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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the state and determinants of women's empowerment in Turkey, based on an extensive and representative survey with more than 100,000 participants. It creates an original index of women's self-perceived empowerment, which incorporates empowerment measures on health, education, income, social life, and personal care and conducts multilevel analysis that integrates effects of individual-level factors with contextual, locality-specific forces. Multilevel analysis confirms the nested nature of women's empowerment in Turkey, which depends on both individual attributes and on the locality in which a woman resides. The Turkish case analysed in this article offers insights for the state of women's empowerment in societies replete with patriarchal norms and neoliberal policies.

This paper explores socioeconomic, political, and demographic determinants of women's empowerment in Turkey by analysing effects of individual- and locality-specific factors. Turkey offers us an interesting case for women's empowerment. Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country. Yet, unlike many other Muslim countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, Turkey witnessed the official granting of political rights to women early on, even ahead of many Western nations. Thanks to the revolutionary zeal of the newly established Turkish Republic (in 1923), Turkish women got equal rights of divorce, inheritance, and child custody in 1926, suffrage rights in local elections in 1930 and in national elections in 1934. Yet, despite these advancements in female emancipation and public rights, many Turkish women struggle with various shortcomings in women's empowerment even today.

For instance, Turkey has experienced declining female labour force participation over the last 50 years (Göksel 2013, p. 45). Further, Turkey suffers from what is called 'feminisation of poverty' (Pearce 1978), in which an increasing share of women and their children fall below the poverty line (Gökovalı 2015, p. 65). Moreover, Turkey ranks 131st among the 144 countries in the World Economic Forum's gender gap index. Specifically, Turkey falls behind many countries in the areas of women's economic participation and political empowerment (World Economic Forum 2017).

Obstacles towards more empowerment persist for many women in Turkey with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and political inclinations (Alemdaroğlu 2015). Enhancements in certain realms (e.g. particular areas of education, such as literacy) are

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negated by the fact that many women are forced to enter 'patriarchal bargains' and concede to remain in the domestic sphere or assume an inferior position vis-à-vis men in the workplace (Kandiyoti 1988; Toktas & O'Neil 2013, p. 37). Most women in the society face major inequalities and hardships in the private realm (such as domestic violence, unfairness in inheritance) (Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz 2016; Toktas & O'Neil 2014). The subordinate status of women in society as well as in the job market boils down to conservative societal norms that assign women merely roles of wives, mothers, and daughters and to political institutions that are in tandem with these societal norms and expectations (Kandiyoti 1982; Kandiyoti & Kandiyoti 1987; Acar & Altunok 2013; Özar & Yakut-Cakar 2013, p. 32; Göksel 2013).

This has particularly been the case during the rising dominance of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has ruled the country since 2002.[1] Gender policies during the AKP era have been 'an amalgam of neoliberalism with social conservatism' (Buğra & Keyder 2006, p. 213; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu 2011). As Dedeoglu (2013, p. 12) maintains, AKP 'has adopted a decorative approach to gender issues, in which women's legal and citizenship rights are well-placed but women's actual position in the society remains untouched, as there have been no affirmative policies to change women's secondary position within society'. Specifically, after 2007, 'patriarchal notions and values, often framed by religion, have increasingly become dominant in the [AKP's] rhetoric regarding the regulation of social and cultural domains' (Acar & Altunok 2013, p. 14). The religiously conservative outlook championed by the AKP rule translates sexual differences into socially defined gender roles, and manifests itself in a way in which men and women are separately and unequally positioned in society in spatial and economic terms (Buğra 2014, p. 153).

All in all, while the conceptualisation of modernity during the early Republican era until the 1980's offered many advancements in women's empowerment by prioritising issues of cultural modernity and Westernisation, and placing women's issues in front, it could not penetrate into society since it was mostly top-down and insufficiently pluralistic (Göle 1997; Kasaba 2008; Buğra & Savaşkan 2014). However, the rise of a conservative majority around the AKP's political leadership and their alternative conceptualisation of modernity has resulted in an even more restrictive social setting for women (Fisher Onar & Müftüler-Baç 2011). In this article, we argue that Turkey is stuck in what we call a 'gender inequality trap' due to the dominance of patriarchal norms and institutions in the country.

Taking the contemporary socioeconomic and political setting into consideration, this article aims to discover the determinants of women's empowerment in Turkey. The article first discusses the concept of women's empowerment. Then, it conducts empirical analyses regarding the covariates of women's empowerment in Turkey. To do so, it utilises confirmatory-factor analysis to create an original index of women's empowerment based on an extensive and representative survey. The article then introduces a multilevel analytical framework that incorporates individual as well as contextual, local-level factors to identify covariates of women's empowerment in Turkey. The final section concludes research findings and offers new avenues of research.

Women's empowerment in the world and as a concept

Despite rising levels of modernisation and industrialisation all around the world, women as of today are consistently and considerably behind men in the degree to which they

have access to resources and with regard to standards of living and personal and political freedoms. Overall, women have access to a narrower variety of jobs, get paid less than men in same sector jobs, and have higher unemployment rates than men in all educational background categories (Abadian 1996; Almeleh et al. 1993; Caraway 2009; Ross 2008; Sen 1992). Throughout the globe, men overwhelmingly dominate economic decision-making bodies such as corporate boards and central banks, while women are typically excluded from these positions. Furthermore, women constitute less than 20 percent of the members of legislative assemblies, almost 130 years after women first achieved suffrage in a nation-state (Phillips 2012; Chant 2013; True 2013). Rising globalisation and the hegemonic neoliberal economic world order bring about new opportunities but have also made women's lives more vulnerable economically, psychologically and socially (Charrad 2010, p. 518; Altan-Olcay 2014).

Lack of women's empowerment leads to unfair political, economic, and social conditions for women, as well as under-utilisation of the full potential of the whole society. Hence, it is crucial to grasp the individual and societal dynamics behind women's empowerment. Yet, even before that, we need to clarify what we mean by women's empowerment. There are more than 20 different definitions of the concept today that tackle different aspects of the phenomenon (Haile, Bock & Folmer 2012; Wyndow, Li & Mattes 2013; Goldman & Little 2015). In the light of an extensive literature review, we define women's empowerment as the process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic and effective life choices, an ability that has so far been mostly denied to them.

Women's empowerment needs to be understood as not just about possessing power, but more importantly about using this power effectively for change (Kabeer 1999; Janssens 2009; Goldman & Little 2015). Using Kabeer's (2005) influential work about the conceptualisation of women's empowerment, we understand the term in light of three interrelated dimensions: agency, resources, and achievements. As Kabeer (2005, p. 14) aptly points out:

> *Agency* represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect. It is hence central to the concept of empowerment. *Resources* are the medium through which agency is exercised; and *achievements* refer to the outcomes of agency. [emphases added]

Kabeer (2005) critically approaches the utilisation of 'objective measures' of women's empowerment (included in the 3rd Millennium Development Goal), such as enhancing female educational attainment, political representation and female labour force participation as the final, ultimate measures of empowerment. Kabeer (2005, p. 13) argues that these measures are indeed valuable 'resources' for empowerment. However, she adds that without women's agency used for change, these resources may not (and in many cases do not) translate to achievements and finally empowerment for women. Reducing women's empowerment to merely attaining 'objective' measures, such as participation in the paid labour market, results in a disregard of broader power inequalities (Altan-Olcay 2014, p. 239). Having above a certain level of education (primary, secondary or tertiary) or being employed are surely important but possessing these resources does not necessarily mean that a woman would feel herself empowered. Indeed, as Kabeer (2005, p. 14) maintains, 'empowerment often begins from within'.

In a similar vein, as Charrad (2010, p. 517) argues, women's empowerment should be contextualised and can only be understood 'within the context of specific social

structures in given times and places ranging from states, social institutions, groups, culture, or norms to name only a few'. Empowerment, or the lack thereof, cannot be grasped without incorporating the intersectional dynamics of class, racial, religious, or ethnic identities and the resultant power struggles of women in the society (Altan-Olcay 2016; Beşpınar 2010; Gündüz-Hoşgör & Smits 2008).

Based on this conceptualisation of women's empowerment in light of the literature, we look at the life conditions of women and analyse how they intrinsically feel empowered in various aspects of their lives. To do so, we utilise subjective (instead of 'objective') measures of empowerment by collecting satisfaction and well-being data for women in the areas of health, education, income, social life, and personal care. We believe that women's satisfaction and well-being in these crucial areas of life address all three components of empowerment (resources, agency, and achievements) and can thus be used as better measures of empowerment, instead of simply using educational attainment levels, labour force participation, etc.

While discussing the concept of women's empowerment, it would be inaccurate to consider 'women' as a homogenous group. On the contrary, women show great diversity with regard to their socioeconomic well-being, identity, demography, and class (see, for instance, Beşpınar 2010 for class-based differences). While many women gain socioeconomic and political advantages nowadays, others have been adversely affected by societal and political norms and developments. Some women are forced to stay at home as housewives and face domestic violence from their husbands and families (Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz 2016; Landig 2011). Many who enter into job markets work in temporary, low-paying, unofficial jobs with no social security. Even ostensibly better-off segments of urban women face serious challenges in education, the workplace, and politics (Çınar 1994; Kandiyoti 1988; Mitra 2005; Beşpınar 2010; Buğra 2014; Cinar & Ugur-Cinar 2018). This is particularly the case for countries where patriarchal institutions prevail and where cultural norms and traditions limit women's access to resources (Morrisson & Jütting 2005).

Patriarchal norms, laws, and political institutions that lead to systematic organisation of male supremacy and female subordination hand more agency, resources and power to men in many countries, including Turkey—the focus of this article (Cindoğlu & Toktaş 2002; Ross 2008; Caraway 2009; Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz 2016). Many women, through years of socialisation into the patriarchal ideology, may not question gender inequality, 'especially in those societies where women's subordination is so deeply rooted in sociocultural norms that men's control over women is taken for granted even by women themselves' (Osmani 1998, p. 68; see also Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz 2016; Beşpınar 2010). Women's struggles for more empowerment sometimes result in meaningful changes but at other times women are bogged down in patriarchal societal structures, left with mere acts of individual survival with continuous struggle but no long-term positive change at individual or societal levels (Arat & Altınay 2015; Charrad 2010, p. 518; Beşpınar 2010, p. 530).

Modernisation does not eradicate patriarchy in many corners of the world; instead, new modes of patriarchy in terms of neoliberal, nationalist and religious discourses evolve in today's world (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu 2011; Samarakoon & Parinduri 2015). As Buğra (2014, p. 149) suggests, 'the difficulties women face in a neoliberal [world] are undoubtedly more severe in countries where labour markets remain unregulated and

social policy institutions are weak' (see also Altan-Olcay 2014). The Turkish case analysed in this article offers us insights into the state of women's empowerment in societies replete with patriarchal norms and neoliberal policies.

A new index of women's empowerment

To understand the sources of women's empowerment, we first need to utilise reliable and comprehensive indicators that cover multiple angles of the concept. Readily available data such as female labour force participation or female schooling can offer us perspectives only with regard to their respective areas, i.e. economics, education, and only cover the 'resources' aspect of women's empowerment (cf. Kabeer 2005). To address the insufficiencies of extant indicators of women's empowerment and provide a better measure, we engage with public opinion data (using Turkey as our case study) and gather information about women's level of well-being and satisfaction in key areas of life, which would help them feel empowered.

For our empirical analysis, we utilise the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TUIK) 'Life Satisfaction Survey' conducted in 2013 (the most recent one that covers the required data both at individual and province levels). The survey uses a 2-stage stratified cluster sampling method to construct a sample of households from 81 cities of Turkey. The first stage selects clusters consisting of 100 households and the second stage determines sub-samples of households to be interviewed from each cluster. A total of 8,810 clusters, including 3,810 clusters from rural areas and 5,000 clusters from urban areas of the country were selected. Within the scope of the survey, 125,720 household addresses were selected with 45,720 households from rural regions whereas 80,000 reside in urban areas. From the selected sample, 103,312 households were actually interviewed. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 196,203 individuals aged 18 or older. This study employs an all-women sample with a size of 112,170 people throughout the country. This representative and extensive sample should offer insights regarding the state and determinants of women's empowerment in Turkey.

We gather five categories of data for women's empowerment: women's satisfaction with their health, education, income, social life, and personal care. The survey questions read 'Please indicate how satisfied you are with regard to your X [insert the five categories above]?'. We rescaled these measures, ranging from 1 to 5, so that higher values represent heightened feelings of empowerment. We argue that collection, aggregation, and appropriate analyses of these subjective measures of satisfaction and well-being can offer better and more thorough proxy of empowerment for women in the most crucial areas of their lives such as health, education and social life, instead of using output- or resource-oriented data such as educational attainment or labour force participation, which may or may not turn into empowerment-related achievements for women.

We conduct confirmatory-factor analysis (CFA) to create and test whether a constructed index of women's empowerment covers a diverse range of topics regarding empowerment. The CFA method produces a multi-item index of women's empowerment for Turkey. Compared to single-item measures of female empowerment such as educational attainment and labour market status measures, our women's empowerment index has more breadth by covering multiple variables related with women's life

conditions. Quantitative analysis of female empowerment with single-item measures focus on specific areas and may disregard inter-correlations of different covariates for empowerment levels of women. On the other hand, CFA enables researchers to consider multiple covariates and account for inter-correlations among the included variables of the analysis. Compared to qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, multi-item indexing techniques such as CFA admittedly provide less depth. However, covering more variables and larger samples, our original index of women's empowerment created by the CFA method provides more breadth in the analysis and produces more generalizable results.

Our empowerment index captures women's subjective well-being in the areas of health, education, income, social life, and personal care, all of which are expected to be individually and concomitantly crucial for women's feelings of agency and empowerment. Instead of simply computing an average of women's empowerment measures in these five categories, we use the CFA technique as it overcomes shortcomings of simple composite score models by allowing different weights for each indicator, controlling for random fluctuations in those measures, and accounting for measurement errors (Turper & Aarts 2017, p. 2–6).

With these in mind, we first create a latent variable for women's empowerment using equal weights for all five indicators of empowerment. We then use iterative techniques to ensure our constructed index best captures the concept at hand with proper weights for each empowerment variable and aligns with expected metrics of the goodness of fit. The constructed index of women's empowerment has a Chi-Square of 0.27, RMSEA of 0.00, Comparative Fit Index of 1, SRMR of 0.00, and a coefficient of determination of 0.70, all of which exceed even the highest thresholds set for confirmatory-factor analysis (Brown 2006). Similar to observed variables, the constructed women's empowerment index also ranges between 1 and 5, with 5 indicating the highest level of empowerment.

Figure 1 illustrates the path diagram for the constructed women's empowerment indicator. As seen in Figure 1, all of the five observed variables for women's empowerment have factor loadings above 0.30, i.e. the value that is commonly used to define a salient factor loading (Marien 2011, p. 19; Brown 2006, p. 130). They are all statistically significant for the latent variable at 1 percent level (all p-values equal 0.00). This is particularly the case for the income, the social life, and the education measures, as specified by higher factor loadings (0.69, 0.58, and 0.51, respectively).

The index of women's empowerment takes covariation of multiple items into account. As indicated in the path diagram, covariance between health and personal care, education and income, education and social life, and social life and personal care show that these couples of indicators not only affect the constructed women's empowerment index individually, but also through their combined impact. For instance, covariance between education and income shows that a woman who is satisfied with her education and income has higher levels of empowerment, not only due to the individual effect of each factor, but also because of the joint effect of education and income on empowerment. Enabling covariance between different indicators ensures appropriate weights for each indicator and offers a much better measure of women's empowerment than composite score models. Further, a Cronbach's alpha test for the latent variable yields a Cronbach's alpha of 0.67, exceeding the set thresholds for reliability of a soundly constructed latent variable (Brown 2006; Marien 2011).
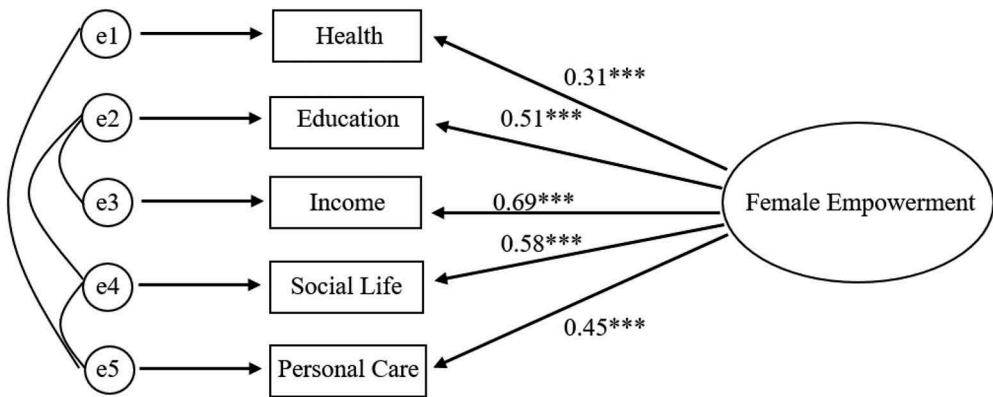
Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis for women's empowerment—path diagram.

Note: Source for all women's empowerment data are compiled from TUIK (2013). The 'women's empowerment' variable is created by confirmatory factor analysis in 5 iterations for the best goodness of fit (cf. Brown 2006). The final women's empowerment index takes into account covariances between health and personal care; education and income; education and social life; and social life and personal care.

To get a better sense of women's empowerment in Turkey, we use the women's empowerment index, get its province-level averages, and rank them accordingly. Figure 2 shows this spatial distribution for 81 provinces of Turkey (darker colours represent higher levels of empowerment). As seen in Figure 2, province-level data bear some regional clustering, in which the eastern and southeastern portions of the country generally have lower levels of women's empowerment, whereas central Anatolian, western Black Sea, and inner Aegean provinces have higher levels of women's empowerment.

Looking at the individual provinces, Sinop has the highest average women's empowerment index value (3.62), which is followed by Isparta (3.56) and Afyon (3.55). As

Figure 2. Spatial distribution of women's empowerment.

Note: We use our constructed women's empowerment variable for this figure. We take the province-level averages of the individual-level women's empowerment data, and rank the provinces based on their empowerment levels. Darker colours represent higher levels of women's empowerment.

presented by Figure 2, the southeastern provinces of Turkey, which are predominantly populated by Kurds have the lowest levels of women's empowerment. To be specific, Diyarbakır has the lowest average female empowerment (2.63), which is followed by Muş (2.64) and Batman (2.74). Table 1 below shows the tabulation of the women's empowerment index with regard to province averages. It indicates that the range with highest frequency ratio is 3.00–3.25, which is slightly above the mid-point of our empowerment index.

Province-level comparison of women's empowerment in Turkey underlines the nested structure of the dataset at hand, which calls for a hierarchical model. Indeed, women's empowerment variables measured at individual-level may cluster around higher levels, such as provinces. Contextual, higher-level factors such as urbanisation, unemployment, and demographics at provincial level may affect whether a woman feels empowered or not. Incorporating effects of local-level factors with concomitant impact of individual factors can best capture general trends of women's empowerment. To do so, we employ a multilevel framework that addresses such concerns of clustering and accounts for non-constant variance across different contexts and localities.

Hierarchical models are increasingly becoming prominent in recent academic studies in social sciences (see, for instance, Steenbergen & Bradford 2002; Kelleher & Wolak 2007; Hakhverdian & Mayne 2012; McLaren 2012). Employing such models in feminist studies can help us better understand and explain the ways women are empowered throughout the world. Given the clustered structure of Turkish data, multilevel modelling would enable us to account for covariates of female empowerment which are nested in geographical regions and local socioeconomic and political conditions. Unlike traditional multiple regression techniques, multilevel modelling captures the variation in clusters of the data and generates more efficient estimates of parameters. Since Turkish women are exposed to diverse living conditions, life standards and life expectations in different regions of the country, a study of women's empowerment needs to incorporate regional heterogeneities into scientific analysis. Since local-level and individual-level conditions interact with and complement each other, analysis focusing on only one of the levels would be incomplete. Therefore, multilevel modelling is an appropriate tool which allows accounting for both province-level and individual-level predictors of women's empowerment in Turkey.

Although a multilevel modelling framework may have difficulties in identifying casual mechanisms, which is more easily achievable by qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews, hierarchical modelling provides more generalisable insights into the nested nature of women's empowerment and its individual-level and local-level covariates.

Table 1. Tabulation of 'women's empowerment index' vis-à-vis province averages.

Range	Women's Empowerment Index	
	Frequency	Percent
3.50–3.75	6	7.40
3.25–3.50	27	33.33
3.00–3.25	36	44.44
2.75–3.00	9	11.11
2.50–2.75	3	3.70
Total	81	100.00

Women's empowerment index covers women's subjective well-being in the areas of health, education, income, social life, and personal care and ranges between 1 and 5, with 5 representing a higher self-perceptions of empowerment.

Hence, combined with the use of a CFA-generated women's empowerment index, multilevel modelling has the potential to offer more breadth and fruitful insights for further analysis of local and individual level predictors of women's empowerment in Turkey.

Although this study aims to provide crucial insights into women's empowerment in Turkey, it is obviously not without limitations. First, the multiple-item index of female empowerment provides an aggregate measure for Turkish women's empowerment. The advantage of the multi-item index is to measure and incorporate more dimensions of women's life conditions. Thus, the results of the empirical analysis include a wider range of measures for female empowerment. However, this approach, similar to other aggregation methods, may fail to capture heterogeneity and details of single measures included in the analysis. Although the CFA methodology incorporates inter-correlations of individual items into analysis, results of multiple-item analysis may differ from those of single-item approaches due to aggregation of measurement errors and reporting biases.

Second, although multilevel-level estimation successfully incorporates hierarchical structure of data to simultaneously produce unbiased estimates for both individual level and local-level covariates of female empowerment, this framework is not able to provide casual implications. Therefore, the empirical results of this study should be cautiously interpreted as correlational observations for women's empowerment in Turkey. Unlike focus group studies and in-depth interviews, the methodology of this study does not enable researchers to identify causal mechanisms among explanatory variables and women's empowerment.

Finally, since both the women's empowerment index and multilevel analysis are based on self-reported survey data, the empirical findings of this study may be prone to reporting biases due to selective memory and exaggeration. Reporting biases of Turkish individuals may also be correlated with regional-level conditions. Further studies should focus on the identification of causal linkages between regional-level conditions, reporting biases and empowerment levels of Turkish women.

Empirical analysis: a multilevel design for women's empowerment

Considering the multilevel nature of our dataset, we use a combination of individual and contextual explanations. At the individual level, we first take into account several demographic factors, such as age, marital and employment status, household size and household income. Following the extant literature (Göksel 2013), we also introduce a quadratic form of age variable. Indeed, bivariate and multivariate analyses show that age has a U-shaped relationship with women's empowerment, in which women's empowerment has a trough in the ages of late thirties-early forties after which women have heightened levels of empowerment.

Studies also show that unmarried women face steeper challenges in their lives as they face higher levels of discriminatory practices (such as not being eligible for some family-related welfare benefits) simply because they are outside the marriage institution (Özar & Yakut-Cakar 2013). To this end, we expect to find that unmarried women have lower levels of life satisfaction and empowerment as compared to married women.

Employment status can also be related to women's empowerment. Some scholars underline the positive relationship between employment and women's empowerment. For instance, based on a study in Bangladesh, Banks (2013) finds that women's employment affects (if not totally changes) patriarchal norms and beliefs. Cindoğlu and Toktaş (2002, p. 44) also maintain that working women have better bargaining position in their lives, especially in their families. Similarly, Moghadam (1996, p. 4) argues that women's entry to the workforce enables them to become autonomous and to contribute to social development beyond household duties.

On the other hand, other scholars argue that employment may become an additional burden in many women's lives. This is especially the case for those who have to work in informal jobs or positions with meagre earnings yet many hours at work (Erman, Kalaycıoğlu & Rittersberger-Tılıç 2002; Gündüz-Hoşgör & Smits 2008; Mitra 2005; Sarıoğlu 2016). Working women still shoulder the majority of housework, child and elderly care, which leads to 'time poverty' (Öneş, Memiş & Kızılırmak 2013). These multiple burdens considerably lower women's life quality and hence their levels of empowerment. Exploitative work conditions, especially in countries competing internationally in sectors such as export-oriented manufacturing (e.g. textiles) hampers, not heightens, women's empowerment (Kabeer 2005, p. 20). All in all, it would be interesting to investigate the relationship between employment and women's empowerment in a country with neoliberal policies such as Turkey, which offers many women considerably lower chances of entry to the workforce and to those who are employed, usually low-paying jobs with few or no welfare benefits.

In addition to demographic variables, we also include an education level indicator (scaled in 6 categories, with 0 representing no schooling and 6 representing the highest-graduate—level of education) to individual-level dataset. Several studies show that education has a positive association with women's empowerment (Cindoğlu & Toktaş 2002; Wyndow, Li & Mattes 2013; Samarakoon & Parinduri 2015). A recent study on the gender wage gap in Turkey shows that attaining tertiary education is crucial for women to have better pay in the workplace, and more control over their lives (such as regarding marriage and fertility), and consequently to have higher empowerment than lesser educated women (Tekgüç, Eryar & Cindoğlu 2017). In light of these studies, we anticipate a positive relationship between education and women's empowerment in our analysis.

To account for the current political atmosphere in Turkey and especially the rising religious conservatism and associated emergence of the AKP hegemony, we add a religiosity index to test whether this variable relates to levels of women's empowerment. For the religiosity index, we combine three religion-related questions in the survey, which measures (*i*) one's interest in religion, (*ii*) how important other's (friends, relatives, neighbours) religiosity is in the eyes of the respondent, and (*iii*) how important other's views about the religiosity of the respondent is. We rescale all three variables (from 1 to 3) so that higher values denote higher levels of religiosity. We conduct principal component analysis to derive the religiosity index (again from 1 to 3, with 3 representing the highest level of religiosity). The PCA for religiosity variable shows that all three variables have high-factor loadings (0.61, 0.80, and 0.78, respectively) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.58, all of which are highly satisfactory according to the research standards.

According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2016), 99.8 percent of the population in Turkey are Muslim. However, people have divergent levels of religiosity and this may be linked to citizens' support for political parties, especially for the religiously conservative AKP, in which religiosity becomes one of the major determinants of the AKP hegemony (Cinar 2016). To this end, despite patriarchal norms, values, and institutions around the AKP rule that cause a highly restrictive social setting for women, religious women may feel more empowered than those who are less attached to religion. This is because devout women may see the rule of a religiously conservative party and its conservative rhetoric in line with their worldview, which would thus enhance their feelings of empowerment.

To further test the effects of the 'rising tide of religious conservatism' (cf. Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu 2009) on Turkish society, and in our case especially for women, we also construct a religiosity variable at province level, which calculates preacher school enrolment rates adjusted for province population. The preacher training schools (*imam hatip okulları*) have served as 'traditional hotbeds of anti-Kemalist indoctrination' and ensure a continued flow of new members for the Islamist parties (Yeşilada 2002, pp. 173–174; Altınordu 2010, p. 525). Especially after the start of the AKP's second term in 2007, numerous preacher schools have been opened. A major educational law was enacted in 2011, which enabled the preacher school graduates to apply for and enter university programmes other than ecclesiastical programmes. Preacher school enrolment rates are a good measure for religiosity at local level since there are higher enrolment rates in more religiously conservative provinces (such as Bayburt, Giresun, Osmaniye, Şanlıurfa) than in more secular ones (such as Tunceli, Kırklareli, Aydın). Rising levels of religiosity have multiple repercussions for Turkish society. Hence, it would be illuminating to see how religiosity interacts with women's feelings of empowerment, both based on their own religiosity and the level of religiosity of the locality in which they reside.

We also take into account other local-level factors to fully understand the state of women's empowerment in Turkey. In empirical analyses, along with the aforementioned local-level religiosity data (i.e. preacher school enrolment rates), we also include province-level urbanisation, unemployment, economic development (log province-GDP per capita) figures and ethnicity data.

It is highly likely that localities with higher levels of unemployment offer fewer opportunities for the socioeconomic emancipation of women. Furthermore, localities with rampant unemployment may create an unsafe habitat for people, especially women who face higher risk of gender-based violence in the forms of abduction, rape and/or murder ('femicide') in their neighbourhoods and in cities at large, which would reduce their feelings of empowerment (Chant & Datu 2015, pp. 51–52). Hence, higher province-level unemployment should be associated with lower levels of women's empowerment.

On the other hand, the relationship between economic modernisation (as measured by economic development) as well as urbanisation with women's empowerment is less than obvious. Some scholars demonstrate that urbanisation has positive effects on women's empowerment (Almeleh et al. 1993). They argue that women in urban centres can receive better education, determine the number of children they have, and invest in themselves and their children (Ashraf, Karlan & Yin 2009; Cindoğlu & Toktaş 2002; Chant 2013; Erman, Kalaycıoğlu & Rittersberger-Tılıç 2002; Eswaran 2002). Urbanisation leads to

the emergence of women's grassroots organisations, social movements, and survival networks to address their social, economic, and political challenges (Goldman & Little 2015; Janssens 2009; Lind 1997; Wyndow, Li & Mattes 2013).

On the other hand, urbanisation creates new challenges for women or worsens their already existing conditions. Some studies maintain that the female economic activity rate is comparatively higher in rural areas (in agriculture) than in urban settings (Buğra 2014; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu 2011). Those who work in urban areas are usually constrained to work in the neighbourhood of their residence and can access jobs only through informal contacts and family and kinship networks, neither of which reduce obstacles to their empowerment (Erman, Kalaycıoğlu & Rittersberger-Tılıç 2002; Mitra 2005). Many urban women reap limited benefits in terms of 'equitable access to decent work, physical and financial assets, intra-urban mobility, personal safety and security, and representation in formal structures of urban governance' (Chant 2013, pp. 9–10). Hence, it is important to test the effects of urbanisation and economic development on women's empowerment in light of a representative sample to better understand the role of modernisation in women's lives.

To offer a more thorough analysis regarding the state of women's empowerment, we have also incorporated ethnicity data into our analysis. Specifically, we are interested in testing whether Kurdish women feel empowered. Historically, the ethnic cleavage between the Turks and the Kurdish minority has been one of the most salient social cleavages (Secor 2001; West 2005; Tezcür 2009; Sarigil & Fazlioglu 2014). The escalation of military confrontation between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish military forces since the 1980s and resulting losses on both sides have deepened this ethnic cleavage (Erman & Göker 2000, p. 100). The AKP's engagement with the Kurds in recent years and the government's 'Kurdish opening' aimed to find a peaceful political resolution to the long-festering Kurdish issue (Öniş 2009; Somer & Liaras 2010). However, the 'Kurdish opening', which was an initiative admittedly vague in its content, came to a halt in recent years as the AKP leadership found it too costly to pursue and the PKK resumed its terrorist attacks on civilians.

Hence, the ethnic cleavage continues to be one of the most salient cleavages in Turkey. One of the most salient social cleavages (along with the secular-religious cleavage), the ethnic cleavage may also have an imprint on women's empowerment, in which Kurdish women feel less empowered than their non-Kurdish counterparts due to years of social exclusion and lower levels of education. To test this, we should ideally have ethnicity data at individual level. However, the Turkish state does not collect and publish data on ethnicity in censuses and surveys. The last time that national data on ethnicity were collected and published was in 1965 (Koç, Hancıoğlu & Cavlin 2008, p. 448).

The best possible alternative academic research regarding ethnicity was conducted by Mutlu (1996). Using the 1965 census as its base and taking into account fertility and mortality rates of each ethnic group as well as net migration figures for each province since 1965, Mutlu (1996) provides the most reliable ethnicity data at province level to the best of our knowledge. Thus, we utilise the percentage of Kurdish population in each province as the Kurdish ethnicity variable. We expect that women living in localities with higher percentages of Kurds (such as Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Muş) should feel comparably less empowered. We admit that this is not the ideal method considering different levels

of analysis yet we believe that the benefits of incorporating an ethnicity-related variable into analysis outweigh the risks involved.

All in all, while personal-level variables cover potentially important individual-level factors such as employment status, educational attainment, income level etc., local-level variables control for effects of urbanisation, unemployment and economic development, as well as the impact of the two most salient cleavages in Turkey (religious and ethnic). Incorporating both levels into analysis in multilevel regressions will hopefully shed light on the state and determinants of women's empowerment in the country. Overall, the specification of the multilevel model involves the simultaneous estimation of level-1 (individual) and level-2 (province) model (112,170 women in 81 provinces). Descriptive statistics for all variables are given in the Appendix Table A1 (at the end of this article).

Below, we illustrate the equation for the model of women's empowerment for individual i in province j. Each α_{nj} term represents the impact of a particular variable on a woman's feeling of empowerment.

$$\text{Women's Empowerment}_{ij} = \alpha_{0j} + \alpha_{1j}\text{Age}_{ij} + \alpha_{2j}\text{Age} - \text{Squared}_{ij} + \alpha_{3j}\text{Marital Status}_{ij} + \alpha_{4j}\text{Employment}_{ij} + \alpha_{5j}\text{Household Income}_{ij} + \alpha_{6j}\text{Household Size}_{ij} + \alpha_{7j}\text{Education}_{ij} + \alpha_{8j}\text{Religiosity}_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

The intercept of this equation, α_{0j}, illustrates the average women's empowerment in province j and is modelled as a function of province-level factors in the level-2 equation. Each β term represents the effect of a particular province level variable on a woman's empowerment, and β_{00} is the average intercept across provinces within each region. Hence,

$$\alpha_{0j} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}\text{Urbanisation}_j + \beta_{02}\text{Unemployment}_j + \beta_{03}\text{Economic Development}_j + \beta_{04}\text{Preacher School Enrolment}_j + \beta_{05}\text{Kurdish Population}_j + r_{0j}.$$

Before moving to regression results, it would be appropriate to discuss variance components of multilevel model. Variance components analysis is vital in multilevel modelling as it gives us clues about how important each level (source) of variation is. We run the variance components analysis of the so-called empty or base model (with no independent variables but the levels of analysis determined) and the models with independent variables. For the base model, 92 percent of the variance derives from individual-level variables and 8 percent from province-level variables. When we introduce independent variables to the empty model, we observe that individual-level (level-1) factors account for 96 percent of the variance, while province-level (level-2) factors explain 4 percent of the variance in women's empowerment. This shows that micro-level factors have higher explanatory power to understand variations in women's empowerment, while some local-level factors also correlate with women's empowerment.

Our dependent variable, which is a constructed measure of women's empowerment is normally distributed. Hence, Maximum Likelihood (ML) is employed to estimate multilevel regression. The findings of multilevel analysis are provided in Table 2. To begin with, the LR tests which compare the goodness of fit of the multilevel model with that of the standard ordinary least squares (OLS) model soundly reject the null hypothesis and clearly show that the multilevel model has a much better fit. This underlines the nested structure of data at hand and thus the importance of running a multilevel model,

Table 2. Multilevel model of women's empowerment in Turkey.

Level 1 Variables	
Age	−0.0255*** (0.0007)
Age Squared	0.00026*** (0.0000007)
Married	0.0408*** (0.0049)
Employed	−0.0911*** (0.0058)
Education	0.0232*** (0.0019)
Religiosity Index	0.0230*** (0.0031)
Household Size	−0.0184*** (0.0010)
Household Income	0.1246*** (0.0017)
Level 2 Variables	
Unemployment	−0.0124** (0.0051)
Urbanisation	−0.00156 (0.00101)
Economic Development (log of GDP per capita)	−0.0077 (0.0139)
Preacher School Enrolment	0.1182*** (0.0388)
Kurdish Population	−0.00305*** (0.00083)
Constant	3.664*** (0.104)
Number of Observations	112,170
Number of Groups	81
Wald χ²	9517.08***

Standard errors in parentheses, t-scores in square brackets. ***p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10., † p < 0.15.
Married (= 1 if married, = 0 otherwise); Employed (= 1 if employed, = 0 otherwise); Education Level is discretely coded
  from lowest to highest, namely, 0 = No Diploma, 1 = Primary School, 2 = Middle School, 3 = High School, 4 = 2-year
  Degree/Associate Degree, 5 = Undergraduate/College Degree, 6 = Graduate Degree; Household Income Level is
  discretely coded from lowest to highest based on monthly income, namely, 1 if less than or equal to 1,080 Turkish
  Liras (TLs), 2 if between 1,081 and 1,550 TLs, 3 if between 1,551 and 2,170 TLs, 4 if between 2,171 and 3,180 TLs and
  5 if higher than 3,180 TLs (categories are based on the TUIK survey); Preacher School Enrolment: Pupils enrolled to
  preacher schools per 1,000 people adjusted for province population. Kurdish population: The percentage of Kurdish
  population in provinces.
Sources for each variable are provided in the Appendix Table A1.

instead of an OLS analysis. Moreover, the multilevel model has very high overall statistical significance, as indicated by a very high Wald Chi-Square figure. This shows the overall success of the estimation framework.

Further looking at the significance of independent variables reveals additional insights. First, the statistical results underline the importance of demographic factors in women's empowerment. For instance, in line with the extant body of the literature, we find that age has a significant U-shaped relationship with women's empowerment. Both the level and quadratic forms of the age variable are significant for women's empowerment. The results also show that married women have higher levels of empowerment, as indicated by the positive and significant effect of the marital status variable. In a similar vein, higher levels of educational attainment increase women's empowerment significantly. Moreover, women living in smaller households have higher levels of women's empowerment. So do women who reside in households with higher levels of income. Based on comparisons of coefficients for individual-level variables, household income level has one of the strongest substantive relationships with women's empowerment, which underlines the importance of micro-level economic factors.

A striking finding of this study is the negative relationship of employment and women's empowerment. We had underlined that certain scholars in the extant literature would expect to find that being employed would empower women—yet the opposite is the case for Turkey. It seems that household duties combined with work-related activities stand as a double whammy for Turkish women, in which being employed in exploitative work conditions turns out to be a liability, rather than an asset for their empowerment. Our finding verifies the scholars who argue that gendered labour

divisions and the absence of work–family reconciliation measures (such as adequate day-care for children) creates huge obstacles for women to feel empowered (Ilkkaracan 2012; Tekgüç, Eryar & Cindoğlu 2017). As the women's empowerment index combines women's well-being in health, education, income, social life, and personal care, it is observed that being employed in a patriarchal and neoliberal society such as Turkey negatively correlates with women's happiness and empowerment in these areas.

Another interesting finding of this research is the positive correlation between religiosity and women's empowerment. Both the individual-level religiosity index and local-level preacher school enrolment rate variable are highly significant, the latter having an even higher substantive effect on the dependent variable. These findings are in line with Fisher Onar and Müftüler-Baç's (2011) assessment on the pathways for the Turkish society, in which they argue that 'Muslim constructions of gendered public spaces may come at the price of the right to dissent and the loss of freedom of expression for non-practicing Muslims' as well as non-Muslims (Fisher Onar & Müftüler-Baç 2011, p. 388).

Province-level analyses reveal further insights. First, province-level unemployment is adversely related with women's empowerment. While being employed personally lowers women's empowerment in Turkey according to our findings, living in a locality with rampant unemployment also diminishes women's subjective feelings of empowerment. As we have indicated before, fewer opportunities for employment—and especially security concerns regarding gender-based violence toward women—may be driving down levels of women's empowerment in cities with higher unemployment rates.

Urbanisation also has a negative correlation with women's empowerment. Yet, this relationship is only significant at 15 percent and has a low substantial effect on the dependent variable. This shows that even though migration from rural areas to urban centres alter women's lives negatively in the case of Turkey, this effect is not as strong as the ones explained until now. Similarly, while having a negative association, economic development does not considerably relate with women's empowerment in Turkey. Both of these findings open new avenues for debate regarding effects of modernisation (or the limits thereof) on the Turkish socio-political and economic landscape.

Another crucial finding of our research is the negative and significant effect of the Kurdish population variable. To give a concrete example of the substantial effects of this variable, ceteris paribus, a woman living in an area with the lowest percentage of Kurds (0.02 in Afyon and Artvin) would have a higher score of empowerment—of approximately 0.28 points—as compared to a woman in an area with the highest percentage of Kurds (89.47 in Hakkari). This finding underlines the importance of 'intersectionality', which has become a useful analytical term to understand the experiences of multiply marginalised sections of society (Choo 2012; Geerts & van der Tuin 2013).

The intersectional framework applies to the Turkish case too, especially for those women doubly marginalised in the society such as Kurdish women (Altan-Olcay 2014; Gündüz-Hoşgör & Smits 2008; Ozkaleli 2015). Empirical analysis underscores that it is much harder for those women with less religiosity or with Kurdish identity (or worse, with both) to feel empowered in a society with patriarchal norms and practices, supported by a religiously conservative state ruled by a hegemonic party (see also Beşpınar 2010, p. 530). Our research, hence, emphasises multiple interactions and repercussions of societal cleavages on Turkish society, and for the sake of this study on different women in Turkey with diverse and multiple identities.

Concluding remarks

Finding the determinants and sources of women's empowerment is crucial not only for women, but also for the general welfare of the society. Empowered women can unleash the potential of societies and help create a better world. There are numerous illuminating studies that explore the roots of women's empowerment throughout the globe. Anthropological, sociological, ethnographic, and political approaches to the research on women's empowerment immensely help us further our knowledge about the lives of many women through biographies, semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and so on. Yet, in order to provide generalisable claims, we should support these approaches and methodologies with quantitative analysis. As Apodaca (2009, p. 419) suggests, the intersection of quantitative analysis and feminist studies provides new ways of knowledge production.

With this in mind, this article has aimed to bridge quantitative techniques with research in feminist studies by offering a general overview of the state of women's empowerment in Turkey based on a very large and representative national survey. To better capture the effects of contextual factors, we have integrated individual factors with aggregate, local level data by employing a multilevel design. We have shown that both individual-level factors and locality-specific factors determine whether women feel empowered in Turkey.

To sum up, while higher levels of education, religiosity, and income level are positively correlated with women's empowerment at individual level, being employed stands as a liability rather than an asset for women in Turkey. At the higher level, women residing in localities with higher levels of unemployment, urbanisation, and a higher percentage of ethnic minorities (for this study, Kurds) feel less empowered, whereas women living in more religious localities seem to have higher levels of empowerment. These findings underline the significance of analyses that integrate micro-level and contextual-level factors to better understand the state of women's empowerment, not only in Turkey, but also in other comparable cases throughout the world.

Some of these findings support earlier research that are already mentioned in the literature (such as the positive effects of education on women's empowerment both in the world and in Turkey). Nevertheless, our research, which is based on an original index of women's empowerment and multilevel analysis, offers many findings which make original contributions to the feminist studies literature. Our research aims to complement studies on women's empowerment, which either use qualitative techniques (such as in-depth interviews, ethnographic research) or quantitative techniques (such as survey design or single-item analysis like female labour force participation) and provide a fresh and alternative way of exploring the phenomenon at hand. We hope that other students of feminist studies can further our findings by offering additional insights into the determinants of women's empowerment in Turkey and beyond based on similar methodological and theoretical approaches.

The overall state of women's empowerment in Turkey rings alarm bells in economics, politics, and education. This is not only the case for the disadvantaged sections of the society, but also for those ostensibly favoured by the current political circles. Turkey today is described as caught in a 'middle-income trap' due to the lack of advancements in innovative sectors of the economy. Without enhancements in political and

socioeconomic institutions that would encourage a wholesale improvement in female emancipation and empowerment, Turkey may be stuck in what we call a 'gender inequality trap' for years to come.

The Turkish case can offer us insights regarding comparable cases throughout the world. It is especially interesting as a case in which patriarchal norms combine with neoliberal policies, leaving little or no manoeuvring room for women's emancipation and empowerment. To this end, this article aims to open up new avenues of research regarding the state of women's empowerment, not only for the case at hand, but also for other countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Enhancing our knowledge about the roots of women's empowerment with generalisable analyses offers us academic as well as practical merits. Applying the findings and implications of such analyses to policy making can greatly improve the life standards of women and the society at large.

Note

1. Regarding the roots and the determinants of the AKP's hegemony, see (Özbudun 2014; Ocakli 2016; Cinar 2016; Esen & Gumuscu 2016).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

Table A1. Descriptive statistics of variables.

	Mean	Max.	Min.	Std. Deviation	N
Individual Level Variables:					
Female Empowerment	3.17	5	1	0.69	113,126
Age	43.63	99	18	16.31	113,126
Education Level	1.42	6	0	1.42	113,126
Married	0.74	1	0	0.43	113,126
Employed	0.15	1	0	0.36	113,126
Religiosity Index	2.23	3	1	0.65	112,170
Household Size (in Number of People)	3.99	29	1	2.26	113,126
Household Income Level	2.14	5	1	1.34	113,126
Province Level Variables:					
Unemployment Rate (%)	8.8	23.4	4.2	3.87	81
Urbanisation Rate (%)	65.16	98.95	35.18	13.51	81
Logarithm of GDP Per Capita	8.22	11.66	5.70	1.19	81
Preacher School Enrolment (adjusted for population)	0.90	0	2.11	0.37	81
Kurdish population	16.49	0.02	89.47	25.70	81

1) The Female Empowerment variable is constructed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).
2) Education Level is discretely coded from lowest to highest, namely, 0 = No Diploma, 1 = Primary School, 2 = Middle School, 3 = High School, 4 = 2-year Degree/Associate Degree, 5 = Undergraduate/College Degree, 6 = Graduate Degree.
3) Married (= 1 if married, = 0 otherwise); Employed (= 1 if employed, = 0 otherwise).
4) Interest in Religion are measured by a discrete scale from 1 to 3.
5) Household Income Level is discretely coded from lowest to highest based on monthly income, namely, 1 if less than or equal to 1,080 Turkish Liras (TLs), 2 if between 1,081 and 1,550 TLs, 3 if between 1,551 and 2,170 TLs, 4 if between 2,171 and 3,180 TLs and 5 if higher than 3,180 TLs. TLs (categories are based on the TUIK survey)
6) Preacher School Enrolment: Pupils enrolled to preacher schools per 1,000 people adjusted for province population.
7) Kurdish population: The percentage of Kurdish population in provinces.
Sources: Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), Life Satisfaction Survey of 2013 for individual and household level data; The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) for province-level GDP per capita figures; Mutlu (1996) for Kurdish population data; other province-level data are retrieved from TUIK 2011–2012 datasets. Preacher school enrolment rates are calculated by the authors based on TUIK datasets, using educational and demographics datasets for 2012.