



ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT: HOW DO LESS-EDUCATED WOMEN FIND WORK IN ISTANBUL?

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The results of this article come from a small study conducted in SLN Textile on February 24th, 2012 in Istanbul, Turkey. The results compose of a small section of a more comprehensive doctoral fieldwork on job finding methods of less-educated women in Istanbul.

The findings come from five in-depth interviews with SLN Textile workers¹, all of whose names have been anonymised due to research ethics and to protect the individuals. The participants have been chosen from a list of all workers in the factory, based on their age, marital status and length of time in the factory. However, it should be mentioned that the selection methods of the five workers should be considered within the bigger research frame, not as individual case studies on their own.

The article here will be organised as follows. The first section will describe the general research background, second section will detail the methodological issues of this particular case study, the third and main section will detail the findings, the fourth will conclude. In the appendix, the general socio-demographic characteristics of the participants can be found.

¹ The author also had an in-depth interview with the CEO of SLN Textile, however because the main concern of the paper is the job access methods of the less-educated, the findings from that interview will only be touched upon briefly and will not be discussed at length here.

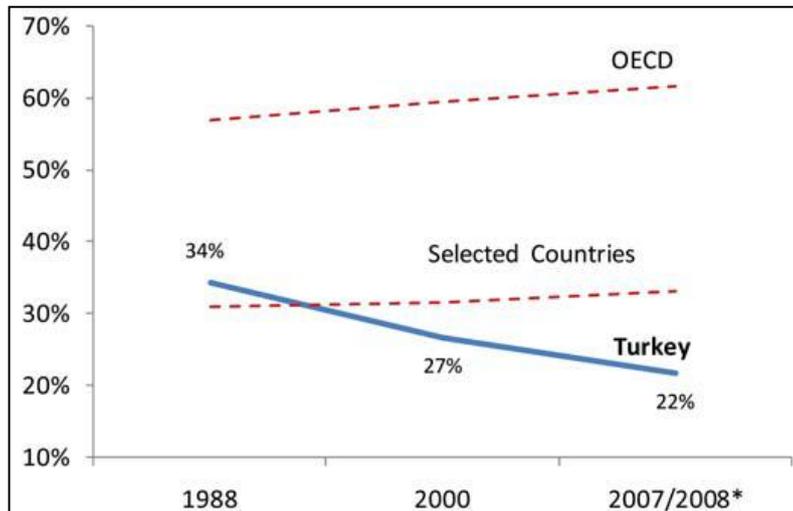
I. BACKGROUND

There are various theoretical and applied reasons as to why job-access methods have been chosen as the main analytical frame of this doctoral research. However to give a brief summary here, without delving at length in academic matters, the main reasons can be listed as follows.

a. Decline in Female Labour Force Participation

The decline in Female Labour Force Participation (here onwards, FLFP) has been widely detailed in literature. Table 1 demonstrates the declining trend of the FLFP of Turkish women in comparison to other developing countries.

TABLE 1: FLFP DECLINE IN TURKEY IN COMPARISON TO THE OECD AND SELECTED ISLAMIC COUNTRIES



SOURCE: DAYIOĞLU AND KIRDAR (2009), WDI, OECD, TURKSTAT

*SELECTED COUNTRIES INCLUDE OTHER ISLAMIC COUNTRIES, NAMELY, AZERBAIJAN, TURKMENISTAN, INDONESIA, MALAYSIA, ALGERIA, IRAN (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC), AFGHANISTAN, TUNISIA, MOROCCO, EGYPT (ARAB REPUBLIC), PAKISTAN, SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAQ.

Moreover statistics detail that the rates of male participation is close to, in fact sometimes higher than the OECD and EU countries (see Table 2). And the Turkish FLFP rate is definitely an outlier.

decline in Turkey through the personal networks frame, asking if women`s networks are limited to only people like themselves, this would influence where they would work, i.e. if informal employment creates a path dependency for informal employment.

II. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

This section will detail the methodology of this particular case study, rather than the whole research, due to time and space constraints.

The research at SLN Textile LTD, which is one of PUMA SE suppliers located in Istanbul, Turkey, was made possible through Mr. Olgun Aydın, Puma.Safe Humanity & Ecology Auditor. Mr. Olgun Aydın was accessed through a personal connection of the author, whose name is not listed here for reasons of anonymity. Mr. Aydın has been welcoming to the project from the very start, and considered the study as part of a bigger picture: corporate responsibility.

The researcher first had a separate meeting in early February (February 7th, 2012) with Mr. Aydın to describe her research plans and receive an induction about what Puma does in terms of female labour market participation, female empowerment, for battling with violence against women and other extremely relevant matters. The induction proved really useful for the researcher to situate Puma and SLN Textile within her larger textile production observations.

The interviews at SLN Textile were pre-arranged by Mr. Aydın and the date became certain soon after the induction meeting. On the day of field visit to SLN Textile, I was accompanied personally by Mr. Aydın to the factory, who also gave me a tour of all the floors. I received a detailed documentation of the female workers in the factory, which listed the age, marital status, educational status of the workers. Within the general research framework, the researcher particularly focused on selecting workers within 18-30 age group, and different educational credentials. Among the same aged persons, marital status was the selection criterion.

The interviews took place in the administrative floor of the factory, in close proximity to the managers` rooms. Although I was hesitant about these rooms as a researcher, in terms of participants` being scared of an interview taking place in such a setting, presence of Mr. Aydın seemed to have helped them to ease up to the project and realise that it is not related to their employment or work in the factory in any sense. To comfort them with the research project and further include them in the research design phase, the researcher asked each of them in the beginning of the

interview to choose a nick name to be used in the published work. Mr. Aydın suggested choosing both a name and a surname, however since the majority of participants in this research only chose first names, here too, in the findings section only first names will be used.

The researcher has built a close relationship with the study participants as Mr. Aydın and SLN Textile allowed the workers as much time as needed, something the researcher is deeply grateful for, and something impossible to match in other textile factories, she has conducted research in. In the end, the interviews took place between 40-60 minutes, which allows for in-depth research, unlike the 10-15 minutes granted in other factories, which barely allows for a quantitative survey.

The researcher also had the opportunity to ethnographically observe the factory setting and the workers during the lunch break in the factory cafeteria. Accompanied by Mr. Aydın and Miss. Meliha Yıldırım (Human Resources Manager), the researcher had the possibility to ask questions about both her own particular research and also about general questions about the factory and textile industry in Istanbul.

Mr. Aydın was present in the interviews until about 17:00, thereafter she was accompanied by Miss. Yıldırım. The second methodological concern the researcher has risen from here, that she did not have the possibility to conduct the interviews one-to-one as she does in all of her other interviews. The researcher had understood and related to the concerns Mr. Aydın and managers of SLN Textile could have, and accepted these conditions. However, during the interview transcribing sessions, it became apparent that a third party's existence and having conducted the interview in a managerial setting have scared off some participants. For further research, I suggest conducting the interviews in the cafeteria, or a similar setting, where workers are used to visit in their every day work setting and leave the researcher with the participant alone, after an initial introduction (if observation of the researcher is necessary).

All in all, it has been a very fruitful experience for the researcher to be able to access such a big textile factory and gain first-hand experience of the workings and management of it. The researcher is deeply grateful to both Mr. Aydın and SLN Textile for providing this opportunity.

III. FINDINGS

Because the study aims to understand the job-access methods of the less-educated, the findings will focus on how these five women have found employment throughout their careers.

Appendix B demonstrates the job finding methods of the participants in this study. It is obvious that relatives are the first source of information the participants applied to, when they needed to find jobs. It is also important to mention that female kin, that is to say female relatives, have provided the main source of information for the participants in their first jobs.

It is of course impossible to generalise from this very small case study. However, the author observes similar patterns in her fieldwork- mainly that relatives are generally preferred in job finding- as it is believed that the jobs relatives find are much more reliable than newspapers and internet and other forms of formal job finding methods. Here it is noteworthy to mention the job advertisement methods specified by the CEO of the company. She has mentioned that often newspaper and internet ads are given, when there is an opening for a position. However, it seems that these methods are actually not used by the actual workers themselves. The researcher asked each participant about newspaper and internet ads. Their answers were striking. None of the women had internet at home, nor could access the internet via their mobile phones (as specified by the CEO) and none of them ever looked at newspaper ads, either because they do not buy newspapers regularly or because they do not trust the ads.

This indicates a quite common mismatch between employers and employees, which we call `social desirability bias` in social sciences. This term stands for a particular participant group imagining or describing the social phenomena in a better condition, or a more desirable condition than it actually is. The lesson to be drawn from this finding could be that employers could focus more on advertising through their workers` networks, and not through formal methods, which are generally preferred by more educated and/or skilled workers.

Another finding is that participants differentiated between female and male kins. This is important in terms of who should be assigned to work with whom, or what kind of a control should be given to certain people at certain positions. Participants particularly highlighted that they preferred working with their sisters, instead of brothers. This is expected when one thinks of the patriarchal norms and relationships dominant in Turkey. Participants highlighted that they often make this preference because of feeling `tense` when they are around male kin, i.e. brothers. Participants also highlighted that they prefer female headworkers (*ustabaşı* in Turkish) because they can share their personal problems, especially about female matters, much more easily with them.

Another noteworthy finding of this small case study is that all of the participants started their registered employment for the first time with this company. Except Yaprak, all participants started their careers before the legal age (16). This often coincides with their not being able to start their careers with registered employment. Having had their full social security for the first time through SLN Textile shows in the satisfaction of the workers here, which they often express with words such as `Here I feel safe` (Ayten), `I like it here. I would never want to work in a small place again` (Efnan), `Here I feel comfortable` (Irem), and `I like the conditions here. And I know that this place is special, so I would do my best not to lose my job` (Beyza).

Moreover, the participants stated that they were happy to work with a female boss. They often implied that they confided in their boss that she could relate to their problems as a woman. Indeed in the interview with the CEO, the CEO herself stated very often that `The female workers should be and are happy to have a female boss, who could relate to their problems.` In fact, this good relationship between the employer and employees is apparent in the fact that participants often felt at ease in asking for short leaves from work, when they urgently needed for health or care reasons.

Last but not least, it is vital to note here that participants expressed utmost satisfaction with their current working conditions, in comparison with their previous employments, due to the good `environment` (*ortam* in Turkish) and good treatment they receive in this company.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this article a brief overview of a one-day field visit to SLN textile has been given. The background to the field study, methodological issues and the study findings have been specified in order. The two main findings of this particular study is that female kin are the most preferred job information hub and the participants became aware of the importance of social security as they started their careers at SLN.

The researcher would like to thank everybody who participated in this study and who helped this study to take place. Without their time and effort, this study would not have been possible. Their names and nicknames will all be listed in the *Preface* section of the compiled thesis in September 2013.

APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTIVE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Immigration Generation	Origin	Marital Status	Number of children	Age and Sex of children	Working with a close kin at work?
Ayten	20	Illiterate	2 nd Generation	Kars	Single	-	-	
Beyza	29	High School Drop-out	2 nd Generation	Kastamonu	Single	-	-	
Efnan	25	Middle School Drop-out	1 st Generation	Kars	Single	-	-	
Irem	29	Primary School	1 st Generation	Samsun	Married	1	6 (M)	
Yaprak	34	Primary School	1 st Generation	Ordu	Married	1	6 (M)	

APPENDIX B: ACCESS TO JOBS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

		1 st Job	2 nd Job	3 rd Job	4 th Job	5 th Job	6 th Job
Relatives	Female Kin	Efnan, Yaprak, Ayten, Beyza	Yaprak	Ayten, Efnan, Yaprak	Efnan, Yaprak		Beyza
	Male Kin	Irem	Ayten		Ayten		
Neighbours			Irem	Irem	Beyza	Beyza	
Work Colleagues							
Other Friends							
Looking around			Beyza, Efnan	Beyza			
Newspapers							
Internet Ads							
ISKUR (Official Employment Agency)							
Private Employment Agencies							

AUTHOR'S OWN.