Gender Role Attitude and Female Labor Force Participation

A case study of İzmir*

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the significance of gender role attitude among the other socio-economic determinants of female labor force participation rate. This paper employs a recent household labor market survey that was conducted in İzmir during the summer of 2010 covering 9,756 individuals. Our initial findings based on logit estimations indicate that the gender role attitude associated with the job market behavior of the mother is an important determinant of female labor force participation. However, the same effect loses its significance once we control for women's own job experience. This result suggests that although the gender role attitude associated with the job market behavior of the mother can induce women to participate in the labor market initially, the same attitude can change by women's own experience in the job market and affect labor force participation rate adversely. The results of this paper are also robust when the sample is disaggregated by education in order to account for the difference between less and more educated women in the labor market.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine whether women’s attitudes associated with their mother’s employment experience and educational attainment can be important in explaining the low rates of labor force attachment observed in Turkish labor markets. Although the socio-economic determinants of female labor force participation rate in Turkey have been analyzed in the literature (Kasnakoglu, Z. and M. Dayioglu, 1997; Baslevent, C. and O. Onaran, 2003; Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2008; Aran et al., 2010; Dayıoğlu and Kırdağ, 2010), weak labor attachment rather than labor force participation rate has not been thoroughly investigated other than recent work by İlkkaracan (2012).

Although low female labor force participation rate itself constitutes a major barrier both to the full utilization resources in an economy and, more importantly, to the empowerment of women, it should not be the sole target of economic policies without being integrated with low attachment rate. İlkkaracan shows that in 2008 half of the urban women in Turkey enter labor market at some point during their life-cycle without staying there for more than a few years (p. 18, 2012). Our initial findings based on a recent household survey from İzmir region in the summer of 2010 indicate a similar problem. Although the urban women’s labor force participation rate is only 28 %, almost 57 % of women in the active working age must have entered the labor market. For less-than high-school graduates in İzmir the experience rate is about 48 %, whereas the same rate for highly educated urban women rises up to 67 %.

Our motivation for this paper has been the importance of gender attitudes of women regarding their labor market decisions. The role of gender attitudes in the context of female labor force participation has been thoroughly discussed in the literature (Harris and Firestone, 1998). The initial assumption of this paper is that higher labor force participation is an expression of more equal gender attitude by keeping all other things constant. We build our argument on stylized
fact about the link between more progressive gender role attitudes and the higher hours worked in the labor market (Knudsen, 2001; Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004; Crompton and Lyonette, 2005; Fortin, 2005; Kan, 2007; Steiber and Haas, 2009).

We do not imply that the attitudes are determined unilaterally by exogenous preferences with no social constraints as argued by Hakim (2000). Rather than assuming exogenous gender attitudes with respect to labor market behavior, recent literature have also emphasized the endogenous character of gender attitudes and shed light on different mechanisms where the attitudes are formed by various social processes.

Our findings point out to the importance of gender role attitude associated with mother’s employment experience and educational attainment on initial female labor force participation rate. This effect seems to lose its significance over time, once women enter the labor market. However, given the limits of our data set, we are in no position to fully account for the exact dynamics between the reversal of job market behavior of women and their attitudes. In other words, based only on our findings, we cannot unambiguously argue whether the low attachment of women is an evidence for changing attitudes (i.e. becoming more traditional) or an indicator of social constraints observed in the labor markets along with their discriminatory effects on women.

**Selected Literature Review**

Moen et al. (1997) pose an important question. Does a daughter shape her own attitude through their mother’s actual behavior in the job market and her beliefs, or, does the attitude formation take place through the daughter’s own experience in the adulthood? They claim that mother’s own identity as a participant in the labor market should affect daughter’s attitudes in the early years of her formation. Their results indicate that mother’s beliefs rather than her attitude seem to play a more important role in forming daughter’s job market
behavior. However, this result may not be statistically reliable, because by including mother’s attitude along with job experience in the same equation, Moen do not pay any attention to a possible correlation of these two variables. Socialization process within family along with educational attainment seems to be crucial in forming the gender attitude regarding the labor force participation rate.

Harris and Firestone (1998) show that both mother’s labor force participation and educational attainment are likely to be related to more egalitarian views held by daughters, however, they also find empirical evidence for positive effect of work experience on progressive gender role attitude. Crompton and Lyonette (2005) reach a similar conclusion with the help of ISSP 2002 Family module. Accordingly, women’s self education and their mothers’ work experience have positive effect on a more equal gender role attitude which is strongly associated with longer hours in the labor market.

Farre and Vella (07) show that maternal employment is important in explaining daughter’s attitude regarding labor force participation with the help of longitudinal data from the U.S. Both mother’s work experience and education are used as instrumental variables in order to deal with potential endogeneity of attitude variable. Therefore they come up with statistical evidence indicating that largest change in attitudes was observed due to the variations in mother’s job experience.

On the other hand, there is also strong empirical evidence for the recursive relationship between women’s attitudes and their labor market behavior. Steiber and Haas (2009) discuss the empirical evidence for the fact that women with more traditional views are less likely to join the labor force. Yet, the working women also tend to switch to more egalitarian views about gender role over time. However, they also emphasize the mediating role of the
institutions, mostly at the state level, in order to understand how the job market experience can exert its effect in different ways.

Child effect is important in analyzing women’s job market behavior. However, the importance of this effect may not be derived solely from more traditional gender role attitudes which are shaped before entering the job market. The effect of children on women’s labor supply is partly determined by institutional arrangements regarding policies such as childcare. Therefore gender role attitudes can both shape and be affected by institutional arrangements. Utunk et al. (2005) provide cross-country evidence for the primary role of institutional factors over gender norms in determining women’s labor supply. In other words, gender values do not have significant effect on women’s behavior in the job market independently of institutional factors. Gender values may have an effect on women’s changes in labour supply, but this effect is explained by the intermediating effect of institutions.

Job market experience can be a crucial factor in changing the attitudes of women by offering them different constraints and opportunities. Policies regarding maternity leave, childcare support tend to be strongly associated with women’s decisions about their attachment to the labor market after giving birth to their child (Kan, 2007). Kan’s research based on work-life history data from the British Household Panel Survey (1991–2001) shows that although the gender-role attitudes can be important in explaining labor supply decision of women at the earlier stage of their participation, job experience accumulated in the labor market over time starts to exert its effect on gender-role attitude.

Crompton and Harris (1998) discuss profession-specific working arrangements that can be important in shaping women’s attitudes by providing them with particular opportunities with childcare. Additionally, some important limitations on the female labor supply behavior
come from staff recruitment procedures and replacement programs that usually treat men and women differently.

**Description of the Model and the Variables**

The data utilized in this paper comes from İzmir Labor Market Household Survey conducted in İzmir during the summer of 2010 (Ogus-Binatli et al., 2011). İzmir is the third largest city in Turkey and hosts almost 6 percent of the Turkish labor force. There are 3,162 randomly selected household making up a representative sample of the province of İzmir. These households cover 9,756 persons whom 6,859 are between the ages of 15 and 65. Accordingly, the labor force participation rate is 28 % for the whole women sample. It reduces down to 27.5 % when we exclude rural areas from our sample. On the other hand, the same ratio is 19 and 47 % for low- and high-education groups, respectively.

We estimate probabilities of female labor force participation by using a logit model where the dependent variable is the position of the individual regarding their labor market position. If the individual was looking for job or employed in last month prior to survey date, she will be considered participant in the labor market and $Z$ takes on value 1. Otherwise, $Z$ will be 0 for all women who are between 15 and 65 years old.

$$Z_i = \beta_i X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

$X_i$ will consist of all other variables. First group of variables consists of individual characteristics such as age, education level, marital status, residence (urban or rural), the presence of young children and old dependents, being a household head, and being a migrant. Another group of variables provides information about the economic position of the individual such as the family income, presence of any household member with health insurance, and the house ownership. Lastly, there are variables in order to account for the role of gender attitude such as education level of mother, and the job experience of both parents.
Expected positive effect of education labor supply comes from the fact that education stands for potential earnings in the labor market. Following Crampton (2005) it can also be argued that highly educated women tend to be strongly associated with more modern views on gender roles. On the other hand, age may represent the job market experience of the individual and therefore we expect a positive relationship between higher age and job market participation. We also include the number of very young and very old dependents (children younger than 7 years old and parents of household head older than 65 years old) as an explanatory variable. The great majority of dependents are children (average of 0.33 children and 0.03 elderly). We expect that women (but not men) in the households with more dependents leave labor force in order to take care of them. Marital status is another independent variable that may account for the effects of socially imposed gender roles on women’s different behavior regarding mobility patterns. Both of these effects are expected to reduce the labor force participation.

Being a household head implies full responsibility for the other members of the household. However, given that there is another variable to account for the responsibilities associated with the household members, the independent effect of this variable is ambiguous. We also include rural dummy variable to account for household location. TURKSTAT (Turkish Statistical Institution) defines a county rural if its population is less than twenty thousand. We expect that living in a rural region to increase labor force participation because great majority of men and women in İzmir’s rural areas are employed in family farms as either owner operators or as unpaid family workers. Another potentially important demographic variable affecting the mobility patterns in the labor market is migration. Particularly, women from rural areas who worked previously as unpaid family workers tend to become unemployed or leave the labor force after migrating to the cities (Aran et al., 2010). The interviewee is
defined as a migrant if s/he has migrated to İzmir after 1989. Hence we expect migrants to be less likely to participate in the labor force.

In order to account for any effect of economic hardship on labor force participation decision of women, we employ three different variables. The first one is the self-reported earnings of all household members other than the interviewee. Either this coefficient can take on negative value if the women tend to participate in the labor force out of financial difficulties in the household, or the effect can be positive given that higher household income can contribute to the childcare costs. In a similar way, having someone else with access to health insurance (associated with employment in formal sector) in the household can reduce women’s need to join the labor force. Lastly, home ownership can be considered a proxy for wealth position.

The remaining three variables are used in order to analyze the importance of attitude regarding women behavior in the labor market. In the absence of explicit information about the gender attitude of women, we rely on information from those variables that are found to be most important determinants of gender role attitude in the related literature. Two of them are related directly to mother, her own job experience and educational attainment. The last one is about father’s job market experience. We are particularly interested in the variables associated with the women’s mother behavior and expect to find positive effects for both job experience and education level.

Our aim is not only to examine the effect of gender attitude on labor force participation rate but also whether this effect can help women to stay in the labor market after their initial entry. Without having longitudinal data where we can trace the effects of attitude on labor force participation with a lag, we divide our sample into two groups according to past labor market experience of women who are currently participating in the market. If the gender attitude associated with mother’s job market experience keep its importance not only at the initial
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entry into the labor market but also during the later stages of women’s life, then the coefficient of those variables are expected not to change between the women with job experience and no experience at all. Lastly, we divide the whole sample into two groups in order to examine the relationship between gender attitudes of women and labor market experience across education levels. We expect that mother’s job market experience can be more important for women with lower educational attainment.

Results

In the first model (table 1 for all estimation results), our results are based on the whole sample. Similar to İlkkaracan (2012) being married has a larger effect than having dependents on the probability of not participating in the labor market. Given that our main assumption assigns an independent role to mother’s job experience and educational attainment in forming women’s attitude, the larger effect of being married can be interpreted as husband’s and his family’s role in altering women’s attitude (İlkekaracan, 2012).

Both having some family member with health insurance and owning the house reduce the probability of participating in the labor force and therefore supporting the link between financial hardship and women’s decision to entry the labor market. On the contrary, there is a positive relationship between household income and labor force participation rate. One explanation can be that with more income there is better access to childcare and women can easily participate in the labor force. Another possibility is the fact that highly educated women tend to marry the man of the same education level.

Education turns out to be statistically significant in the regression, and it can directly be related to its importance as an indicator of potential earnings in the labor market. Mother’s job experience turns out to be one of the most important factors determining female labor force participation. The positive contribution of having a worked-mother supports the existing
literature where mother’s work experience is highly associated with non-traditional gender attitudes held by their daughters. On the other hand, mother’s educational attainment is also important but it has a lower statistical significance.

In the second model, we run the model for low-educated group. The most important change is with respect to higher odds of participating in the labor force as a result of having a worked-mother. The variable is again the most important determinant of labor force participation for women. When we run the same model for women with at least high-school diploma, however, there is a decrease both in the magnitude and significance of the worked-mother variable. Women’s own education turns out to be the most important determinant of labor force participation rate for this group.

In the next step, we use to different samples. While there is no change regarding the composition of women in the labor force, we utilize two different non-participant groups. The first one (no job experience) consists of non-participant women with no prior job experience, and the second group (job experience) includes only those non-participants who must have actively entered labor force at some point of their lives. Our motivation is to find out whether mother’s prior job experience can retain its effect on women’s labor force participation through shaping their gender attitudes even after women gained some personal experience in the labor market. In other words, we try to investigate the effectiveness of mother’s prior job experience regarding women’s labor force attachment.

When we just examine the effects of the same variables on the probability of participating in the labor force against non-participants with no job experience, then, mother’s prior job experience turns out to be much more important for the whole group. Even for the highly-educated people, mother’s job experience by forming women’s gender attitude seems to have more important than the daughter’s own education level if the non-participants do not have
any job market experience. However, mother’s prior job experience loses its overall significance in all groups once we control for women’s own job experience. In other words, significance of mother’s job experience as a factor determining women’s initial entry into the labor force cannot help women sustain their attachment to the labor force.

TABLE 1 HERE

Conclusion

What are the implications of the above results? First of all, we simply do not know whether women’s not staying in the labor force can be a reflection of a more traditional gender attitude given the lack of explicit data about her gender attitude. Women, who entered the labor force based on their non-traditional gender attitude associated with their mother’s prior job experience, can still hold the same attitude, but, be constrained by other processes that can be experienced only after joining the labor force. Therefore there can be a group of women whose behavior may be at odds with their attitude. On the other hand, women can also adapt their attitudes to new circumstances and start embracing more traditional gender norms. This classification may correspond to the distinction used by İlkkaracan (2012) between “discontent” and “content” nonparticipant homemakers. In both cases, it is important to understand how and why women’s own job experience may adversely affect the relationship between attitude and job market behavior resulting in low labor force attachment.

In this context, women’s decision to leave the job market may be the result of discriminatory social policies in the areas of childcare support, maternity leave etc. that would reinforce traditional gender roles regarding childbearing and childrearing. However, there can be other experiences along with discriminatory effects on women such as mobbing, the lack of adequate facilities, regulations of labor hours, gender wage gap, and feminization of jobs. Therefore, although women may escape from traditional gender norms during their initial
labor force entry based on their non-traditional gender attitudes related to their mother’s work experience, traditional gender norms seem to reinforce their influence on the attitude-job market behavior of the same women through institutional arrangements in the labor market and social policies. As the next step in our project, we intend to conduct a new survey for women where we can inquire more adequately about how exactly women’s own job experience alter the relationship between job market behavior and gender attitudes.

REFERENCE


This is a preliminary draft.

**TABLE 1 Estimation Results (odds ratios)**

***, **, and * denote statistical significance at 1, 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively.

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<td>Age</td>
<td>1.16***</td>
<td>1.14***</td>
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<td>1.20***</td>
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<td>Household Head Migrant</td>
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<td>0.92</td>
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<td>1.71***</td>
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<td>3.52*</td>
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