**A research on the problems that female school administrators face at schools in Turkey: Case of Tokat and Samsun Provinces**

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The expectation of society from male individuals is to keep presence in public spheres and consistently sustain rationality. Expectation from female individuals is, however, to be emotional-weak, and to build their lives on their house, spouse and children. In such a context, women continue their lives with a work-or-home dilemma. Although it seems that women make progress in moving towards management in many professional fields, there is no evidence of such progress in the field of education. This research presents the problems that female administrators working in the field of education in Tokat and Samsun provinces stemming from their being female. Of the qualitative research methods, semi-structured interview technique was used in the study – in which ten female administrators participated. As a result of the study, it was concluded that women cannot be represented in management positions sufficiently enough due to the social perception, the roles ascribed to them by society, and their responsibilities and duties within the family. Further, women were found not be very eager to become administrators because of obstacles they put themselves. Female administrators participating in the study reported that they encountered some problems in management of educational institutions because of the reasons stated above.

**Key words:** Women, female administrators, school administrators in Tokat and Samsun.

**INTRODUCTION**

As a result of an individual's being female or male, the society that individual lives in shapes him or her according to the patterns believed to be appropriate for genders. Object and events that an individual have encountered since birth are full of images that the society believes appropriate for genders. These images characterise individuals as weak and passive women and strong active men. Society structures female and male identities in a way that they undertake the roles assigned to them. As a result of this construction, man takes the role of being active in public spheres, and woman takes that of being active in the house and family (Gümüşoğlu, 2008: 40). The notion ‘working life’ brings serving in income-generating jobs to mind in the first place; however, women remain largely outside of those jobs (Tutar and Yetişen, 2009: 124).

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The development level of societies is directly correlated with the value attached on women (Eroğlu, 2004: 24). Similarly, women’s benefiting from social and economic developments differs depending on the development level of societies (Gönülü and İcli, 2001: 82). When findings from professional areas like education and healthcare in developing countries are evaluated, it is seen that women take the backseat of men (Tutar and Yetişen, 2009: 117). Women own multi-directional and multi-dimensional roles, hence their job opportunities must be enhanced and reorganised; additionally, their roles and relationships within the family must be reviewed and redefined (Lynch, 2008: 590).

It is obvious that there are fewer women in working life. Nevertheless, women have started to take hold of working life and the number of women working has been increasing in the last years (Sherman, 2000). Almost in every country, men possess management positions. Women may have the chance to get job experiences, yet they cannot have the chance of working in management positions (Omar and Davidson, 2001). Society expects men to keep presence in public spheres and consistently sustain rationality. The expectation from women is, however, to be emotional-weak, and to build their lives on their house, spouse and children.

Education given to women and jobs chosen should have the nature of not being harmful for the sphere consisting of their house, spouse and children. Home and work life dilemma is seen to be a continuous burden on working women’s backs (Eyüboğlu et al., 2004: 4). Additionally, some traditional attitudes suggesting women are more worthless and weaker than men even prevent young girls from making use of their educational rights. Also in historical process, woman was thought to be inferior despite her outstanding feature of being “mother” and “fertile” and women employment was obstructed due to the consideration of “a woman’s place is her home” (Tuskan, 2012: 445-446).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Status of women in society has been the most crucial criteria determining gender equality and level of civilization in societies. As well as being a fundamental principle of democracy, gender equality serves as an important element in empowering and supporting women by pioneering the formation of a strong society. In this respect, women’s benefiting from political, economical rights and those ensuring them participate in cultural life in the same way as men do is an issue that takes place, and needs to take place, in the upper row of our country’s agenda. In order to ensure equality, important studies were carried out for the women to have legal rights and for the implementation of those rights (tbmm.gov.tr/women commission).

Women employment in Turkey has always attracted attention as an issue that the government always regards and tries to better. Women in Turkey gained the right to work in public administration in March 3, 1924 by the acceptance of Unification of Education Act. It was attempted to equalize the legal status of women by the Dress Code Reform in 1925, Turkish Civil Code in 1926 and right to vote and stand for the local elections in 1930 and national elections in 1934 (Tutar and Yetişen, 2009: 124). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the one that enabled women in Turkey to have a serious say in management (Ergin and Çınkır, 2005). However, in terms of participation in employment, women have a disadvantageous position compared to men. In the republican period, women’s participation in the workforce accelerated being parallel to the rise in their level of education. Despite this, there has still been inequality against women in various levels of education and employment (KSSGM, 2000:5).

Although women have been equalized to men in employment areas by legal regulations, women’s role in working life, and also their contribution to working life, is not at the desired level because of public gender roles, social, cultural and economic reasons. All these issues make us face the concept of “Glass Ceiling” which can be defined as “an invisible layer that blocks women’s way up to management in working life” (Wirth, 2001:4-5). This concept was cogitated in the USA in 1970s and was defined as invisible barriers resulting from some kind of prejudice and cultural factors which prevent women from arriving at administratorial positions (Wirth, 2001:1; Morrison and von Glinow, 1990:200-208). Glass ceiling is the invisible barriers resulting from the society’s social, cultural and economic structure and forming the prejudice which suggests that women cannot labour in working life with the desired productivity and continuity (Morrison and von Glinow, 1990:200-208). Some of the reasons why women cannot build their way up to management positions in spite of the fact that they can take place in working life more easily and quicker compared to the past are as the following:

**Public role:** Society assigns women the role to stay at home and manage the household issues. This role is determined by social prejudices (Gökalp, 2008: 29).

**Learned helplessness:** Women fail to reach administratorial positions because of social prejudices, inequality of opportunities, and the obstacles they face in in working life. This situation forms a general judgement in women’s mind, hence creates learned helplessness (Binen, 2013: 28).

**Social prejudice:** Prejudices suggesting women would not be successful in working life due to their personal characteristics are major obstacles preventing women to become administrators.

**Institution climate:** Women encounter barriers such as not being able to find suitable role models, prejudices, and not being able to get accepted by other employers in the institutions they work for (Atay, 1998: 249).
Inequality of opportunity: When women and men are in equal terms for a administrational position, often men are preferred (Palmer and Hyman, 1993).

Interior obstacles: Women interiorise exterior obstacles and roles determined by the society. As a result of this, they prevent themselves by believing that they would not succeed in a administrational position (Güldal, 2006: 70).

Since 1970s, it is observed that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women who begin to work, and what is more, aimed at administratorial positions. In the light of this, studies show that women start working in equal terms with men, but later on their work experiences and career paths depart (Morrison and von Glinow, 1990:200-208). Although it is known that most of the primary school teachers are women in almost every part of the world, it is observed that such a participation gradually subsides on the way to administratorial positions. According to data in 2013-2014 academic year (http://kadinnstatusu.gov.tr/uygulamalar/turkiyede-kadin), the numbers and percentages of women working in educational institutes are as follows:

1. 94,6 % of 63.327 teachers serving in preschool education (59.940),
2. 58,16 % of 288.444 teachers serving in primary school education (167.783),
3. 53,16 % of 280.804 teachers serving in secondary school education (149.241),
4. 45,58 % of 278.641 teachers serving in high school education (127.028) are female.

The situation for working women in our country is almost the same. For example, although women could start to serve in school management in 1871-1872, the first District Director of National Education was appointed in 1968, and the first Provincial Director of National Education was appointed in 1990 (Aydın, 2009). According to data of Strategy Development Department in Ministry of Education (MOE) dated February 2014, 15,51 % of 103.304 Administrators (15,970) working in MOE’s central or rural schools are female. The situation in terms of the number of administrators serving in provincial organizations is as follows:

1. 2 of 81 Provincial Administrators of National Education (2.5%),
2. 5 of 859 District Administrators of National Education (0.6%) are females.
3. 5.436 of 37.369 school Administrators (14.6%),
4. 7.749 of 50.641 deputy school Administrators (15.3%) are females.

Head of Ministry of Education, in his statement on February 13, 2015, explained that the Ministry should give more positions to women in management and said: “As the Minister of Education, I have to confess one our our shortcomings, our weaknesses. As the Ministry of Education, we have not reached our targeted number of female administrators yet. We only have 8 Provincial Administrators of National Education and unfortunately, just one Director of National Education. This has a reason: the reflection of barriers that were previously put in front of our women. Unfortunately, women, women working in educational institutions, could start the journey quite behind. Now we are trying to accelerate it. Hopefully, in the following years, we will carry the share of women in the administratorial positions in the Ministry of Education to the level they deserve. This is necessary for the Ministry of Education because a vast majority of those in our teaching staff, more than half, are women” (http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/index/kadin_yonetici).

As it can be clearly seen, women cannot be represented adequately enough in administratorial positions in education. Although studies show that the number of working women has risen, the number of women administrators has not risen in a parallel direction. The rate of women to serve in top-level management in all occupations is considered to be 0,8% (Atakli et al., 2004; Duman, 2008). Institutional culture and management experiences which prevent women from taking part in management are taken into consideration. This prevention can also be observed in the field of educational administration (Figure 1).

The major factors that prevent women from building their way up to management are social and cultural prejudices. There is a sense in community suggesting that women should perform in occupations suitable for their roles assigned to them by society. Here, we can talk about obstacles that women put themselves as well as exterior factors. Furthermore, women pull away from the responsibilities of management because of the responsibilities and duties they interiorise within the family, especially as mothers.

According to Ertürk (1997), education is a process of intentional and planned behavioral change in the desired way. The ‘desired way’ here can be defined as changing behavior in the way that is accepted and desired by society. In the light of this, although education focuses on a behavioral change in the individual, it is an inevitable fact that it also affects the whole structure of a society. In today’s developing world, education is the major factor for societies to adapt to contemporary changes. Education takes its indispensable place as a right in all agreements with the basis of human rights. In the Constitution of our country Article 42, “right of education” is mentioned as an unavoidable right. Education is every individual’s right without any race or gender discrimination. In the last years, gender equality poses as the most important issue on the agenda. In developing and underdeveloped countries, the terms are against women. A lot of studies and legal regulations have been carried out for years in
order to get rid of this problem. By the help of these, the number of women continuing to have education from primary school to university has increased. This situation has positively affected women to stand out in professional occupations requiring expertise, rather than being unqualified and unpaid individuals. Women now come to the forefront of working life in management levels.

Education is provided formally in school organizations. Compared to men, women are represented more as teachers in educational institutions both in the world and in our country. However, this situation is vice versa in administrational positions of educational institutions. Women are not at the desired level yet as being administrators in educational institutions.

The contribution of this study is very important for the researchers, educators, and readers in educational science. Since, the results of this study are informative because of coming from different country, Turkey. Especially, as a sense of modernism, this study has focused on women leaders in schooling. The aim of this study is to detect the problems female school administrators face. In the light of this, answers to following questions were sought:

What are the problems that female school administrators face
1- about the staff at the school they work in?
2- about the students and their parents?
3- in the process of being appointed to management?
4- in their family context?
In this study, qualitative research methods were used for an in-depth analysis of the issue. Qualitative research can be defined as a way of research in which the researchers examine the issues in their natural environment, and deal with them in an interpretive way and with multiple methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; cited from: Ekiz, 2003: 27). Because the study aims at an in-depth investigation of the problems that female administrators working in the field of education in Tokat and Samsun provinces, phenomenological pattern was used as it fits the nature of the issue. In studies where phenomenological pattern is used, the intention is to analyze a situation or an event deeply as it is and comment on it. Additionally, it is intended to reveal an individual’s life, perception, view and thoughts (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). Purposive sampling methods became evident during the qualitative research process. In this research, participants were chosen by criterion sampling method among the purposive sampling methods. Purposive sampling makes the in depth analysis and research of situations predicted to possess rich information possible (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). As can be understood from the above literature, the researcher used a qualitative research design in order to get in-depth information about study.

Research group

Ten female school administrators working in Tokat and Samsun provinces, who were chosen by criterion sampling method among the purposive sampling methods, voluntarily participated in this research.

Data collection tool

In the study, semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection tool in order to identify the problems that female school administrators face. Interview is a data collection tool used to gather information about individuals’ experiences, thoughts and attitudes. Interviews present what people think and why; what their emotions, attitudes and feelings are; and what factors direct their behaviours (Ekiz, 2012: 62). Semi-structured interview form was used in the study to gather in depth information about the related issue and to make the interviewee express herself comfortably. In the process of forming semi-structured interview form, literature was reviewed first and in the light of the information collected, research questions were designed. Research questions were presented to field experts, edited after the feedbacks and interviews were initiated later on.

Data resources

Ten female school administrators working in Tokat and Samsun provinces constitute the data resources in this study. Sampling was determined by stratified sampling. Stratified sampling is the determination of participants by taking their specific features into account in a way to represent the universe. For this reason, school administrators working in preschools, primary schools, secondary schools and high schools were included in the study. Research data were collected by face to face interviews with female school administrators through the semi-structured form designed.

FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

Problems that female in the field of education face were investigated in various themes in the light of data gathered by the analysis of the interviews with participants. In this respect, as a result of the analysis of interviews, problems were categorized under 4 themes: problems related to the staff, parents, students and the process of appointment to the management. Data explain the problems that administrators face as below.

It was seen that all female school administrators had had problems with the staff for once or more. Two of the administrators stated that it was difficult to work with female staff. We can present this situation as follows:

“There are problems about wording when I’m working with female staff. As our friendship bond is stronger, I sometimes experience worthlessness. They trust me so much that they expect me to accept their excuses whenever they ask for time off work. If I don’t, they may be offended.”

“Female staff is more whimsical. And I do not believe that they want to be directed by a female because jealousy is common among women …”

Çelikten (2004), in his study “Women on the administrator chairs of schools: Case of Kayseri”, stated that female school administrators get negative attitudes from not only male staff but also female staff, which is a parallel argument to this study. He supported this statement with these example expressions of a participant; “Female teachers behave more emotionally and whimsically, they do not share and they are selfish; males are more sharing and helpful”. The very same participant also stated that “women prefer to see a man in the management and not a woman”.

A survey by Ranstad, a human resources consulting firm, revealed that women do not like working with other women, or seeing them as their administrators. According to the data of this survey, throughout the world, 54% of women would like to work with men while 29% would like to work with women. 17% chooses to keep impartial. Additionally, 45% of women prefer male administrators while 25% prefer female administrators. According to the same survey, the situation is not different in Turkey. Of the women in Turkey, 60% prefer male administrators while 22% prefer female administrators (http://www.kigem.com/kadin-calisan-erkek-yonetici-tercih-ediyor.html).

In our study, female school administrators explained their problems with male staff as follows:

“A highly conservative teacher even talks by avoiding eye contact.”

“If there are no women in National Education meetings, you are left alone because starting a dialogue with men is seen as social discrimination.”

“Male staff does not take me seriously as I am a female. They believe that I cannot be a administrator. In such situations I am obliged to apply official sanctions and this sometimes results in resentment.”
The administrators also stated that they have some problems with the staff working in auxiliary services at school. Their statements are as follows:

“They do not take me seriously, I hear things like ‘you are a woman, you would not understand’.”

“Workers do not take us seriously as we are women and I believe this situation is directly related to the fact that women are of secondary importance.”

“I can read the belief that ‘women cannot make good administrators’ in the eyes of people we temporarily hire. I sometimes even encounter the exaggerated form of it: contempt.”

“It is really hard to be a founding administrator. I had to give my private telephone number to the workers and unfortunately I was harassed several times by phone.”

“I really have difficulty especially in making the staff in auxiliary services work. Their perception of woman is much more different.”

In his study, Çelikten (2004) states that when a female school director appointed to his school, a cleaner asked to be appointed to another school because “it was humiliating for him to get orders from a woman”. These findings show that standard of judgement of society towards female school administrators is not actually positive. Two examples of problems with staff were stated above. Findings are obtained from female school administrators’ statements and social standards of judgement towards female school administrators.

Female school administrators explain the problems they experience with parents as follows:

“A parent came to me and told she cannot pay for the revenues due to financial problems. She wanted to help with the stuff at school instead, and I agreed. However, she just came and worked just for one day. Later on, I found out that she did not have financial problems, and I asked her to come to school for a talk. However, it was her husband who showed up! He was so rude and I was seriously affronted. And there is no CCTV at school to prove all these.”

“Society seeks male administrators. Sometimes we face bullying.”

“Some fathers hesitate to tell me problems about their children just because I am a female.” “I feel some fathers do not take me seriously because I am a woman. They believe I cannot make a good administrator as I am female.”

Some female school administrators, however, say especially mothers of students trust them so much that they share even the smallest unimportant details, and they sometimes ask more for their children, but such problem can be handled by talking beforehand without becoming a problem.

As for the relationship with the students, female school administrators did not state many problems. A few female school administrators indicated they had trouble:

“I have difficulty in imposing discipline and authority on male students.”

“Sometimes students mock at my voice, or clothes... because I am a woman.”

Female school administrators do not have many problems with the students. The reasons for this may be their ‘motherly’ compassion towards children and their great communication skills. Also, Çelikten (2004) believes the most outstanding features of female school administrators are “communication” and “human relations”. In this respect, it is normal that they do not have many problems with students. When studies in this field were analyzed, it was seen that there are some behavioral differences between male and female administrators but female administrators give much more importance to interpersonal relationships and to the aims of their institution (Turan and Ebiçlioğlu, 2002: 448). As a result, it can be said that female administrators, focusing on communication and interpersonal relations, have a positive communication process with their students.

Problems that female school administrators experience during the process of appointment to management can be explained as follows:

“I believe women are disadvantageous in the appointment process.”

“I believe male administrators are favored in oral interviews.”

“They say they wanted to see women at higher levels but they do not put this in practice. There exists a problem of ‘favorism’ rather than gender discrimination.”

“Unqualified males are appointed to management.” “Usually they cannot accept women. However, it is a big step that one of the Vice Administrators of National Education is a woman.” “Women rights are not defended in educational unions.”

“There is more conservative staff because of political changes and men even hesitate to shake hands. The presence of women creates unease among men.”

Female school administrators participating in this study indicated that they face discrimination especially during the appointment process. Similarly, Atay (2001), in his study on primary school administrators’ behaviors, concluded it is commonly agreed in the society that women are different from men so they cannot not successfully fulfill management roles. The same study sorts prejudices against women as “they do not want to work; they cannot be devoted to their careers like men; they are not through and durable enough; they do not work overtime; they do not have the capacity to decide; they are way too emotional”. In this respect, one of the most important obstacles in front of women in educational
management is the notion “Glass Ceiling”. Glass Ceiling is a barrier that women who desire and struggle to build their way up to high positions in public or educational institutions, businesses, or non-profit organizations and face (Örücü et al., 2007: 118). Although these barriers are not set forth, there are many studies on this issue. The obstacles mentioned here do not reveal themselves explicitly but they are formed by social values and prejudices.

Female school administrators explained the problems about their responsibilities and duties within the family as the following:

“I remember the times I had to work because of my responsibilities as a director although I was in maternity leave. I feel like I neglected my family because of this.”

“I started to work as a administrator when my son was 2 years old. I could not take care of him enough. Since I became a administrator, I have not been able to spend enough time with my family.”

“As a mother, you are responsible for lots of things within the family, and it is difficult to set loose of management sometimes. It is seen like you do not care your business.”

“I spread negative vibes to my child because I carry problems at school to my house.”

“I cannot put up with my own child’s noise because of my exhaustion and I expect too much from him presuming he is like the children at school.”

Koray (1992: 119) states that one of the biggest obstacle in women’s becoming administrators and pursuing this duty is that although they are working, they still have to deal with everything at home by themselves as wives and mothers. Because they see being wives and mothers as their primary jobs, neglecting this causes unrest in their inner worlds. Additionally, Negiz and Yemen (2011: 204) indicate that women believe the most important barrier for them to become administrators is the familial responsibilities assigned to them.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

According to the data, female school administrators have problems in managing because of their duties and responsibilities within the family. The greatest obstacle in this regard is their numerous responsibilities at home. Additionally, “woman of the house” and “motherhood” roles, which are assigned by the society, are crucial factors. In parallel with the data, Sağlam and Bostancı (2011: 148), in their research, indicated that 16 of 32 female school administrators who participated in the study confessed that they did not take place in management positions due to their duties and responsibilities within the family. The public role of women is mostly determined by traditional values, which suggest that men need to work and bring home money while women stay at home and take care of the house and children. It is always stressed that, even a woman works professionally, her priority should still be her family (Gökalp, 2008: 29). This situation obstructs women from becoming administrators not only in our country but also in many other countries. To give an example, a study in Japanese companies revealed that women had a negative attitude towards a career as a administrators since they put their roles within the family ahead of everything (Appold et al., 1998: 555). In a study in India, however, it was concluded that women were successful in professional life despite the cultural traditions and behind this success there was the support from the family and the company and their personal efforts (Nath, 2000). Another study mentions that “womanhood” was seen as inferior to “manhood” even if the culture does not suggest so, and it was indicated that working women empowered the control of men and class distinction just changed shape (Liddle, 1989).

When the data are analyzed, it can be seen that school administrators working in preschools, primary schools, secondary schools and high schools had mainly problems with the staff, students, parents and in the process of appointment. Those whom the female administrators had the least problems with were the students. Women tried to solve these problem initially by having a talk. Later on, they tried dealing with the problems by official sanctions. However, the presence of situations when both ways were useless is a very important obstacle for female school administrators to do their jobs. In parallel with earlier studies, it was seen that women were kept in the background in the appointment process. The roles that men stick on women and social gender roles can be presented as the reasons for this. On the contrary, decisions were taken to increase the number of female Administrators in the National Education Council. For example, in Article no. 34 of the 18th National Education Council, it is decided that “Incentives to increase the number of female administrators in the appointment of school administrators should be provided”. Additionally, in Article no. 5 of the last 19th National Education Council, the proposal suggesting “Social gender equality should be taught as a unit inside an existing subject at schools starting from the 3rd grades” was adopted.

When the data collected in this study and findings from other studies are taken into consideration, it can be strongly suggested that there are stereotyped values against women within the society. Apart from the limitations stemming from the society, there are also obstacles that women themselves create. Additionally, it can be said that women face prejudices not only from men but also from women. Both national and international studies confirm the finding that female administrators fulfill their work without any delay. In this respect, it would be a right approach if women are subjected to positive discrimination in decision-making.
process in business and also in reaching management positions. For this, the greatest responsibility falls on legislators and civil society organizations.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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