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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Turkey is still perceived as an agricultural country when evaluated in terms of social and economic criteria. Indeed, 45.1% of the population live in the countryside and 45.6% of economically active population is engaged in agriculture. The ratio of female population in rural areas is similar to the general population ratio (45.7 %). However, 74.7% of female population participate in the labour force of the agricultural sector. 2.8 % of women working in agriculture receive salary or wage, 2% are daily wage workers, 7% work for themselves, while a great majority (88.2%) are in the position of family workers with no payment.

In this research the activity of women in the rural life, women's place in the agricultural activities and their participation in the decision making is analysed.

16 villages of Antalya, Burdur, Isparta, Karaman and Mersin districts constitute the research area. Eight villages are located on and around the Burdur-Antalya motor-way ("the Western Route") while the others are on and around the Karaman-Mersin motor-way ("the Eastern Route").*

The main data for the research come from the material collected through questionnaires and observations of 80 married or widowed women in 16 villages. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Questions meant to determine the women's socio-economic characteristics form the first section, while questions concerning women's position in the agricultural holding and in the family are in the second section.

31.3% of the sample consists of the 50-59 years old persons. This is followed by 22.5% of the 31-39 years old group. The shares of young women and middle aged women are close to each other.

70% of women are the primary school graduates and the rate of literacy is 78.8 %. The most important reason for the literacy rate being higher than the country average (71.9 %) is that these villages lie in the Mediterranean

* For the list of 16 villages, visited in November 1997, see the report: "Research origin and its organisation".

region where the primary schools have been introduced in all villages a long time ago. Women who make up the illiterate group are more than 50 years old. Since education of girls after the primary school is not seen as having adequate importance in rural areas and education possibilities outside villages are very limited, women's education usually ends after the primary school. The majority of women (20–40 years old group) said that they had wanted to attend the secondary school and to have a job but their families had not permitted.

93.8% of women answered the question related to the job by saying that they were housewives. However, 71.3% of all women are engaged in farming. It is interesting that in two villages of Burdur and Mersin districts, namely Kişla and Yapkinçi, there were two women engaged in commerce as grocers.

40% of women had married in the age of 15–17 while another 30% — in the age of 20–22. One may appreciate the slow shift of the marriage age by making comparison with the results of Nurettin Yildirak's research in 1974 in the villages of Mus district in Eastern Anatolia, where the average marriage age of women was only 16 (Yildirak, 1974). When we consider that those who married so early are now over 50 years old, we can see that the average marriage age is moving towards 20 and over.

30% of women have two children. Only 17.5% of women have five and more children.

Considering the family size and structure it can be stated that the nuclear family is prevailing in the research area. 27% of married women live together with either their husbands or their families. The percentage of families consisting of 2–4 persons is 66.3%. The percentage of the biggest families (8 or more persons) is 3.4%.

Turkish women participate in the agricultural production to a great extent and in fact they are the main labour force maintaining the whole rural economy (Murray, 1985; Gün, Gülçubuk, 1995).

Most of the women interviewed by us are employed in agricultural sector and at the family farm. 71.3% of them work at family farms while 5% work at other farms. Having the right to own holding but with no land or with very limited area, if any, women work mostly in hoeing or harvesting. 35.1% of women work only in vegetable production, 7% look after the livestock, while 57.9% are engaged in both. 28.8% of interviewed women have no relations with any kind of agricultural work and just do the housework. 30.4% of women say they do not do any agricultural work since they have no land or animals to look after. Age is a very important factor which affects the women's work situation. There is a close relationship between the women's age and their contribution to the agricultural holding. 39.1% of women not working in the holding are more than 50 years old and most of them stated they stopped working because of age.

Table 1

The structure of female participation in the agricultural activities (sample research)

Number of women in:	Only in veg. prod. (1)	Only in livestock prod. (2)	In vegetable & livestock (3)
Landless holdings	1	2	-
Farms of 1-20 da*	14	1	12
Farms of 21-100 da	4	-	15
Farms of 101-200 da	1	-	5
Farms of above 201 da	1	-	1
Total	21	3	33

* 10 da (dekars) = 1 ha

Sources: interviews carried out in 1997 in investigated villages.

There is an inverse correlation between the farm area and the number of women working in. It is a fact that as the area of the farm grows the number of women working on farm decreases. Thus the farms of 0.1 to 2 ha absorb 47.4% of women engaged in agriculture while at farms above 20 ha the share goes down to 3.5%.

Women work mostly in labour intensive occupations (such as hoeing, harvesting) in vegetable and fruit cultivation. In the research area the number of farms involved in animal breeding for market purposes in economic sense, is very limited. The sheep and goat breeding prevails. We have noticed that the closer the animals are grazing to the village area the bigger the share of women participation in the sheep and goat breeding. Cattle breeding, however, is mostly under the responsibility of women. Cleaning the stables, spreading bait, milking and producing butter, cheese and yoghurt from milk is all done by women. Dairy products are consumed by the family and the surplus is sold by women at the market. 42.5% of interviewed families do cattle breeding just for this aim and another 43.5% of families do sheep and goat breeding for market purposes.

Time spent for agricultural activity varies according to the proportions of home and other duties. When there is a lot of work at farm, time spent on farming duties gets obviously longer. Especially during the high seasons of agricultural works women abandon their everyday home duties and work in the fields. As Nurettin Yildirak estimated in his research (Yildirak, 1988) if we consider 1 kg bread ready for consumption there is 60% of the total labour done by women. If there are other individuals in the family who can help women in housework, the burden of the work is less but even in a nuclear family women having children work with extreme tempo.

While they play so important role in work, women's share in decision making is very low. According to the results of another research done by Merter in Malatya (Merter, 1990) 45.4% of decisions concerning the family are taken by males, while 44.2% are taken together with wives. 2.5% of women take decisions themselves, which usually occurs in case of widows or

divorced women. In 7.5% of the cases decisions are taken by the older members of family. With regard to decisions related to the farm, 55% of women state that their husbands take these decisions. Women do not actively take responsibility for the economic and technical decisions with regard to the farm. The answers indicating "common decisions" represented only 21.3% of the sample investigated. In fact, women do not desire to be more active in the decision making since they do not want to add decision making responsibility to their heavy duties.