

Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in Turkey: Is Social Conservatism an Important Constraint?

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the main determinants of women's labor force participation in Turkey. Important structural and social changes in the past decades might be expected to increase the number of women in the workplace. Social attitudes toward working women have changed. Women are becoming more educated, they are getting married at a later age, and fertility rates are declining. Despite these factors, the share of women working or seeking jobs has been declining in Turkey.

I use the insights from gender and development research in the analysis of the determinants of women's labor supply. Instead of using a conventional labor supply model, I incorporate cultural constraints, specifically the sexual division of labor in the household and gender ideology operating in society, as determinants of women's labor market behavior.

I examine the correlates of women's labor force participation using logistic regression analysis with a recent dataset compiled by Hacettepe University based on Turkey Demographic Health Surveys (TDHS). Different from household labor force survey data, this dataset allows me to analyze social and cultural determinants together with the traditional supply side variables. I include an "internalization of patriarchal norms" variable created out of women's answers to nine opinion questions in the survey using principal component analysis. These questions capture different aspects of patriarchal relations such as gender division of labor in the household, women's mobility in the public domain, decision making in the family, and control over sexuality. Moreover, I incorporate the role of religion using a religiosity variable based on the frequency of religious practices of women, prayer (*namaz*), fasting, and wearing a headscarf.

My results are in accordance with the previous literature with regard to the positive impact of education and the negative impact of childcare obligations on the labor force participation of women. I find that both patriarchy and religion variables are significant in explaining women's labor market behavior. However, this effect is only seen in the urban areas. In rural areas, neither patriarchy nor religion is significant. The odds of being in the labor force are 52 percent higher for a progressive woman in urban areas. The impact of religion is even stronger. A woman who does not practice religion at all is 190 percent more likely to be in the labor force in comparison to a woman who practices *namaz* and fasts regularly and uses a head-scarf when she leaves the house. Husband's education, which is usually assumed to have a positive impact on women's participation, is not significant in my analysis, suggesting that education may not make men more progressive. Finally, household wealth is associated with less labor force participation of women suggesting that in wealthier households women can afford not to work.