

## A SOCIOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF HOME-BASED WORKING AND WOMAN LABOUR

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### Abstract

Starting from 1980s, home-based working has gradually increased in the context of globalisation. As an important employment source mostly for woman, home-based working is a work type which includes a wide range of jobs from piece work to self-employment. Empirical studies in our country concerning the reasons of this type of labour, which contains invisible workforce, are rather limited.

In the research, the conditions of home-based working women who receive fee per piece in Denizli textile industry are analyzed. The research, carried out using qualitative research technique, focuses on the cheapness of labour force, organization forms in the household and the invisibility. Nourished by poverty, home-based working again continues as the result of poverty.

**Keywords:** *Home based working, poverty, woman labour*

**JEL Classification:** **Z13** - Economic Sociology; Economic Anthropology; Social and Economic Stratification

### 1.INTRODUCTION

Home-oriented work, a popular concept in recent years, started to be used following the definition of working at home by International Labour Organization (ILO) as a dependent form of working. Home-oriented work is a form of work ranging from freelance working to working for sub-contractors, and including such types as working on order basis or pieceworking. This form of work is getting more popular in modern sectors such as automotive or electronics, as well as traditional sectors which are not dependent on a workplace but can be performed in various places out of the workplace such as textile or shoe manufacturing. While also seen in houses where technology is used or in high-

skilled work, in parallel with technological reforms and economic globalization, home-oriented work is a form of work generally performed within the contexts of being unskilled and poor, and aimed at cost reduction. Although the fact that companies transfer work out of the workplace and subcontract the work to smaller workplaces, plants, or homes has been considered as a traditional form of work, bound to fade away in time, it has become more and more widespread. As workers turned from factories towards houses, gaining an informal form, home-oriented work has become varied and the number of such workers increased. Business relations non-conforming to legal standards, performed so as to gain advantage in the global competitive environment, discontinuity, insecurity and minimum costs are getting more widespread as the work form of unskilled labor.

Globally, although the rate that women join the economic life has considerably increased in regions excluding Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, women labor rate is still below the rate that men join the labor (UNCTAD, 2004). When considered statistically, it can be seen that statistics are generally related to the formal sector, not reflecting records of informal sector workers, part-time workers, or outworkers. The literature reviewed, gender and marriage can be seen as the determining factors of home oriented work, women constituting the majority of workers. Most of them work at home due to cultural prejudice, lower skill levels, or the difficulty of finding a job in the formal sector (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987; Erman, Kalaycıoğlu and Tılıç, 2002; Freeman 2003). Home-oriented work which became widespread also in Turkey especially after 1980s within the context of Globalization, is a form of work where women outnumber men. Home-oriented work of women labor is dealt with in this study.

## **2.METHODOLOGY**

The study is on 50 women working for sub-contractors or employers in the textiles sector doing home-oriented piecework. Interview technique was used because subjective cases can better be understood in a qualitative study. Data obtained through face to face meetings was evaluated together with observations. Our study was conducted on dependent pieceworkers working for sub-contractors or employers.

Work forms of workers, cheapness of labor force, in what kind of an organization work is performed in the household, the position of family members within this organization, and the relation of home-oriented work with visibility are presented in this study. The research is a descriptive study and the interviews were completed following a 4-month field work.

## **2.1. Approaches to Home-Oriented Work**

Approaches regarding home-oriented work can be dealt with in two groups. First of them is the one discussing the prejudice women come across in every field within the contexts of patriarchal ideology and social gender roles. The second is the one discussing in which conditions women labor has become a part of labor market within the frameworks of different production processes and labor organizations.

### **2.1.1. Approaches to Home-Oriented Work, Patriarchal Ideology and Social Gender Discrimination**

The perspective based on social gender analysis shows us how multi-layer meanings of being a woman and a man is formed and how being a woman and a man takes place in every type of daily activity both in and outside the home (Hart;1995:41-42). Social division of labor imposed by the discriminative system underlying the social gender is based on male dominance and the working and house-supporting man. In approaches dealing with home-oriented work within the contexts of social gender discrimination and patriarchal ideology, social position of women is explained within the frameworks of patriarchal family pattern and ideological assumptions in this direction, and power relations. At the core of the studies in this group is the assumption that the employment of women in low-wage, insecure and irregular jobs is the reflection of their unequal position in the family on the labor market. While the division of labor in the family, attitude towards women working outside, the point of view that women developed within such a structure, and the strategies they

developed are being dealt with, some explanations are tried to be given as to how women sometimes regenerate this system. Even if women are employed in the labor market, they still have their responsibilities at home and are trying to harmonize the regulations concerning the working life with their family lives. The need for women labor in developing countries is caused by pressure of economic troubles and the low wage of women is added to the family budget. Accordingly, the wage that women get is defined as “side income” and their working outside as “take or leave, doesn’t matter” – the truth is vice versa, though. This is in contradiction with the reasons obliging women to work. In societies where traditional values are dominant, the case of working women can temporarily be accepted when men cannot support the home and as soon as men become able to support the home, women leave the working life and get back their role of housewife (Beneria ve Roldan 1987 İçli, 2009).

Control over the family sources of income is generally under the supervision of men. As the amount of income decreases, women's responsibility in the management and control of money increases, and in order to find the cheapest of everything, they try to manage the little money by using their time and effort (Pahl,1989;Payne,1998). The fact that women's working depends on the husband's/father's permission and that it is tolerated when the economic conditions of the family is worse is all related to the assumption that women are temporary in the working life. The income that women provide by working is considered a support to the family income and this money can be used on the education of children or dowry. On the other hand, it can be seen that women keep a part of their income from their husbands in order to spend as they wish, and try to increase their power within the family by patriarchal bargaining (Hattatoğlu, 2001; Kandiyoti, 1988). In settings where men cannot provide enough money, women's working and bringing money to home can cause an increase in men's patriarchal assertiveness.

The impact of patriarchal social gender ideology and cultural factors lead women to do marginal and low-wage jobs. Especially women migrating from the country to the city are observed to work in such jobs mostly. And according to Çınar, the easiest way for undereducated women who have just arrived in the city to contribute to their household income when they face economic difficulties is working in clothing factories or pieceworking at home (1994; 369-380)

### **2.1.2.New Ways of Using Women Labor**

While new technologies make production possible in different parts of the world, they also offer opportunities to benefit from the advantages of different places. Companies move the labour-intensive part of their production to countries with cheaper labor, and support contract manufacturing by getting in touch with various companies. Thus, avoiding several legal obligations such as wage, tax, or insurance, companies increase their profits. Following international companies, partners in different countries, factories, contract factories working with these firms, smaller plants, and micro-family enterprises doing business with them, at the very end of the chain are home-oriented workers. Accordingly, reorganization of production depending on the globalization is supported by home-oriented work as well as technological developments. Sub-contract relations help reduce the costs depending on the demand by methods like employing contract workers, using family labor, or giving work out to homes. Such methods pave the way for tax evasion by employing uninsured workers on the one hand, and kill the bargaining power of free, unsecure, irregular labor on the other (Gilbert 1994,

Eraydın and Erendil 2002). In this environment, home-oriented work at the end of the sub-contractor chain stands as an invisible labor where the lowest wages are paid and majority is constituted by women.

Woman workers are unaware of the real value of the wages they receive, because the difference between goes to the intermediaries. Therefore, the amount that women get is what remains after the share of the intermediaries is cut from the amount paid by the employer. Besides employing uninsured workers and paying low wages, employers can also reduce their costs by avoiding responsibilities such as rent, lunch, or shuttle. Because there is not a production area in home-oriented work, a class awareness caused by employer-worker relation or unionization is not possible. Along with the structural adjustment programmes put into practice in Turkey in 1980s, the population of women in certain areas in the informal sector started to increase. As in many countries in the world, labor markets in Turkey are stratified and this stratification is disadvantageous for women workers.

## **2.2. Invisibility of Home-Oriented Work**

One of the most important characteristics of home-oriented work differing it from other forms of work is the invisibility of the work and the worker. Involvement of many various companies of various sizes, intermediaries, and home workers in the production lead to the invisibility of relations (Disk, United Metalworkers' Union, 2003). It is impossible to tell where and by whom the product was made by looking at it. If the product in question is a brand name product, labor information as to which part of the process was carried out as home-oriented is also not given.

Our information as to home-oriented workers is limited. One reason is our lack of statistical data on this issue. Companies do not consider their workers employed as home-oriented (in order to reduce the costs or avoid insurance obligations) as employee, and do not reveal their data. Because home-oriented workers do not work in formal workplaces but at their homes or in informal small plants in their neighborhood, they are not considered as workers and therefore they cannot benefit from the labor law. They are not of concern to unions, either, for they are not defined as workers in the labor law. Accordingly, legal claims of home-oriented workers are out of question. It was seen in our sample group as well that there were not any unionized, insured women.

## **2.3. Cheap Labor**

Home-oriented work ranks among informal economy and corresponds to irregular form of working. There is not a control over informal work performed at will as to amount, form, and wages. Women working for certain whiles in order to achieve

such goals as educating their children or paying of their debts do not usually have social security expectations like retirement or health. Although women do not have such social security rights, they bargain with their employers about their wages and try to increase their incomes. Looking at the findings, average wage that women get is about 500-600 TL. It has been stated that this amount is not a stable, regular wage but can change even if just a bit depending on the job they get or the bargains. One person in our study says:

*“My husband is a worker at a painter’s. Job is not the same every time, neither is the money he gets, but it’s not enough for our living; therefore regardless of the quantity or quality, I also get some work from outside, but my wage is very little, too. Children are still students, we have some debts, life is hard. I just know the money I get, I don’t have such things like retirement and so on.”*

Women performing home-oriented work are not in opposition with this kind of work, because they give more importance to house work and responsibilities, and do not consider this as a real job. Because women’s work is not considered a skill but rather unskilled labor and lack of unionization paves the way for them to work as cheap labor. Such form of working causes the labour of helping family members in the home-oriented work, especially children, to be unreturned and unable to benefit from social security. Men in the household are in a more advantageous position than woman labor because of the facts that they mostly prefer to work in the formal market and therefore benefit from social security rights and generally earn more when compared to the informal sector.

#### **2.4. Organization of Home-Oriented Work Within the Household with the Family Members**

Home-oriented work is a form of work mostly preferred by women and the majority of the workers are women. Women’s low education level and patriarchal relations are among the reasons why women take place in the informal sector and invisible jobs. Women can take their place in the working life only in the informal sector without contradicting family values and dominant social values; moreover, lack of education, family and husband pressure, and child, patient or elderly care force women to prefer the informal sector.

According to the DIE (State Institute of Statistics) data, 95% of all working at home are women. According to the TUIK (Turkish Statistics Institute) data, a majority of (96%) workers in the home-oriented work are women, and 4.6% of working women are within home-oriented work status. This rate increases to 7.7

percent in cities. Not only in our country but also in many countries, women work in home-oriented jobs in the informal sector.

For women within the home-oriented working system, workplace is not where they go but which comes home itself, or is the home itself (care workers, day wage workers, etc). Although the distinction between public sphere and private sphere has been set since ancient times, a hierarchy occurred between them as commodity production went out of the house. A physical distance came between workplace and the household. Home-oriented work and production were moved into the house again, however the differentiation problem of public/private sphere couldn't be overcome, and this difference carried on its existence though with a new vision. Although it is claimed that working, even in informal sector, could change the position of women, in fact, a development to improve women's position in the patriarchal relations is not possible. Accordingly, home-oriented work regenerates the social gender roles of women as cheap labor and gendered division of labor (Acar-Savran, 2004).

Because working at home is not considered as working, the housewife status of women continues to be the key status, and neither there is a decrease in their domestic responsibilities nor do they have a say in family decisions. Women are exposed to a dual exploitation by shouldering both home-oriented work, whose speed, working hours, breaks, or overtime is unclear, and domestic housework and responsibilities. One of the women we interviewed says:

*"My father-in-law is has been so sick for the last two years. He can't look after himself. My husband doesn't do much, I try to look after him among other things. Other daughter-in-law of his is not enthusiastic at all, I got stuck, you see."*

Despite home-oriented work, women continue to see housework as their own duty and while shouldering work as to the reproduction of the household for a new day, they also go on the care of family members, children, patients, and the elderly. Women can perform home-oriented work in two ways. First is when women and children within the same household work together. The other is the work determined by work factors when women from different households come together. In this study, focus is on the form of work where household organization is based on family relations and women and children of the same household work together. This kind of work rather performed in a cooperative environment where contributing people do not put in a claim for the money earned. Cooperation is agreed on in advance even before the work starts, and during the work the helping people contribute to the work unreturned without any objection. A working woman we interviewed within our research said:

*“When I cannot finish work and short in time, I generally expect help from my daughter. She’s a student, on the other hand, and I don’t want her to stay behind at school. She usually helps with the housework. And sometimes my sister-in-law comes and helps.”*

Because these helps mostly come from women or children at home, it can be said that child labor is widely used. And from that point, we can see the impacts of patriarchal ideology. Especially, the one expected to help is the female child, whereas help from the male child is only in question when the work is very much behind due time. Children help their mothers but their gender determines the form of help. While female children both help the housework and contribute to the work performed at home, the contribution of male children is only in the form of helping finish the work. It can also be said that the contribution of female children to the housework is mostly continuous. The tasks of cleaning and tidying up the house are done with the help of the child labor. One person we interviewed told us about the help of her daughter:

*“My daughter is 13 years old, she goes to school as well but she’s my best assistant. She does the housework after school. I work for them, for them to buy whatever they want, do whatever they want, to be happy. I do not have to work so much if it hadn’t been for them.”*

Gender-based formation of social values as to the male child can obviously be seen in statement of one of our participants:

*“My son doesn’t know anything about housework. I actually taught him a few things but he is not willing to do the least at all. He’s the male child, you know. His help is real help when I’m short of time to finish the work.”*

Accordingly, while women are employed in home-oriented work in the informal sector, patriarchal relations form an area mingled with capitalism. As capitalism is joined by the informal area, social gender roles and social gender-based division of labor continue for women. Women, under these conditions, may develop a relation of cooperation with female children and other women in the family about responsibilities at work and at home.

In our research, there are interviews indicating there is not much expectation from the elderly members of the family because they are old. A woman living with her parents-in-law says she doesn’t expect from them a contribution to the house or the housework because they are old, and that she’s trying to do everything herself. In another example, a woman who sometimes receives irregular help from her mother living nearby says:



*“Children surely need care, I look after them myself but sometimes I get pressed by work. I can send children to my mother’s when work is much because her house is near. Thanks to her, she takes care of the children. But I cannot always send them, she also has her own house and she’s looking after my father, moreover she has diabetics and hypertension.”*

There has been some answers from women we interviewed saying that although they get help from their own mothers-though not regular, they less often ask for help from their mother-in-laws. The difference between mother and mother-in-law in the labor cooperation, though not as rule, is shaped by the reasons that relations with mother is more emotional, based on a closer ground, old age, distance between houses, or the people they have to look after in their homes.

*“Kids are sometimes real problems, they need to be taken care of, then my mother-in-law helps, and I try to settle the children.”* Another interviewee says: *“When the work can’t be completed on time, both children and my mother-in-law help. Then we altogether try to complete the work.”*

When we have a look at the husbands’ position in family labor cooperation, it can be seen that even men’s letting women work at home can be considered their being sensible. From the answers below, it can be understood that women get rather more pleased if their husbands also help them do their work:

*“My husband works on subsistence wage, he sometimes help me if he’s not too tired. He lets me do it when I get new work.”*

*“I can’t say he gets too involved. However, when the work is too much and I have to work till morning, he helps, otherwise my assistants are the children.”*

## **2.5. Impacts of Economic Crisis on Home-Oriented Workers**

Economic crises are highly effective on home-oriented workers. Denizli, a city where especially textile industry is had developed, get affected by economic crises. Especially following the last economic crisis, several textile factories closed down or moved to other places and owing to the slowdown of work a lot of people became unemployed and naturally home-oriented workers also got affected by these negatives. One of the home-oriented workers said:

*“There have been many times we were short of time and we worked till morning altogether with all family. However, the work we can get have decreased a lot. There is not much work as it used to be, we can’t earn money any more. It is much more difficult to make a living, you’re going to eat, meet the need of the children, and pay rent, all with by money.”*

Workers who buy less goods and services from the market so as to cut down on consumption, try to expand the size of their subsistence production. Following the economic crisis, some of the workers moved their houses to their villages near the city centre and began to come back to the city when there is work to do. However, they also mention their problem that the traveling expenses as a result of this situation puts an extra burden on them. On the other hand, there have been some who mentioned that they try to do some extra work and earn an income when they find marginal jobs. However, ones in his group said that they have very little chance to find a side job.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

The findings of the empirical study that we carried out on interviews with women working in the textile sector with sub-contractors and employers, or pieceworking are parallel to the findings of researches conducted in various countries.

It has been determined that undereducated, low-skill women in our sample group work on wages below subsistence level, with non-persistent incomes, and without any social security. People who cannot find employment in the formal sector and have to work in low-wage, insecure, home-oriented jobs in order to maintain their lives are mostly women in Turkey, as in other countries. Women lacking in enough education or documents certifying their skills have to do home-oriented work which requires a busy working schedule and doesn't offer a social security. Home-oriented work, where working hours vary according to the work to be done, neither gives women the chance to look for jobs (because of time problems) or let them join the web of social relations. Accordingly, women have to continue doing home-oriented work in order to maintain their daily lives.

Our findings show us that our entire sample group is willing to stop working at home and stay at home after economic problems are solved. Women spend the income they get as a result of their working, even if it's little) on their children on the house. However, they do not have complete control over their incomes.

Patriarchal ideology and social gender discrimination are implicit in traditional men and women roles in daily activities. Our findings showed us that women ask for help from other women and children in the family when they have much work to do, however, they have very little expectation from their husbands under the effect of cultural prejudices.

Women experience a dual exploitation in both their working lives and domestic responsibilities for the wages they earn are not high enough to buy service from outside for some household responsibilities such as elderly-care.

Home-oriented work is unable to rid workers of poverty because they are in need of these jobs. Therefore, home-oriented work fed by poverty creates a vicious circle going on with the result of poverty. When the fact that almost all of the home-oriented workers in Turkey are women taken into consideration, the poverty of home-oriented work can as a result be considered as the poverty of women.

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