



Work family Conflict in Middle-Eastern Cultures:  
The Case of Turkey



Zeynep Aycan  
Koc University

# Workforce Statistics

- Economically active population over 12 years of age: 29.7 % women; 68.3% men.
- Among working women, 56.8% are employed in the agricultural sector, 28.8% in the services sector, and 14.4% in the industry.
- Majority of women work as unpaid family labor and in informal sector.
- Among professional jobs, 60% of pharmacists, 19% of physicians, 30% of dentists, 34% of lawyers, and 23% of professors are women in Turkey.
- Approximately 4% of Turkish women hold top level managerial positions.

# Cultural & Institutional Context

- Professional Turkish women are influenced simultaneously by two cultural forces:
  - a masculine society influenced partly by traditional Islamic middle-eastern values and practices,
  - dominant ideology of the Turkish state (i.e., secularism) promoting emancipation of women.
- Turkish labour laws protect women from gender-based discrimination in workplace. Moreover, there are provisions to aid women balance work and family responsibilities (paid maternity leaves upto 3 months).
- The largest source of support include extended family and paid household workers.
- Research showed that childbearing can be a serious barrier to women's career advancement.

# Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions with 15 working women revealed that:

- Conflict is experienced especially between work and parental roles.
- Development and education of children are the primary responsibilities of women.
- Despite household helpers, women coordinate and plan how things run at home and with the children.
- They have hands-on approach in handling work and family responsibilities, which puts a lot of demand on women's shoulders.

- Despite all demands, they feel that they have fulfilled lives. They are proud of the fact that they *sacrifice* themselves for their families (especially children).
- Instead of lowering standards at home (e.g., not preparing proper meal), they prefer lowering standards at work (e.g., working part-time or change jobs).
- They tend to blame their husbands for not supporting women's career development and not sharing the household responsibilities.
- Often times they also blame themselves for being perfectionist and not delegating responsibilities to others around them, especially to their husbands.
- They believe that they need to retrain themselves first for a more egalitarian society.