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Gender, family and academic careers in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Turkey has a remarkably high proportion of female full professors in its universities and in scientific fields (STEM) that are traditionally dominated by men in other countries. This could reflect a great deal of occupational gender equality but there has been a debate whether this equality came at the expense of family life. With the expansion of academia in the late 1990s and the erosion of childcare availability, whether institutional or familial, more recent cohorts of female academics may be paying a greater family penalty than their predecessors. We investigate these conjectures using the Turkish Academic Career Survey (TAC) – an original retrospective life-history study conducted in 2007 with a representative sample of around 4500 academics. We focus on the relationship between career progression and the family transitions of academics and analyze whether this relationship varies by scientific field and if professors advanced in rank during different stages of higher education's expansion in Turkey. We find a considerable gender gap in family formation outcomes of Turkish academics in all fields. Furthermore, we find that female academics that completed their PhDs after 1999 were not considerably at a higher risk of postponing parenthood compared to those who obtained their PhD's before the higher education expansion occurred.

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1. Introduction

We study the family formation processes of male and female academics in Turkey and analyze whether their progression up the academic ranks is associated with their family formation outcomes, namely partnership formation, transition to parenthood, and second-births. Using a retrospective life-history dataset that is a large and representative sample of academics, we analyze whether these relationships vary by scientific field and when the academics experienced promotion with respect to the different stages of higher education expansion in Turkey.

Our study is motivated by three observations of the literature. First, while there is a long tradition of multi-disciplinary research that examines whether family processes affect career advancement and the productivity of academic women (see the literature reviewed earlier in Long & Fox, 1995; and more recently in Hermanowicz, 2012), few researchers have turned their attention to the reverse relationship and investigated whether the career progression of female academics and scientists shapes their family formation processes and outcomes (e.g. see Buber, Berghammer, & Prskawtez, 2011; Long, 2001; Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden, 2013).

These few studies indicate that even in fields where relative equality is achieved in terms of female-to-male ratios across academic ranks, female academics are more likely to pay a family penalty and are disadvantaged in terms of family formation outcomes. Leaving out the inequality in family outcomes from the analysis of sex-segregation in scientific and academic careers yields an incomplete picture of the gender inequality experienced in these careers (Mason et al., 2013).

Second, the vast majority of quantitative evidence for family processes of academic women concerns the USA, where the level of horizontal (i.e. across fields) and vertical (i.e. across ranks) sex-segregation is lower than in other OECD countries (OECD, 2006). While there are very few studies with large samples from other advanced economies (e.g. Buber et al., 2011 for Austria; and Probert, 2005 for Australia), we know of no studies focusing on family formation patterns of academic women and women in scientific careers in industrializing countries or emerging market economies.

This is regrettable because these countries differ dramatically from the US and other advanced economies on a number of dimensions which limits the generalizability of the previous studies. For example, in these countries, family formation processes and their determinants are very different (Coale, 1984; Caldwell, 1976; Van de Kaa, 1994; Cáceres-Delpiano, 2012); female labor force participation is often at lower levels; higher education expansion is

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in its initial stages (Schoefer & Mayer, 2005). As a result, often a smaller portion of women have access to higher education and academic careers compared to women in advanced countries.

A number of sociologists have investigated cross-national differences in sex segregation in higher education (and in academic careers particularly) (inter alia Bradley, 2000; Charles & Bradley, 2002; Mason, Goulden & Wolfinger, 2007; Mason et al., 2013; Charles & Bradley, 2009). These studies suggest that developing and transition countries may exhibit lower levels of sex-segregation and higher female representation in higher education and scientific careers compared to advanced economies due to a set of macro-structural factors, such as post-industrialism, size of the higher education system, and access to higher education, etc. (e.g. Chang, 2004; Charles & Bradley, 2009). It is argued that a combination of these factors may have contributed to selecting certain types of women into higher education and professional occupations (Chang, 2000, 2004; Charles, 2011). Yet, the questions of whether these women pay a penalty in terms of family outcomes, and if their family processes differ from their counterparts in advanced economies have been neglected in this literature.

Third, some of these studies (e.g. Bradley, 2000; Charles, 2011) and the reports published by the European Commission (She Figures, 2003, 2006 and 2009) regard Turkey as an “outlier” or a “paradoxical” case with respect to sex-segregation in the sciences. Although Turkish female labor force participation has largely declined or stagnated over the last three decades, making it the lowest in Europe and also among the OECD countries, Turkey has long enjoyed the highest proportion of women in top academic positions such as full professorships. Furthermore, Turkey also enjoys a higher representation of female professors than the majority of EU countries in scientific fields that are traditionally male-dominated, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).¹ The explanations of the Turkish case were principally based on anecdotal evidence and occasionally on quantitative studies that relied upon small and unrepresentative samples (Acar, 1983, 1990, 1991; Healy, Özbilgin, & Aliefendioğlu, 2005; Özbilgin & Healy, 2004; Küskü, Özbilgin, & Özkale, 2007). Earlier qualitative studies argued that academic women in Turkey during the 1980s and early 1990s had more resources and so were able to combine work and family life (e.g. Acar, 1991); the implication was that these women did not pay a family penalty. Yet, this picture may have changed with the expansion of the higher education sector. To our knowledge, no quantitative analysis of academic women and their family environment has been conducted to test these predictions using large-scale representative data.

We aim to fill this gap and make contributions to two specific literatures. First, we contribute to the general literature on gender inequality in academic and scientific careers by providing evidence on another dimension of gender inequality: the gender-gap in family outcomes in a relatively egalitarian academic market. Second, we contribute to the literature on the role of education expansion, women's human capital investments (i.e. schooling), and career progression in family formation (e.g. Blossfeld & Huinink, 1991; Blossfeld, 1995; Budig, 2003). We do this by focusing on a highly-educated sample of women (and men) to explore how variations in their career progression are associated with variation in family outcomes. To this end, we compare women whose family transitions and career progressions took place during different periods of higher education expansion. We also compare academic women in departments with traditionally lower female representation rates (e.g. STEM) versus female-dominated fields.

¹ In fact, the peculiarity of Turkey was picked up as early as in 1994 by a report in *Science Magazine* that compared Turkey with the US (Kahn, 1994) and found that Turkey had higher rates of female engineers and computer scientists than the USA (Bradley, 2000).

We use a unique life-history dataset that we collected in 2007 that has rich information on the background and family outcomes of approximately 4500 academics in Turkey. We combine this dataset with the administrative records of the departments in which they work. We then use these data to construct weights for our sample and obtain characteristics of the workplaces. We describe our data sample and how we ensure representativeness of the whole academic population in Section 3.

Turkey is an interesting case also for other reasons: first, family processes in Turkey are very different than those in many Western societies. For example, both in the general population and in our sample of academics, the frequency of cohabitations is negligibly small. Consequently, childbearing almost always follows marriage. Second, Turkey has a centralized higher education system. Academic salaries as well as all promotions are regulated by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for all academics in the public universities which constitute an overwhelming share of the university sector. This leaves little variation in basic salaries and may also provide a degree of transparency in promotion decisions. Finally, considerably fewer Turkish PhD holders work outside academia or stay inactive, something that we verify from the nationally representative Survey of Doctorate Earners conducted by the Turkish Statistics Institute. All of these have favorable methodological implications for the generalizability of our results, the representativeness of our sample, and the number of factors we need to control for. We discuss these issues in depth in Section 3.

2. Background literature

2.1. Academic career progress and family formation

The relationship between academic careers and family formation is complex. A large set of American studies have focused on the reverse relationship, i.e. whether family processes affect rank advancement and the productivity of women in scientific careers as this was believed to be an important driver of sex-segregation in science and academia (e.g. see literatures reviewed in Long & Fox, 1995; Xie & Shauman, 2003 and particularly Morrison, Rudd, & Nerad, 2011). These studies find a mixed picture for the role of family formation in academic career advancement. For example, Xie and Shauman (2003) found that marriage does not matter for women's scientific career outcomes but having children explains a large amount of the variation in these outcomes. Furthermore, the authors found that women with children are less likely to pursue careers in science and engineering after the completion of science or engineering education. They are less likely to be in the labor force or employed, to be promoted once they are in scientific career, and to be geographically mobile. On the contrary, Long (2001) argues that having children has no effect on career progression.

If family processes affect the career advancement of academic women, particularly those in STEM fields, then, it is plausible that women of higher academic ranks have already paid a family penalty and those that were not promoted are more likely to have had their children earlier. In this case, we would observe a rank gradient in family formation. Mason, Wolfinger and Goulden in a series of studies throughout the 2000s (compiled in a book in 2013) looked at gender and rank differences in family formation of American academics. They have nuanced findings: women who had children in the first five years after finishing their PhDs are less likely than men in similar conditions to get a tenured professorship. Women in tenure track careers are also more likely to forego their desire for children than men across all fields (Mason & Goulden, 2002). However, once they are tenured, having young children may not necessarily have a negative effect on their further career progression compared to men in similar conditions (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008).

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