Female Labor Force Participation in Turkey
Qualitative Research Report
Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this research is to explore reasons for low female labor participation in urban Turkey.

Key research issues are,

- Understanding why urban women with low levels of education do not work and/or stop working
- Understanding the cultural perspectives of inactivity

Methodology:

- A total of 8 mini focus group discussion with 4-5 respondents and 9 in-home visits were realized between February 12-23, 2009.
- The group discussions took place at GfK Türkiye Qualitative Studios in Istanbul which are equipped with viewing facility via one-way mirror. The in-home visits took place at participants’ homes
- The group discussion lasted approximately 2 hours; while in-depth interviews lasted about 1 hour.
- The participants were given incentives for participating in the research.
- The recruitment phase were done by phone calls. GfK Türkiye works with field agencies which are members of Turkish Association of Marketing and Opinion Researchers. Before the fieldwork, GfK Türkiye prepares a field brief and screening form which is applied to each participant during the phone calls. Only the participants suitable for the project are invited.
- Participants who were i) inactive, ii) uneducated, and iii) who displayed good communication skills were invited to the interviews.
- The sample, as such, is NOT representative of the Turkish population – which is a limitation of most qualitative studies.
Sample Size and Composition

For this research 8 mini focus group discussions were conducted with;

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<th>C2DE, SES</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>Married &amp; Single (2 of the respondents)</th>
<th>Inactive, who quit working at least 3 months ago</th>
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<td>Husbands of the female respondents</td>
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Total 8 Mini Focus group discussions
Sample Size and Composition

For this research 9 in-home visits were conducted with:

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<tr>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>Inactive, who have never worked before</td>
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<td>18-24</td>
<td>Married with children</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Married with children</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>9 In-home visits</td>
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Community’s approach to working women

- Participants have argued that community’s approach to working women has changed in a positive way in the last decade.
- With changing economic conditions, they argue, it became harder to financially support the family with a single income. In accordance, family members other than the father, the ‘breadwinner’, had to enter the labor force to earn the sufficient money to support the family.
- "My mother-in-law says: 'I could not work, you work'."
- "Now, even women in the rural areas, work."
- "A man can not afford even the expenses of a child by himself."
- "I think it is perceived as normal. I do not think that people would question the reasons of a woman working because everyone knows she is legitimate and trying to support her family."
Women’ capability to take the decision of working

- Women believe that the harmony of the family should be protected and decisions should be made together. Women define themselves interdependently as a part of a couple, therefore believe that they should get the consent of their husbands.
- None of the women think of working without the consent of the husband, hence they believe this would corrupt the family cohesion.
  - “This decision should be given with the husband. You live in the same house, you share a life together.”
  - “Women can not take decision by themselves.”
  - “If the family needs money then woman should work whatever husband says because the issue is children’s future.”
  - “The life is common and it is not worth”
Understanding “housewives” - Females’ Perspective

- “Even if the husband cheats on you, you have to be loyal to him” (a woman who has worked before)
- “I am always alone at home, I have limited contact with my neighbors and relatives. So I can not feel confident when I am in a social environment with strangers..” (a woman who has never worked)
- “Being a housewife means a monotonous life. You are doing the same things everyday. Nobody appreciates you. Moreover when there is one thing missing, the husband complains and asks “what you did the whole day long”, devaluing the work you do. The kids always expect things from the mother, not from the father” (a woman who has never worked)
- A majority of the males perceive being a housewife as an easy job; even laying at the home throughout the day. Some of them admit that childcare is very tiring, but since taking care of children is associated with female nature, it is still not perceived as real work.
Understanding “working women” with a profession
Females’ Perspective

• "If the woman has economic independence then she lives like a “lady”. She wears beautiful dresses, appears well cared. On the weekends, she spends time outside eating, travelling to different places, going to cinemas, etc. She goes to holidays. She lives the life to its fullest” (older woman who has never worked)

• "If she works in a good position she does not have to explain everything to the mother in law or the husband. She is stronger. She lives freely. She can do what she likes to do. People around her respect her.” (a woman who has never worked)

• “Working woman knows how to behave properly outside. She has self confidence in getting into social interaction with people, making new friendships and taking care of her needs outside by herself.” (a woman who has worked before)

• “She gets help from her husband for the household chores. Her husband is tolerant to her and that makes her satisfied” (a woman who has worked before)

• “Decisions are taken together with the husband. There is equality in relations. She does not fear when she wants to say something. She has high self-esteem” (a woman who has never worked)
Understanding “working women” with unskilled jobs
Females’ Perspective

• “You work and can not take the money for yourself. The husband takes it from you. You end up working and having nothing in return. That makes you exhausted.” (an elder woman who has never worked)
• “At least she has some independence during the weekend to travel and visit friends” (a woman who has worked before)
• “You wake up early in the morning to go to work as a cleaning woman, then you arrive and you do the house chores at home. You can sleep very late at night. It is very difficult to wake up early the next day. You are exhausted with time.” (a younger woman who has never worked before)
• “You become despressed, more angry, less tolerant to the kids.” (a woman who has worked before)
• “Others do not behave well towards you in work so you feel the inferiority” (an elder woman who has never worked)
Reasons for not working

- "I worked as a housekeeper in a lady’s home for about 1 year. She didn’t give my travel expenses but she was very nice, telling me that her house was also mine. However, I had to quit since it was very far, it was in Ulus…” (a woman who has worked before)

- "My mother-in-law was looking after my kid. But she was old, it came to be hard for her to take care a small kid. Even more, my kid has been missing me and became naughty. So, I had to give up working. Now, I can’t start working because of my kid.” (a woman who has worked before)

- "There are many job opportunities now but my husband don’t let me since there are long overtime hours or the workplace is very far” (a 33-year-old married woman who has worked before)

- "I had to quit due to economic crisis. I want to work but there are no jobs nowadays.” (a 18-24 years old, woman who has worked before)
Reasons for not working

Verbatims: Due to prevention by husbands and/or elder family members

- "I found a job as a cook two hours a day. I’m 40 and I have four kids, but my father raged. He said that he raised me and married me off, and always supported me; how my husband could not look after his family and could think of making me work... Far before my husband, my father will never ever give permission!!! (a woman who has never worked)

- "I wish I had education. If I had graduated from high school, I would have had a proper CV and could find a good job. When they ask today about my education, I feel uncomfortable to say ‘primary school’” (an elder woman who has never worked)

- "I also thought about working. However, I got pregnant. And now, my kids are small” (a younger woman who has never worked)
Willingness to work

I would like to work because....

Verbatims: For children

• “My kids are growing up and their needs are also becoming more and more. If I earned my own money, I wouldn’t need to say no to them”
• “To provide a better future for my kids. To send them to extra courses for the examinations and help with their school, their wish for computer, Internet…”
• “I want my kids to have as high an education as possible. So, I would like to use the money I earn for their school needs”
• “Our house is a rental. Single income isn’t adequate today. My kids are growing, they will feel an appetite for what they see around. So, If I worked, I would afford anything they want” (a younger woman who has never worked)
• “I want to give everything to my child” (a 18-24 years old, woman who has worked before)
• “I want to save money to buy a house for my daughter. If something bad happens to me, she would at least have her own house” (a 22-years-old, married woman who has worked before)
Willingness to work

**I would like to work because....**

**Verbatims: For self-satisfaction**

- "If I had a chance, I would like to work. First, you become more self-confident. Then, you are respected” (a 23-year-old married woman who has never worked)
- "A working woman is not responsible to her mother-in-law or father-in-law...” (a woman who has never worked)
- "To gain my economic independence, in order not to ask for money from my husband; if I were to have my own income I would do what I want, I would spend my money the way I would like to” (a 25-35 years old, woman who has never worked)
- "I would like to work not only because of economic conditions; but also to be a creative person” (a woman who has never worked)
Willingness to work

"A friend of mine, who is working in textile production, has been using anti-depressants. She says she is too tired, unhappy and she has no freedom to spend the money she earns herself. She gives the money directly to her husband and her husband gives her some pocket money. She also works at home weekends, doing household chores. Is this being a working woman? She works but she doesn’t have her own money. Then, I live a more luxurious, comfortable and less tiring life than hers" (a woman who has never worked)

"It depends on the quality of the job. There is so much difference between my friends who work in textile production and who has a desk job in a pharmaceutical company" (a woman who has never worked)

"I would not work in textile again. You’re under noise and dust all day” (an elderly woman who has worked before)
Willingness to work

- It was observed that the previous work experiences also determine the type of the work women are willing to acquire.
  
  "I feel it’s hard to bear all the long hours, noise of the machines and tiring work of textile now. You get exhausted mentally as you get older. So, I’m thinking of cleaning in a hospital or something similar when I look for a job in the future” (a 28-year-old, married woman who has worked before)
  
  "I don’t like to work in textile again. All the noise and dust negatively effect you. Serving tea type of job could be better for me” (an elder married women who worked before)
  
  "Textile work is a bad sector because the work environment is uncomfortable. People frequently swear at each other...” (a 39-years-old married woman who has worked before)
Potential Job Definitions

- The types of jobs participants would expect:
  - Textile-confection
  - Tea maker in a company
  - House work/ House cleaning / Childcare
  - Office cleaning
  - Salesperson in a market retailer/ clerk/cashier
  - Cook / scullion
  - Service hostess
  - Waitress
  - Secretary & Taking telephone calls in a small company (several of the women who have worked before)
When they would consider working

Life Conditions in which they would consider working

- The husband’s consent
  - "If my husband would let me work, I would immediately work" (a 31-years-old woman who has never worked)
- Availability of a support network for childcare
  - "If my mother lived in the same apartment building, I could leave my kid to her and she could take care of my kid while I was at work" (a younger -25-35 years old woman who has never worked)
- If they could not afford their children’s education expenses
- If the husband had a medical problem that prevents him from working anymore
- When asked what type of service they would provide as a home-based business, it was observed that sewing and beadwork were associated with home-based work.
- Women’s reports indicated that husbands would not prevent their wives from having a home-based business since they could still realize their roles as a housewife and mother.
Importance of Education

- "A high school graduate can find better jobs. Let’s say jobs that you need to work on a computer" (a 23-year-old married woman who has never worked)
- "My sister has only primary school education. When her husband was unemployed, she looked for a job. Even a grocery store did not employ her as a shop assistant for the vegetables section since they wanted someone who had at least secondary school degree. This is the way it is! There’s no job for primary school graduates nowadays..." (a woman who has worked before)
- "The type of jobs a primary and high school graduate would differ. A primary school graduate can get cleaning or housework, while a high school graduate can get a deskjob" (a woman who has never worked before)
- "Employers perceive primary or secondary school graduates as passive. A high school diploma is requested even for a secretary job" (a woman who has worked before)
- "I sent my CV to a law firm to apply for a secretary position. They told me that all my qualifications were adequate and would hire me if I had a lycee diploma" (a woman who has worked before)
Importance of Education

- During the discussions, women indicated that lack of education makes them feel inadequate, limits their power to make decisions concerning their own life and leaves them short of the chance to work outside their home and thus have their own economic freedom.
- Their longing for having an education depicted itself in their dream for their children – especially for their daughters.
- "I’m from Erzurum, my family did not send me to school. I can hardly read and write. I can never forget the horrible feelings of not being educated. Now, I would clean the stairs, do cleaning at homes and make my children finish their education. My son entered İstanbul University and this is my daughter’s last year” (a woman who has never worked)
- “I have two daughters and I tell both of them not to be dependent on their husbands. They may not be as lucky as we are…” (a woman who has never worked)
Conclusions and Recommendations

> The research shows that the level of participation in the labor force by men and women differs because of the traditional views of gender roles and relations.

> Most of the women are prevented from working because a family member “does not approve of them working outside the home”.

> “Child care” stands out as an obstacle which prevents women from having a job.

> Inadequate work conditions turns out to be another primary reason for quitting their jobs among women who have worked before. Low wage, tiring long hours, unavailability of social security, feeling uncomfortable in the workplace (annoying jokes, too free-and-easy people, immoral closeness of married people etc) and mobbing by the boss (Humiliation, headscarf problem) determine the heavy conditions for these women.
Conclusions and Recommendations

> Women tended not perceive owning a home-based business as becoming a working female. Since home-based business is generally associated with “beading” and “sewing”; it was not desired much. In addition, it does not provide women with the means which women want to achieve via working: No social security, too time-consuming, money earned is too low, and no opportunity for socialization.

> The majority of the participant women in the FGDs seemed willing to work outside for money. Irrespective of past work experience of the women, ‘for the education and future of the children’, appears to be the main motivation for women’s willing to work. The desire to have “economic independence” and “self-satisfaction” appear to the secondary reasons for women’s willing to work, yet as crucial as the former.
Conclusions and Recommendations

> Women perceived primary school and secondary school degree indifferent in terms of enabling to find a job. For almost all, at least high school graduation makes the difference and elevates the opportunity for finding a job that requires more skills and offers better conditions; such as a deskwork.

> Therefore, female education and overall labor market conditions can have a strong impact on female participation to laborforce. As women have explicitly stated, gaining economic independence is a very important step to change their position within the family and society, and acquiring a more social life. “Receiving higher education and thus making a profession” is the most apparent longing in their lives repeated by women. Their desire for their kids –especially daughters- to go as far as they want to achieve academically and to work also support the idea.
Conclusions and Recommendations

> Participants have argued that community’s approach to working women has changed in a positive way in the last decade. According to the women, the attitude towards working women was quite negative about 10-15 years ago. With changing economic conditions, they argue, it became harder to financially support the family with a single income. In accordance, family members other than the father, the ‘breadwinner’, had to enter the labor force to earn the sufficient money to support the family.

> With increasingly higher number of women entering the laborforce, not only “working” on its own is normalized, but also women working along with men in the same environment, being more socialized and having more power within the family is perceived as more normal today than it used to be.