

# Major Issues on the Status of Women in Turkey<sup>(1)</sup>

The report prepared in 88 pages on the above-mentioned seminar serves to show three important facts:

1. That Turkish women, in spite of Kemal Atatürk's reforms and the efforts he made in favor of women's emancipation, suffer from an inferior status which may be compared to that of their sisters in the majority of Third World Countries<sup>(2)</sup>.

2. That common problems shared by Turkish and Arab women and discussed in the Seminar, make the report about it of special interest to Arab readers as well as to those interested in the status of Third World women as a whole.

3. That a group of highly educated Turkish women and men are deeply aware of the Turkish women's problems and needs, and are convinced of the necessity of working for a change. This group, which succeeded in founding the Turkish Social Science Association, organized in 1978 a seminar on «Women in Turkish Society», followed up in 1980 by another seminar on policy formation. They were responsible for the formulation of recommendations and preparation of the report which the following pages try to summarize.

## Introduction

Dr. Nermin Abadan-Unat, president of the Turkish Social Science Association, introduced the report by giving the main topics of discussion handled by the Seminar. She concluded by saying: «Women's position can only be realistically assessed if division of labor, appropriation systems, power diffusion, decision making processes related directly or indirectly to women's status are completely analyzed.»

## Seminar Report

It was prepared by Dr. Deniz Kandiyoti, from the Bosphorous University in Istanbul, who stated the Seminar objectives as follows: 1) the identification and critical evaluation of present trends and policies, 2) suggestions and recommendations for the future.

Five critical areas were covered by the participants: economic participation, education, social security, health and legal rights of women.

## I — Statistics regarding Women's Work

According to the report, 64% of Turkey's female population reside in rural areas. Eighty eight percent of the female labor force work in agriculture. The work of this group takes the form of unpaid labor which

is only imperfectly recorded in national statistics. Agricultural extension services, credits, setting up of cooperatives are all geared to men. Mechanization of agriculture has decreased the demand for women's labor. The migration of males to urban areas has left many women in charge of households.

## Distribution of the female labor force

The total percentage of employed women (excluding unpaid rural workers) is 10.2%. They are concentrated in low wage industries. Ninety-three percent of them are unskilled and uneducated.

The rate of semi-skilled white collar jobs for women is low. They are concentrated in secretarial jobs and the like.

The absence of nurseries and day-care centers makes women's work outside the home extremely difficult.

On the other hand, the ratios of women in the professions compare favorably with those of Western industrialized countries: one lawyer out of five and one medical doctor out of six are women. Their economic position makes it possible for them to employ migrant women as domestic servants, thus enabling them to devote most of their time to professional activity.

The counterpoint of this group of privileged women are the shanty town women who work in cleaning and other domestic jobs on a daily or monthly paid basis without social security.

The largest category of women in urban areas are housewives. Their ratio has increased by 20% between 1955 and 1975 due to internal migration, scarcity of jobs and non-attractiveness of the ones available. In wealthier and more metropolitan strata, women spend lavishly on self-adornment and leisure.

## Recommendations

### (A) Regarding rural women

1. «Female labor should gain recognition by being properly recorded and their contribution to the G.N.P. (Gross National Product) must be taken into account.»

2. «Women producers in agriculture and traditional crafts should be given support both at the production and marketing ends of their operations.»

3. The desirability of increasing female productivity must not lead to the narrowing of women's options even farther by depriving them of the right to equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

4. Besides the problem of productivity, other problems should receive adequate attention, namely the burden of constant pregnancies, the low age of marriage, the possibility of birth control education and the spread of birth control methods.

### (B) Women employed outside the home.

1. They should be given opportunities for techni-

(1) Seminar Report by Dr. Deniz Kandiyoti, Ankara, 1980.

(2) See Al-Raida, No. 1979, vol. II, no. 10, p.9 and Feb. 1980, vol. III, no. 11, p.8, on Cultural Values and Population Action Programs in Turkey by Dr. Cigdem Kagitcibasi.



cal training in diverse and more remunerative jobs. Adult education is recommended, especially for working women.

2. Labor unions must become aware of the needs of female workers.

3. Child care facilities must be provided in adequate numbers; and maternity leaves should be made longer, while the possibility for women workers to return to their jobs is secured.

4. Protection of women working on an irregular basis.

#### (C) Housewives

1. Recognition of domestic tasks as part of the GNP.

2. Adequate protection of housewives for widowhood, sickness and old age by increasing family allowances or giving them social security.

## II. Education

1. According to UNESCO statistics, illiteracy among Turkish women is one of the highest in the world, with the literacy differential between the sexes reaching 35%.

2. Literacy training should be accompanied by the teaching of practical and technical skills.

3. Elimination of sex-typing from textbooks and school curricula, should be a primary concern.

4. Women of secondary and high school levels should be allowed to join technical vocational schools.

5. Courses on sex education and birth control should be incorporated into school curricula.

6. Science education among women must be encouraged.

7. Adult and on-the-job education for parents should train them in the equality of the sexes. It should also help women outside the school system to acquire new skills and to receive on-the-job training and mid-career education.

## III. Social Security

Major shortcomings of the system:

1. Inadequate breadth of coverage, the rural population excluded.

2. Inadequate financial resources, since the system is fed by contributions paid directly by beneficiaries and employers.

3. Disparity and lack of coordination among social security systems which have been instituted at different times with different aims and norms.

4. Early retirement of women.

5. Employment of women as clandestine workers and on an irregular basis.

6. Women employed in domestic service do not fall within the scope of organized and insured jobs.

7. Insurance of housewives seems to benefit only the richer women who can pay the premiums required for insurance.

## Traditional social security mechanisms:

1. Reliance on family and children as security for old age.

2. Non-productive forms of investment like jewelry, gold, shares in land or in legal ownership of a residence.

## Recommendations

They include the reform of the security system to include rural women; the revision of the insurance scheme for housewives; changes in inheritance laws to favor women; development and expansion of institutions for the care of the aged and destitute.

## IV Health

Statistics made in 1975 show a relatively high mortality rate among Turkish women aged 15-44. This fact is directly related to their high fertility profiles and the frequency of gynecological pathologies, due to the absence of prenatal care and to the non-hygienic conditions under which 93% of deliveries are performed, namely, in homes by untrained persons.

High fertility rates indicate the low level of use and the inefficiency of birth control methods.

Other factors of female mortality:

Illegal abortion.

Nutritional deficiencies resulting from women's special needs.

Deficient hygienic conditions in general.

## Recommendations

Improvement and extension of health services.

Training of midwives and nurses.

Birth control should be made easily and cheaply available.

Legislation on abortion should be changed.

Planning for an effective nutrition program encouraging the production of nutritive foods at a low cost.

Raising the overall level of hygiene and sanitation by establishing clean water supplies and proper sewerage.

## V Legal Rights

The legal status of Turkish women presents so many problems that it is impossible to give a clear idea about it in this abridged report. The recommendations reproduced in the original report and briefly related here offer evidence of the numerous injustices imposed on women in the legal field. The following is a brief account of those recommendations:

1. The enforcement of laws regarding a legal age of marriage, civil marriage and mutual consent in marriage should be made a subject of stricter control.

2. The law on «Children Requiring Protection» should be used to extend protection and shelter to children whose labor is exploited, who are suffering



from misuse of custody and who run the risk of becoming prostitutes.

3. The clauses which undermine equality among partners in the marriage union should be abolished as unconstitutional.

4. The civic code clause making women's employment subject to the husbands' permission (clause 159) should be abolished as unconstitutional.

5. The laws regulating employed women's maternity leaves should be unified around a single set of norms. Women should be given the option of extension of leave at the very least on an unpaid basis, as well as the possibility of dividing their leave period before and after delivery, according to their needs.

6. Women's rights for child-care facilities for their pre-school children should be extended to all employees regardless of their legal status (civil servant or worker).

7. The separation of goods as a property system has serious disadvantages for women. This system could be modified as follows: Spouses could retain control over and property of the separate possessions they bring to the marriage. However, those goods acquired after the marriage should be considered as "common goods" and shared in the case of divorce. The Civic Code contains such an optional system on "partnership limited to acquired goods".

8. The payment of alimony in cases of poverty should not be limited to a one-year period as specified by clause 144 but extended until such time that there is an improvement in the spouse's material conditions or until remarriage occurs. Provisions must also be made for the realistic reappraisal of the amount of minimum alimony required to meet rising costs of living.

9. The close connection and complementarity between property regimes and inheritance laws is widely recognized. If the separation of goods were to remain the accepted property regime in Turkey, the

increase of the surviving spouse's share and the exclusion of distant relatives from inheritance would seem essential.

10. Abortion should be made legal, particularly to put a rapid stop to women's death or infirmity following illegal abortion under unsanitary and primitive conditions.

1. Laws which, wittingly or unwittingly, endorse a double standard in sexuality (such as penal code clauses 440 and 441 on adultery, penal code clause 462 on extenuating circumstances for homicide or bodily assault) should be amended and freed of such content.

### Conclusion

Dr. Kandiyoti concludes with the following reflections:

While we believe, as many do, that women's status constitutes an intrinsic part of broader issues, we still claim that their problems be treated as a separate issue within overall national development problems.

It is generally admitted that the projects geared to women by international aid agencies are compatible with the goal of increasing overall productivity, hence it is necessary to support all measures that help to increase women's participation in it such as providing them with credit, extension services, marketing co-operatives, education, health, contraceptive services and so on.

The question that may be raised is whether the sectoral allocation of the sexes will remain largely unchanged, i.e. whether women will continue to be relegated to their traditional activities in the fields, in their homes and at their weaving looms.

If productivity is the sole aim of development, how compatible would it be with that of equal opportunity and equality of rights between the sexes?