

Female Academics' Perception of Gender Roles in Working Life: A Qualitative Research Example in Türkiye

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Abstract: This study examines the perceptions of female academics working in Türkiye towards gender roles in working life. The main purpose of the research is to understand the experiences of female academics in business life, the difficulties they face, if any, and their perceptions shaped in line with gender roles. For the research, a semi-structured interview form was used and 18 female academics working in Türkiye were interviewed. Content analysis was used for the analyses. According to the findings, gender role perception for female academics refers to the roles attributed to females and men. On the other hand, it has been revealed that being a mother and wife as a female is the most prominent gender role. The negative situations they face in terms of gender roles are work-life balance, glass ceiling syndrome in career and the emotional pressure of not having time for children. The positive situations, on the other hand, are the pride of having a respectable job, the support received from spouses and family (solidarity behaviours of the Turkish family structure, grandmother, grandfather and grandfather taking care of the children, one of the parents of one of the spouses helping with housework and cooking during busy times, etc.), the comfort of having partially flexible working hours and being able to catch up with housework, positive discrimination towards female and especially mothers in the workplace. As a result, this study will be a guide to the effects of gender roles perceptions of female academics on their working lives and for further research to be conducted in this field. It is important to develop policies to support female academics and to ensure gender equality.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Perception of Gender Roles, Female Academics, Working Life, Türkiye

1. Literature Review

Gender refers to the knowledge that a person is of a certain sex, what is expected of a person at the social level within this knowledge, and the position assigned to the person in society (Vatandaş, 2011). The main idea in role-gender adaptations is that the individual is male or female. The learning of gender roles takes place through socialisation or internalisation (Dahrendorf, 1959). Gender is used in the sense of cultural, social role, spiritual-inner definition of the person and their representation. Gender is a concept related to the duties and responsibilities given to females by society, how females are seen, perceived and expected in society (Alisbah Tuskan, 2011). Gender determines femininity and masculinity on the basis of social, cultural and psychological factors. Gender is the psychological, social and cultural social manifestations of femininity and masculinity (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). As far as we see in the definitions in the literature, it is noteworthy that gender is defined in terms of the prominent responsibilities of men and female in a society.

The category of gender, which is based on a modern formulation of sexuality (Connell, 1998), is a concept that, unlike biological sex, is used to describe the social and cultural definition of men and female, the way society distinguishes these two sexes from each other, and its impact is reflected in all areas of society (Yüce et al, 2014). The roles and responsibilities that confine female and men with innate biological differences to defined identities, shape their lives by expecting behaviours in accordance with ideal patterns, leave deep traces especially in the lives of female, and are reproduced continuously through the socialisation process are called gender (Scott, 2017). This distinction emphasises that the differences between men and female are not merely innate or biologically dependent on sexual characteristics, but on the contrary, they are learned behaviours (Özdemir, 2019). In many societies, social norms are more restrictive towards females, especially when it comes to gender roles in the labour market and self-employment (Marques, 2017). In short, we see that gender roles are classified and evaluated according to socially learned behaviours.

A study conducted in Japan revealed that gender roles in working life are egalitarian and females are not adversely affected by this reason (Magnier-Watanabe et al, 2024). A study conducted in Poland, on the other hand, revealed that gender norms, female's participation in unpaid work at home, female's share in household income and inequality between spouses in the sharing of household chores persist. This is because females living in less traditional households are more likely to share housework equally with their husbands. Among couples with traditional gender attitudes, a female's contribution to household income is not associated with the sharing of housework. As a result, reducing gender pay gaps can be an important step towards greater equality not only at work but also at home (Magda et al, 2024). It is generally believed that female struggle with the balance between the demands of their career and their family life (Fetterolf & Rudman, 2014). From these studies, it is seen that the perception of gender roles is perceived differently in different societies. Furthermore, some study

suggested that the majority of studies on gender-related perceptions, attitudes and roles have been conducted in the United States or in a limited number of European countries (e.g. Germany, the UK) (Camussi & Leccardi, 2005; Hoebeke, 2008). Therefore, it is anticipated that conducting a study on gender roles in Türkiye will contribute to this gap in the field

Gender roles have varied between genders, cultures and even between homosexuals, and the unchanging result has been unequal practices (Bhasin, 2012); these practices lead to negativities in many areas such as female's education, participation in labour life, political representation and income level (Yılmaz et al., 2022). It is stated that the fact that the processes related to child or patient care are more favourable to gender roles considered to belong to female and that female are naturally more prone to these processes causes these fields to be professionally not preferred by men and more female to enter these disciplines (Şentürk, 2025). Another study conducted in Türkiye revealed that nursing and midwifery professions are more suitable for females in terms of gender roles (Gönül & Akyıldız, 2024).

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There are a large number of quantitative and longitudinal studies on understanding gender roles (Amato & Booth, 1995; Brewster & Padavic, 2000; Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Berridge et al., 2009; Aygar et al, 2022). However, it is noteworthy that qualitative research is not so much. Moreover, it is predicted that qualitative research will be more powerful in providing deeper explanations and richer information about gender perception. It was thought that collecting real life stories of female academics' gender perceptions in the form of narratives would be more effective in collecting data for the purpose of this study. Thus, this research aims to examine the perceptions of gender roles in working life of female academics in Türkiye. In addition, a study conducted in Türkiye during the pandemic period revealed that the academic life of female academics changed in terms of academic productivity and that the pandemic deepened gender inequalities. Therefore, it was suggested that more research be conducted to develop more effective social policies (Parlak et al. 2020). Based on this research, it was envisaged that a new and in-depth study on gender roles in Türkiye would be a resource for Turkish society and other countries. Thus, this research has the potential to fill the gap in the literature and make important contributions.

2. Methodology/Design

The research method is a qualitative research method. A Semi-structured interview form was prepared for this research. Before starting the interview, the research scope was explained to the participants, and permission was obtained to take notes the interviews. Interviews were conducted by the author of the study at a time convenient for the participants and via telephone. The participants were encouraged to freely express their experiences and were given the opportunity to direct the conversation. The interviews lasted from 20 to 25 min. The meeting interview form consists of 2 parts. The first section includes 5 interview questions and the second section includes 4 questions about demographic characteristics. Therefore, a total of 9 statements are included in the interview form. The questions are generally open ended. Some sample questions are 'Is there a situation (positive or negative) that you have encountered in terms of gender roles in your working life? If so, can you tell us about them?', "Can you talk about the effects of your private life relationships (spouse, family, children, etc.) on your working life?". The research questions were created in light of the information available in the literature to reveal how female academics perceive and define gender roles in line with the purpose of the study. Within the scope of the research, interviews were conducted with 18 female academics working in different universities in Türkiye. The sample was selected in accordance with maximum diversity sampling, which is one of the

purposive sampling methods within the qualitative research method (Patton, 1990 and Yıldırım, 1999). This sampling method involves participants with the same characteristics but with different experiences that are unique to each other. This provides a variety in the sample (Friday and Leah, 2024). The qualitative research method (Patton, 1990 and Yıldırım, 1999) uses purposive sampling.

Firstly, the data were coded. Second, the themes of the coded data were determined. In the third stage, the codes and themes were organised. In the fourth stage, the findings were defined and interpreted (Guba and Lincoln, 1982). In this process Miles and Huberman's (1994) percentage of agreement method was used and the percentage of agreement of the analysis is 75%. An ethics committee report was also obtained from Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Social and Human Sciences Publication Ethics Committee.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Variables

The average age of female academics is 38.5 years. 9 of them have PhD, 5 have master's degree and 4 have bachelor's degree. 6 of them work as doctoral faculty members, 5 associate professors, 4 professors and 3 associate professors work as research assistants. 10 of the sample were married and 8 were single. Among female academics, 9 have 2 children, 6 have 1 child and 3 do not have children.

3.2 Results of the Qualitative Analysis

The theoretical framework most frequently encountered in the literature on gender roles was used in the selection of themes used in the analysis of the data. In this context 3 Themes emerged from the data obtained from the interviews. For example, since we noticed that gender roles are often discussed in the literature in terms of the responsibilities of being a woman and a man, we determined one of the themes as Gender and Behaviour-Appearance (Being a Female and a Man and Other). The other two themes Domestic Gender-Based Division of Labour, Becoming a parent (Being mother) and The Negative-Positive Situations They Face in terms of Gender Roles". In order to represent the opinions of the sample in the research by concealing their identities, they were given codes such as Sample 1 (S1), S2, S3, S4..., S18.

3.3 Theme 1: Gender and Behaviour-Appearance (Being a Female and a Man and Other)

Gender and Behaviour-Appearance is the most frequently used explanation of what is meant by the phenomenon of 'gender roles'. Like being a female and a man and others. 15 out of 18 female academics pointed to these facts. Some of the female academics' expressions on these subject are as follows:

S5: 'The roles and responsibilities attributed to females and men in a society by the society....'

S9: 'The roles attributed to females and men by society in line with their gender. They are the expectations of society from individuals based on gender....'

S12: 'Gender roles refer to socially determined and culturally shaped norms of behaviour, duties and responsibilities deemed appropriate for females and men in a society. These roles manifest themselves in many areas such as how individuals should dress, speak, work and behave within the family. Gender roles are based on the expectations and cultural values of society rather than biological sex and can change over time...'

S17: 'It evokes the jobs attributed to the sexes. Females are responsible for cleaning the house and men are responsible for earning a living...'

S18: 'The roles that society attributes to men and females...'

There are a few common conclusions we can draw from the participant statements. It is about the roles and expectations determined by the society based on genders. Each of them mentions the behaviours, duties and responsibilities deemed appropriate for men and female in line with social norms and cultural values. It is emphasised that gender roles are based on social expectations rather than biological differences and that these roles may change over time. It is also stated that these roles shape the behaviours that society expects from its individuals.

3.4 Theme 2: Domestic Gender-Based Division of Labour, Becoming a Parent (Being a Mother and Parents)

One of the findings of the research is that employees complain about the domestic gender-based division of labour. They state that being a mother about perception of gender roles is a great responsibility.

Some of the participants' views on this issue are as follow:

S1: 'In my mind, gender roles evoke the roles that society assigns to the sexes. An example of this is that the mother is responsible for ensuring that there is a hot meal at home every day and the father is responsible for taking the car for routine maintenance...'

S3: 'Employee, mother, wife, wife, child, sibling are allocated too many roles...'

S5: 'As an academic, I have to carry out intensive studies. However, as a mother, caring for my two children and constantly trying to take care of them makes it difficult for me to advance my academic career. The responsibility of a husband who does not help me in this regard is also on me...'

S10: 'I think that being a woman or a mother should be a privilege in business life. Determining working hours accordingly would encourage females to take more part in active working life...'

According to the statements above, female academics have difficulties in trying to establish a balance between their responsibilities at home and at the workplace due to their gender roles, and social systems make it even more difficult to establish this balance. In addition, it is noteworthy how gender roles shape individuals' lives and professional careers, and the difficulties and injustices that these roles can create are emphasised.

3.5 Theme 3: The Negative-Positive Situations They Face in terms of Gender Roles

Another theme is the negative-positive situations they face in terms of gender roles.

Female academics' 10 claim that they have positive and negative situations. Some statements on the subject are as follows:

S1: As female academics, despite the challenges we face, we have the potential to make significant contributions to society and the academic world. By strengthening our positive aspects and developing strategies to cope with negative aspects, we can create positive changes both in our own careers and at the societal level...'

S4: 'First of all, I do not think there is a negative aspect. I think it is a very important task to be together with our young people who represent our future at the university and to be able to convey something to them both academically and in terms of life experience. I think that the education that students will receive from female academics from a female perspective is of great importance in terms of shaping their perspectives and visions in life...'

S5: 'There is no situation that I can explain positively or negatively, I can say that an equal policy is applied...'

S7: 'I think there are gender-based prejudices. In another workplace, I have noticed that female employees are taken less seriously in technical roles than their male counterparts. Especially in a male-dominated field such as engineering, I have observed that female's competencies are questioned and they are left behind in important projects. This can negatively affect the career development of female employees and undermine equality in the workplace...'

S10: 'There were positive aspects due to the understanding of my professors. During my daughter's illness, they showed understanding and allowed me to take unpaid leave. If I were a man, I might not have had such leave even if I did not need it economically...'

Under the above theme, the aim is to raise awareness of the impact of gender equality and societal perceptions on professional life, while addressing the gender-related experiences, opportunities and challenges of female academics. Each of them assesses the challenges and opportunities that female face in academic and professional fields from different perspectives, but all of them emphasise the impact of gender in working life.

The themes created for the gender perceptions of female academics in Türkiye are included in the theme below.

Table 1: Expression Frequencies of Themes

The Perceptions	Expression Frequency
Gender and Behaviour-Appearance (Being a Female and a Man and Other)	15
Domestic Gender-Based Division of Labour, Becoming a parent (Being a mother and parents)	13
The Negative-Positive Situations They Face in terms of Gender Roles	10

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of this research, it has come to the forefront that when it comes to gender, academic females mostly use the expressions ‘being a woman and a man and being the other’. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, in a given culture, gender refers to the social and behavioural norms that are widely accepted as socially appropriate for individuals of a particular gender (<https://tinyurl.com/yuxbhmkn>, 14.11.2025). In other words, it is noteworthy that gender perceptions have a gender-based approach. In the studies conducted in this field, gender role is defined as being of a certain sex (Vatandaş, 2011); being masculine or feminine (Dahrendorf, 1959); behavioural expectations based on biological sex (Fawcner, 2012). Our gender identity perception is our sense of who we are as a woman, as a man, or as a different gender (Cosker-Rowland, 2023). The traditional relationship, such as a female's primary responsibility for childcare, is a function of socially constructed gender roles. Particularly when combined with difficult demands, females may find it difficult to combine these two activities (Haynes, 2006). Gender can be explained as a cultural construct, which is the social categorisation of males/masculine and females/feminine (Oakley, 1985). Gender can also be understood as the roles, attitudes, attributes and behaviours associated with each gender (Hatchell & Hatchell, 2007). As a conclusion, it is possible to say that all over the world, although it varies according to the culture, the gender role is perceived as being of a certain gender type. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that gender is based on social norms determined by society rather than biological differences. It is seen how the socially accepted roles of female and men are shaped and how gender identity is associated with these roles.

Another theme that emerged was the “gendered division of labour within the family, being a parent (Being a mother and a parent)”. A key issue in gender is the gendered division of domestic labour (Peng, 2022). Similar results were found in previous studies. According to a study, they emphasise that the existing potential of females is distorted by sexist stereotypes. Females are forced to take responsibility for specific gender roles, such as motherhood and homemaking, which are hidden in their nature and abilities (Gill and Grint, 1995). Owing to gendered perceptions of motherhood and fatherhood, mothers will often reduce the number of hours they work for pay in order to devote more time to child-care responsibilities (Klerman & Leibowitz, 1999; Yeung et al., 2001). In the 20th century, the gendered division of labor in caring for children in many societies, especially in middle-class families, has been linked to a dominant model of “breadwinning father, houseworking mother”. This involves mothers taking on the physical and emotional burden of caring for children (Christopher, 2012). It is seen that the emphasis in this theme supports the literature. The gender-based division of labour within the family and the roles of motherhood and parenthood are observed to express gender roles. It is emphasised that female's being limited to certain roles such as motherhood and domestic care due to gender stereotypes leads to limitations in the field of labour force and career.

Last theme is “The negative-positive situations they face in terms of gender roles”. The results of a study conducted among male academics on the perceived gender roles of female academics in Türkiye revealed that culture and religion and patriarchal social structure have an impact on this role perception (Demirtaş, 2024). On the positive side, there are supportive family relationships in Türkiye. Therefore, gender roles show positive discrimination for females. For example, a study in Türkiye highlights the important role of workplace flexibility, supportive networks and policies that prioritise personal well-being and career advancement for females in gender roles (Bulut et al, 2024). In this way, it is predicted that gender role equality will be promoted (Bulut et

al, 2024). The results of a study on the perceived gender roles of female academics in Türkiye from the perspective of male academics revealed that culture, religion and patriarchal social structure have an impact on this role perception (Demirtaş, 2024). Another study conducted in Türkiye emphasises the important role of workplace flexibility, supportive networks and policies that prioritise personal well-being and career advancement. In this way, it is predicted that gender role equality will be promoted (Bulut et al, 2024). Based on recent research revealing the multidimensionality of gender role attitudes, the prevalence of a gender role ideology that favours female's employment but gives greater priority to caregiving roles is also still prevalent (Han et al, 2024).

Positive and negative aspects of the responsibilities imposed on females in terms of gender roles are another theme that emerged. In that context -negatively- female academics emphasised that gender-based prejudices cause occupational discrimination and pose an obstacle to career development. Some previous studies have also found results that confirm this. In many societies, social norms are more restrictive towards females, especially when it comes to gender roles in the labour market and self-employment (Marques, 2017). For example, gender roles have varied between genders, across cultures, and also between homosexuals, and the unchanging result has been unequal practices (Bhasin, 2012); these practices sometimes lead to negative effects on many issues such as female's education, participation in working life and political representation, and income level (Yılmaz et al, 2022). It is seen that there are positive and negative situations that female face based on gender roles. It is emphasised that the perceptions of female academics in Turkey towards gender roles are shaped by culture, religion and patriarchal social structures. On the positive side, supportive family relationships in Turkey and practices such as flexibility in the workplace are expected to promote a more equal gender role distribution for female. On the negative side, however, it is noted that gender-based prejudices hinder female's professional development and lead to discrimination in the labour market. It is also emphasised that even though female's participation in the labour force is supported, female's caring roles are still at the forefront and this may create constraints in their careers.

5. The Theoretical and Practical Implication

This study revealed the perceptions of female academics working in Türkiye about their gender perceptions. These findings will be an important source for both theory and practice showing that being a female, being a mother and being an academic are associated with a gender perception for female academics. This current research will theoretically develop the perception of gender and will be a guide for other studies to be conducted in the future. In particular, examining gender perceptions of female academics with scientific data will be an important theoretical source. In practice, this study will be a serious source for other countries to raise awareness about gender perceptions of female academics.

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