvement in union activities. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed to identify recurring themes and challenges faced by these women.

One of the primary issues identified was the burden of long working hours and shift schedules. Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with early start times and lengthy commutes, as most textile factories are located far from city centers. The combination of early morning commutes, long shifts, and caregiving responsibilities at home leaves women physically exhausted and limits their social lives. Night shifts were highlighted as mentally and physically draining. These difficulties are compounded by the unequal treatment of blue-collar workers compared to white-collar employees. For instance, women noted discrepancies in meal quality, break schedules, and other workplace privileges, fostering a sense of exclusion and inequality. Additionally, many participants criticized the lack of differentiation in wages between experienced and new employees, which undermines the motivation of long-term workers.

Another recurring theme was the relationship between female and male coworkers. Female workers reported a lack of physical support from male colleagues for physically demanding tasks and criticized the unequal distribution of night shifts. Younger female workers were troubled by the use of vulgar language among male coworkers and expressed a desire for more respectful interactions.

While some male colleagues were seen as supportive, others displayed dismissive or discriminatory attitudes, which affected workplace dynamics.

Several participants shared experiences of verbal or physical harassment at work. Younger female workers often faced inappropriate behavior from male coworkers, especially during their initial employment period. Instances of harassment on company-provided transportation were also reported, leading to safety concerns. Measures such as segregated seating arrangements on shuttles were implemented in some cases, but participants emphasized the need for broader interventions to ensure safety and dignity at work.

Union participation was another critical area explored in the study. While union membership offers certain benefits, such as equal wages with male coworkers, female workers reported feeling excluded from decision-making processes. Older and more experienced female workers were more likely to participate in union activities, while younger participants felt their voices were often overlooked. This exclusion reinforces the male-dominated structure of unions, where leadership and decision-making roles are predominantly held by men. Women also expressed dissatisfaction with how unions addressed their concerns, including issues related to maternity leave, caregiving responsibilities, and workplace safety.

Wage inequality emerged as a significant concern. Although, unionized female workers reportedly receive equal pay to their male counterparts, the wage gap between experienced and newer employees has narrowed due to recent increases in the national minimum wage. This development has caused frustration among long-serving workers who feel their contributions are undervalued. The lack of financial incentives for seniority has further diminished the perceived benefits of union membership.

This study highlights the systemic challenges faced by women in Türkiye's textile sector. Long working hours, inadequate workplace conditions, discrimination, and limited representation in union activities are persistent issues that negatively impact women's well-being and professional development. Additionally, the dual burden of work and caregiving responsibilities exacerbates the challenges these women face.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach. Increasing female workers participation in union decision-making processes and ensuring their equal representation in leadership roles are crucial first steps. Employers and unions should prioritize gender equality through targeted training programs that raise awareness about discrimination and harassment. Improved childcare services, and special accommodations for night shifts are necessary to help female workers to achieve a better work-life balance. Measures to prevent workplace harassment and

violence should be strengthened, with clear mechanisms for reporting and addressing such incidents.

In conclusion, the experiences of female textile workers in Türkiye underscore the urgent need for structural reforms to create a more equitable and supportive working environment. By addressing the systemic barriers identified in this study, policymakers, unions, and employers can help improve the quality of life for women in this sector. Future research should further explore the psychological and economic impacts of these working conditions, with a focus on developing sustainable solutions that empower female workers. This study provides a foundation for such efforts, shedding light on the critical issues that need to be addressed to ensure a fair and inclusive workplace for all.

Statement

Ethical Statement

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of Hacettepe University Ethical Department and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments. For the research, a signed permission letter was obtained from the general president of the TEKSİF trade union and submitted to the Ethical Research unit of Hacettepe University

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest

Funding Statement

No funding was received for this research.

Author Contributions

Both authors have contributed equally to the research.

Manuscript Submission Statement

This manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration for publication by any other journal.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, B. (1994). A field of one's own: Gender and land rights in South Asia. Cambridge University Press.
- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139–215.
- Ankan, Ç., & Aktaş, A. M. (2008). Türkiye’de kadın sağlığını etkileyen sosyo-ekonomik faktörler ve yoksulluk. *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 13(13), 21–28.
- Aytaç, S., & Sevüktekin, M. (2002). Çağdaş sanayi merkezlerinde kadın işgücünün konumu: Bursa örneği. Ankara: Türkiye İşveren Sendikaları Konfederasyonu Yayını.
- Dedeoğlu, S. (2000). Toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri açısından Türkiye’de aile ve kadın emeği. *Toplum ve Bilim*, 86(1), 139–170.
- Deniz, A. ve Kuloğlu, D. (2019). Ekonomi tarihinde Avrupa ve Türkiyede kadın çalışanların ekonomideki evrimsel süreci. *Avrasya Uluslararası Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 7(16), 345-374
- Dirgar, E. (2009). Konfeksiyon sanayiinde kadın çalışanların demografik özellikleri ve istihdam yapısı üzerine bir araştırma. *Tekstil ve Konfeksiyon*, 19(4), 330–336.
- Ecevit, Y. (1991). Shop floor control: The ideological construction of Turkish women factory workers. In N. Redclift & E. Mignione (Eds.), Beyond employment: Household, gender and subsistence. Blackwell.
- Engels, F. (2019). İngiltere’de emekçi sınıflarının durumu (2. Basım). (O. Emre, Çev.) İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- English, B. (2013). Global women’s work: Historical perspective on the textile and garment industry. *Journal of International Affairs*, 67(1), 67–82.
- Eraydın, A., & Erendil, A. (1999). Yeni üretim süreçleri ve kadın emeği. Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Genel Müdürlüğü Yayını.
- Eraydın, A., & Erendil, A. (1999). The role of female labour in industrial restructuring: New production processes and labour market relations in the Istanbul clothing industry. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 6(3), 259–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663699925024>
- Esin, M. N., & Öztürk, N. (2005). Çalışma yaşamı ve kadın sağlığı. *Mesleki Sağlık ve Güvenlik Dergisi*, 3(1), 38–42.
- Gönüllü, M., & İçli, G. (2001). Çalışma yaşamında kadınlar: Aile ve iş ilişkileri. *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 25(1), 81–100.
- İstanbul Tekstil ve Konfeksiyon İhracatçıları Birliği (İTKİB). (2018). Toplam tekstil ve hammaddeleri sektörü ağustos ayı ihracatı performans raporu. İstanbul: İstanbul Tekstil ve Konfeksiyon İhracatçıları Birliği (İTKİB) Genel Sekreterliği Yayını.

- Kadın Emeđi ve İstihdamı Girişimi. (2013). Türkiye’de kadın emeđi ve istihdamına yönelik politikalar: Kadın emeđi ve istihdamına dair politika ve faaliyetlerin 12 ilde deđerlendirilmesi raporu. İstanbul.
- Kahraman, F. (2017). Çalışma ilişkileri bakımından dördüncü sanayi devrimi ve Sivas ilinde farkındalık üzerine alan araştırması (Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Sivas).
- Kandiyoti, D. (1997). Kadınlar ve hane üretimi: Türkiye’de kırsal dönüşümün etkileri. In D. Kandiyoti, Cariyeler, bacılar, yurttaşlar (s. 55–78). İstanbul. Metis Yayınları.
- Keleş, D. (2018). Türkiye’de sendika-kadın ilişkisi: Sendikacı kadınların bakış açlarına ilişkin deđerlendirme. *Çalışma ve Toplum*, 4(59), 2047–2082.
- Kıray, M. (1985). Metropolitan city and the changing family. *Turkish Social Science Association*, (1), 79–92.
- Leal Filho W, Dinis MAP, do Paço A, et al. COVID-19 and sustainability in textile, apparel and fashion use: An assessment of trends. *Textile Research Journal*. 2022;93(3-4):674-690. doi:10.1177/00405175221114167
- Leventer, G. & Altun, A. (2023). Sanayi Devrimleri Tarihinde Kadın İstihdamı ve İktisadi Gelişim Süreci. *Aksaray Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 15 (3), 279-302.
- Maynes, J. M. (2004). Gender, labor, and globalization in historical perspective. Indiana University Press.
- Özer, M., & Biçerli, K. (2003). Türkiye’de kadın işgücünün panel veri analizi. *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 3(1), 55–85.
- Özkaplan, N. (2009). Duygusal emek: Kadın ve erkek işi. *Çalışma ve Toplum*, (2) 15–23.
- Peker, E. ve Kubar, Y. (2012). Türkiye’de kırsal kesimde kadın istihdamına genel bir bakış. *Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 14(2), 173-188
- Sanayi ve Ticaret Bakanlığı. (2020). Tekstil ve hammaddeleri ihracat raporu. [Erişim tarihi: 15 Ekim 2020]. <https://ticaret.gov.tr>
- Seidu, R.K., Jiang, S.-x., Tawiah, B., Acquaye, R. and Howard, E.K. (2024), Review of effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the textile industry: challenges, material innovation and performance, *Research Journal of Textile and Apparel*, 28(4), 745-764.
- Soysal, T. (2006). Uluslararası sözleşmeler ışığında 4857 Sayılı İş Kanunu’nda kadın işçiyi koruyan hükümler. *Kamu İş*, 8(4), 1-48.
- Şahin, K. ve Develi, A. (2021). Kadın istihdamında kayıt dışılık sorunu. *Kesit Akademi Dergisi*, 7(27), 386-400.

- T.C. Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı. (2019). İşçi sayıları ve sendikaların üye sayıları hakkında tebliğler. [Erişim tarihi: 20 Ekim 2020]. <http://www.csqb.gov.tr>
- T.C. Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı. (2019). Türkiye sendikacılık istatistikleri. [Erişim tarihi: 31 Ocak 2020]. https://www.csqb.gov.tr/media/63359/calisma_hayati_2019.pdf
- T.C. Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı. (2019). İşçi sayıları ve sendikaların üye sayıları hakkında tebliğler. [Erişim tarihi: 10 Mart 2025] <https://www.csqb.gov.tr/Media/2eojuc2u/2025-ocak-tebli%C4%9F>
- T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi 4857 Nolu İş Kanunu [7 Mart 2025]. <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=4857&MevzuatTur>
- T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı (2023). 2023 Yılı Faaliyet Raporu. [Erişim tarihi: 13 Mart 2025]. <https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/65e1730213b8768d8422d054/Ticaret%20Bakanl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1%202023%20Y%C4%B1%C4%B1%20Faaliyet%20Raporu>
- Toksöz, G., & Erdoğan, S. (1998). Sendikacı kadın kimliği. İmge Kitabevi Yayınları.
- Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (2025). İstatistiklerle Kadın, 2024. Sektörlere göre istihdam edilenler metaveri. [Erişim tarihi: 13 Mart 2025]. <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Kadin>
- Türkmen, M. (2010). Küçük ve orta ölçekli işletmelerde üretim stratejisi, üretim ve işletme performansı üzerine strateji temelli bir analiz: Tekstil ve otomotiv yan sanayinde karşılaştırmalı bir uygulama [Doktora tezi, Selçuk Üniversitesi].
- Urhan, B. (2014). Sendikasız kadınlar kadınsız sendikalar. İstanbul: Kadav Yayınları.
- Ünlütürk Ulutaş, Ç., & Pala, H. Z. (2013). "Sendikalarda kadın sesi: Türkiye'de sendikalar ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği." IV. Sosyal Haklar Ulusal Sempozyumu. İstanbul: Petrol-İş Yayınları, 293-311.
- Ünlütürk, C. and Öngel, S. (2023), 'For fair fashion: improving due diligence, wages, and gender equity in the Turkish garment sector. An analysis of garment factory's and brand's business conduct.' Fair Wear Foundation
- Wilson, K. (1979). A history of textile. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Yavuzçehre, P. (2014). Tekstil sektöründe çalışan kentli kadın işçilerin yoksulluk halleri [Doktora tezi, Pamukkale Üniversitesi].

- Yılmaz, A., Bozkurt, Y. ve İzci, F. (2008). Kamu örgütlerinde çalışan kadın işgörenlerin çalışma yaşamlarında karşılaştıkları sorunlar üzerine bir araştırma. *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 9(2), 89-114.
- Yüksel Oktay, E. & Özmen, İ. (2023). Türkiye’de Tekstil Sektöründe Çalışan Kadınların Sorunları, *Yalova Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Cilt 13(1), 73-86,
- Yüksel, M. ve Ören, K. (2018). Kadın Çalışanların Elektronik Ticarete İlişkin Algı Düzeylerini Ölçümlemeye Yönelik Bir Alan Araştırması. *Social Sciences Studies Journal*, 4(16), 1249-1269.
- Zengin, B., & Koçoğlu, Ş. (2018). Türkiye’de Kadın İstihdamı ve İstihdam Artışına Yönelik Politika Önerileri. *İş ve Hayat*, 4(8), 166-188