

Patriarchal Norms in Turkey and Their Influence on Women's Development and Domestic Roles: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchy refers to a social system in which positions of power and authority are primarily held by men. In Turkey, patriarchal structures continue to shape gender expectations, often reinforcing women's association with domestic responsibilities. These norms are frequently linked to women's biological role as birth-givers, which has historically tied them to caregiving and household duties, although their roots are not yet fully explained. This systematic review aims to understand how patriarchal structures and gender roles in Turkish society affect women's psychological and behavioral development and their participation in the labor force. Open access articles published in peer-reviewed journals between 2008 and 2025 were searched on Google Scholar. A total of 10 eligible studies (6 in English, 4 in Turkish) were included in the current review. Findings revealed five thematic categories affecting women's development and potentially workforce participation: (1) Traditional Gendered Domestic Roles in a Patriarchal Society, (2) The Religious Influence of Islam, (3) Social and Structural Barriers to Workplace Participation, (4) The Role of Education and (5) Psychological and Emotional Impacts of Patriarchal Conditioning. Overall, the literature indicates that entrenched gender norms, institutional gaps, and weak policies sustain Turkey's patriarchal structures. Key barriers to women's workforce participation include inadequate employment laws, childcare demands for young children, and expectations of domestic roles. Education consistently emerges as the strongest driver of women's labor force participation.

Keywords: Domestic labor; female labor force participation; gender roles; patriarchy; Turkey; women

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy, defined as a system where men hold primary authority in both private and public life, continues to shape gender roles around the world (1). As of 2024, women's labor force participation remains consistently below men's in both developed and

developing countries (2). Gender inequality, reinforced by cultural norms and stereotypes, continues to limit and devalue women's presence in societies (3). These entrenched expectations influence women's emotional and behavioral development as well as their access to education, work, and leadership opportunities (4).

The history of women's labor participation shows how patriarchal norms have persisted despite social change. Before World War II, women were often regarded as a reserve labor force and had little chance to establish stable roles in the labor market (5). After the war, women's status improved in many parts of the world, but progress in the Middle East remained limited due to

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Accepted November 19, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.70251/HYJR2348.36713720>

conservative socio-cultural norms and deeply entrenched patriarchal structures (4). In Turkey, increased rural-to-urban migration during the 1950s reshaped family life, moving from extended to nuclear structures and enabling some women to enter paid work (6). However, this shift also reinforced a dual system: while women gained legitimacy in the public sphere through paid employment, their unpaid domestic labor within the home remained largely unchanged (6).

Cultural and religious influences have also played a central role in shaping gender roles in Turkey. In the Ottoman Empire, women's lack of education was identified as a social problem as early as the Tanzimat reforms of the 1800s (7). In the 1980s and 1990s, educated urban religious women began to critique both modernism and male-dominated traditions. While some strands of Islamic thought encouraged women's education, they often framed it in terms of preparing women for motherhood rather than professional life. Studies from the 1990s suggested that many religious women valued education but were reluctant to work outside the home due to maternal responsibilities (8). By the 2000s, religious women increasingly sought to balance professional roles with motherhood. More recent research argues that cultural traditions, rather than religion itself, may be the stronger factor limiting women's employment opportunities (7).

Despite social and educational reforms, current statistics reveal the persistence of inequality. A wide body of research consistently demonstrates that Turkish women remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks, while men's contributions are concentrated in financial or repair-related roles (5, 9, 10). The Turkey Family Structure Survey, 2021 by Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) reported that Turkish women perform 94.4% of childcare, 85.6% of laundry and dishwashing, 85.4% of cooking and daily cleaning, and 78.7% of household shopping (10). Men, in contrast, perform 74.1% of bill payments and 65.2% of minor home repairs (10). According to the Turkey Gender Equality Monitoring Report (2023–2024), unpaid domestic and care work is the leading reason for women's exclusion from the labor force, cited by 42.9% of women; no men reported care responsibilities as a barrier (9). As of 2021, almost all household chores were seen as women's responsibilities. Over 80% of daily routine chores such as cooking, laundry, cleaning and tidying the house were assigned to women while childcare was almost exclusively (94.4%) attributed to women (9). These figures highlight how women's paid employment is

often treated as secondary to their domestic obligations, resulting in long hours of "double labor" (5).

Even when women participate in the workforce, gender bias leads to unequal pay, limited career opportunities, and stereotypes portraying women as "emotional," "low-performing," or "irrational" (5). Legal frameworks to support women's employment remain underdeveloped, and public-sector jobs are often the only spaces where shorter hours and protections make employment more compatible with domestic responsibilities (12).

Overall, patriarchal norms, conservative traditions, and weak legal protections continue to restrict women's opportunities in Turkey (11). While women have long struggled for equal access to the labor market, progress remains uneven (11). Gender roles, reinforced by cultural expectations and care responsibilities, position women as a reserve labor force whose contributions are undervalued (5). At the same time, education consistently emerges as the most powerful factor in challenging these norms, shaping family attitudes, and supporting women's professional inclusion (5). Against this backdrop, the present literature review examines how patriarchal structures influence women's development and workforce participation in Turkey. It identifies five key themes across recent studies: (1) traditional gendered domestic roles, (2) the religious influence of Islam, (3) social and structural barriers to workplace participation, (4) the role of education in promoting empowerment and labor force entry, and (5) psychological and emotional impacts of patriarchal conditioning.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Search Strategies

To identify studies producing empirical evidence relevant to understanding how patriarchal social structures in Turkey influence women's development, a literature search was conducted in June 2025 using the keywords: "*Patriarchy*" AND "*Middle East*" AND ("*women*" OR "*female*") AND ("*domestic roles*" OR "*home*" OR "*household*"). This search was carried out in Google Scholar and limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English or Turkish. Because cultural, social, and political conditions in Turkey differ in important ways from those in the wider Middle East, a second search was conducted in July 2025 with a revised focus on Turkey: "*Patriarchy*" AND "*Turkey*" AND ("*women*" OR "*female*") AND ("*domestic roles*" OR "*home*" OR "*household*"). To broaden the scope, a third search using the same keywords was conducted in Turkish. Through

this extended search, four additional studies were identified (6, 7, 5, 11) and included in the review.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The combined searches produced the majority of the studies analyzed in this paper. Articles were included if they: (1) were published in peer-reviewed journals, (2) provided empirical evidence on patriarchy and women's development in Turkey, and (3) focused on domestic roles, household responsibilities, or related gender norms.

The following were excluded: (1) studies using the term *patriarchy* but focusing on unrelated issues (e.g., domestic violence without discussion of broader social structures such as labor market participation, family roles); (2) theoretical papers, commentaries, or opinion pieces without empirical data, (3) editorials, book chapters, conference abstracts, and dissertations without full text available.

During the review process, several studies were found that examined related topics, such as rural-to-urban female migration or cross-country comparisons of women's labor force participation, but a comprehensive

analysis of these areas was beyond the scope of this review.

Data Extraction

For each included study, key information, such as study design, participant characteristics, measures used, analytic methods, and main findings relevant to patriarchal structures, was extracted and organized into a summary table for synthesis and comparison.

RESULTS

Search Retrieval and Characteristics

The search identified ten eligible studies: six quantitative, three qualitative, and one mixed methods. All studies were cross-sectional. Six were published in English (13, 4, 14, 8, 12, 3), and four were published in Turkish (6, 7, 5, 11). The majority focused on domestic tasks (n = 3) or women's labor force participation (n = 4), while the remainder addressed patriarchal norms, religion, or conservatism. A detailed summary of all included studies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Included Studies (N = 10)

Reference	Design	Sample	Measures / Key Variables	Main Findings Relevant to Patriarchal Structures
6	Qualitative, cross-sectional	6 married working women and spouses	Semi-structured interviews on division of labor and spousal attitudes	Women disproportionately perform domestic labor; men's resistant attitudes drive unequal distribution.
7	Qualitative, cross-sectional	50 adults (25 couples) with young children	Interviews on religiosity, gender roles, household expectations	Religious upbringing reinforces patriarchal gender roles; some women cite Islamic teachings supporting shared chores.
5	Quantitative, cross-sectional	11,549 nonparticipants ages 15-35	Labor force survey; reasons for non-participation	Domestic/family responsibilities major barrier to employment; education is strongest factor breaking cycle.
12	Quantitative, cross-sectional	6,189 married women	Demographic & Health Survey; labor market indicators	Patriarchal ideology confines women to private sphere; presence of young children reduces labor participation.
11	Quantitative, cross-sectional	National labor statistics (1988-2010)	Labor force indicators; childcare burden	Participation limited by childcare, marriage, education; legal regulations inadequate to support working women.
8	Quantitative, cross-sectional	7,405 ever-married women	Patriarchy and conservatism scales; TDHS 2008	Patriarchal norms and religiosity reduce participation; education increases it while young children reduce it.
13	Quantitative	6,190-7,171 adults	World Values Survey; religiosity & conservatism scales	Turkey has become more patriarchal since 1990; political conservatism predicts patriarchal attitudes.

Continued Table 1. Characteristics of Included Studies (N = 10)

Reference	Design	Sample	Measures / Key Variables	Main Findings Relevant to Patriarchal Structures
4	Mixed-methods	1997 field study + HLFS 2008	Household roles, decision-making; labor trends	Male-breadwinner model persists; some women prefer patriarchal contract due to poor work conditions.
14	Quantitative, cross-sectional	600 married university staff	Gender-role attitudes; hours spent on domestic tasks	Men hold more traditional attitudes; women carry heavier domestic workload despite employment.
3	Qualitative, cross-sectional	28 housewives	Interviews on duties, expectations, identity	Women report stress, invisibility, and emotional burden; some internalize roles as identity or duty.

Note: TSI = Turkish Statistical Institute; OECD = Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Analytic methods across the studies include descriptive analysis, thematic analysis, logistic regression, probit regression, multinomial logistic regression, symbolic-interactionist approaches, and multi-level modeling.

Of the ten studies included in this review, five overarching thematic categories were synthesized. The first theme, 'Traditional Gendered Domestic Roles in a Patriarchal Society (n = 6)', captures how entrenched household expectations continue to restrict women's engagement in paid work. Within this theme, three sub-patterns emerged: the unequal distribution of household labor (n = 2), where women disproportionately shoulder domestic responsibilities, the domestic burden on women (n = 4), highlighting how caregiving and household management remain their primary duties even when employed, and husbands' opposition to paid domestic help (n = 2), which reflects resistance to outsourcing household tasks despite women's heavy workload.

The second theme, 'The Religious Influence of Islam (n = 3)', points to the complex role of religion in shaping gendered expectations. While some studies identified religious interpretations as reinforcing patriarchal norms, others noted ways in which Islamic values were mobilized to argue for a fairer division of household labor.

The third theme, 'Social and Structural Barriers to Workplace Participation (n = 9)', was the most frequently identified. It encompassed three subcategories: patriarchal attitudes and social gender norms (n = 6), which emphasize how cultural expectations continue to limit women's economic roles; the influence of marriage and the presence of children (n = 8), which often curtailed women's labor force participation due to caregiving responsibilities; and institutional neglect and policy gaps (n = 3), highlighting shortcomings in legal frameworks and social policies that fail to adequately

support women's employment.

The fourth theme, 'The Role of Education (n = 5)', consistently underscored education as a decisive factor enabling women to challenge restrictive gender norms and participate in the workforce, though patriarchal attitudes could still persist even among highly educated groups.

Finally, the fifth theme, 'Psychological and Emotional Impacts of Patriarchal Conditioning (n = 2)', reveals the emotional effects of domestic expectations on women, including stress, loneliness, and feelings of servitude, while also highlighting that some women still do not wish to give up their household roles.

Traditional Gendered Domestic Roles in a Patriarchal Society

Unequal Distribution of Household labor

Two studies (14, 6) reported that women carried greater responsibility for domestic work than their husbands. Copur (14) found that men scored higher on traditional gender role attitudes, while women reported higher responsibility and more time spent on household tasks. Division of labor was influenced by income equality and educational attainment within couples. Göközkut (6) similarly observed that men's participation in housework was limited, occurring primarily in households where both partners had equal education and income. Men's resistant attitudes towards sharing domestic labor were reported as one of the reasons for the unequal distribution, with one participant stating:

“My spouse has contributed nothing. I have always done everything” (K6). Unless women hold an income and educational background equal to that of their husbands, they continue to undertake the primary responsibility for household labor, caregiving, and domestic duty, even when employed.

Domestic Burden on Women

Four studies (6, 4, 5, 3) consistently found that women carried the primary burden of domestic work, even when employed full-time. Öztürk (5) reported that 98.46% of women cited housework and family responsibilities as barriers to workforce participation. İlkcaracan (4) noted that over 12 million women declared full-time homemaking as their reason for not joining the labor force. Eroglu (3) found that women described themselves as under a “double burden,” performing household chores while also providing psychological and educational support to family members.

Husbands' Opposition to Paid Domestic Help

Two studies (6, 7) found that husbands resisted the use of paid domestic help. Reasons included the belief that household tasks were inherently women's responsibility Göközkut (6) and religious arguments against allowing the home, seen as a private space, cleaned by “foreign” women Turan (7).

The Religious Influence of Islam

Three studies (13, 8, 7) examined religion's influence. Engin (13) reported a positive relationship between religiosity and patriarchal attitudes across economic, political, familial, and educational domains. Dildar (8) found that women who regularly practiced namaz and fasting were 6% less likely to participate in the labor force. Turan (7) identified that religious families reinforced traditional gender attitudes but also noted that some women used examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad to legitimize men's participation in household chores.

Social and Structural Barriers to Workplace Participation

Patriarchal Attitudes and Social Gender Norms

Six studies (12, 5, 8, 13, 7, 3) highlighted the influence of patriarchal norms in limiting women's labor force participation. Engin (13) reported that agreements with patriarchal statements, such as “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”, or “On

the whole men make better political leaders than women do” showed that economic, political, and educational patriarchal attitudes had increased significantly between 1990 and 2011. Similarly, Öztürk (5) reported that in Turkey, strong gender perceptions and cultural factors were the biggest obstacles to women's participation in the labor force due to housework responsibilities and family pressure. Echoing these findings, Dildar (8) found that patriarchal values negatively influenced women's labor participation, particularly in urban areas. Moreover, Hoşgör (12) reported that women with traditional gender attitudes were less likely to be employed in the formal economy.

Marriage and Presence of Children

Eight studies identified marriage and childrearing as barriers to workforce participation (11, 5, 12, 8, 4, 7, 6, 3). Korkmaz (11) found that childcare responsibilities for children aged 0–5 were overwhelmingly assigned to mothers, with fathers ranked last as caregivers. Dildar (8) reported that each additional child under five decreased urban women's probability of labor force participation by 7.4%. İlkcaracan (4) found that marriage itself was a stronger determinant of withdrawal from the labor market than the presence of children.

Institutional Neglect and Policy Gaps

Three studies (11, 4, 13) reported institutional barriers. Korkmaz (11) described reforms aligned with EU harmonization but noted persistent gaps in childcare provision and return-to-work protections. İlkcaracan (4) reported that 85% of employed women with low education had no access to social security, maternity leave, or retirement benefits. Engin (13) found that policy reforms had limited impact on patriarchal values, with political conservatism continuing to reinforce restrictive gender norms.

The Role of Education

Five studies (11, 8, 4, 12, 5) identified education as the strongest factor promoting women's workforce participation. İlkcaracan (4) reported that university graduates had nineteen times higher odds of labor participation than women with less than primary schooling. Dildar (8) found that an additional year of schooling increased women's probability of labor force participation by 3.6% in urban and 6.7% in rural areas. Hoşgör (12) noted that women's own education reduced the likelihood of being a housewife, although the husband's education could counteract this effect. Öztürk

(5) found that university education substantially reduced rates of non-participation in both women and men. Dildar (8) also reported that among women with different educational backgrounds, patriarchal norms had the strongest impact on those with higher levels of education, concluding that these norms remain a barrier to the labor force participation of highly educated women.

Psychological and Emotional Impacts of Patriarchal Conditioning

Two studies (3, 4) examined psychological effects on women. Erogul (3) reported that women experienced social pressure, stress, feelings of servitude, social invisibility, and loneliness due to domestic responsibilities, with some participants criticizing having the entire household workload and the expectation that women should “do everything.” When asked about the roles and responsibilities expected of their family and spouses, participants commented “Family is not about the woman handling everything alone. Sometimes, I feel like I am the only one” (P9) and “My roles challenge me; sometimes, I feel like a servant at home, and all the responsibilities are placed on the woman” (P24). Some women resisted patriarchal conditioning by advocating for egalitarian domestic roles. İlkkaracan (4) found that employed women reported greater autonomy in decision-making (e.g., use of birth control, education, political involvement) compared to non-participants.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review demonstrates that patriarchal norms in Turkey continue to shape women's lives by assigning them primary responsibility for domestic work and caregiving. These norms are reinforced by religious interpretations, institutional gaps, and enduring gender-role expectations, which together limit women's labor force participation and personal autonomy. Findings across education, religion, and family structures converge to show that multiple intersecting factors sustain women's secondary status in the labor market.

The findings suggest that patriarchal expectations shape women's experiences of work in both private and public spheres. In feminist literature, this is often referred to as the “double burden” (5, 6, 8), where women's paid employment does not exempt them from household responsibilities. Rather, employment adds to the workload, forcing women to carry both jobs simultaneously. Housework is widely regarded as “invisible labor,” as it is unpaid and ideologically

constructed as women's duty rather than recognized work. Although each of these tasks that women perform at home corresponds to a paid profession in the public sphere, the emotional dimension of housework, woven with love, stands out as an obstacle to its recognition as a category of labor, ultimately normalizing it. Several studies underscored that even when women engage in the labor market, household chores and caregiving remain overwhelmingly assigned to them.

Consistent with global research on gender inequality, the results indicate that education remains the strongest factor enabling women to challenge patriarchal structures and increase labor force participation. At the same time, marriage and the presence of young children were consistently shown to reduce participation, reflecting the persistence of cultural expectations that women serve primarily as caregivers.

Psychological and Emotional Impacts on Women

A particularly important theme emerging from the studies is the emotional and psychological toll of entrenched domestic roles. Women described stress, fatigue, feelings of invisibility and often a sense of being like “servants,” in relation to their household responsibilities. They were overwhelmed by expectations from both spouses and extended family and socially isolated despite their constant labor. According to studies, participants spoke of loneliness, pressure, and the fear of social exclusion if household duties were neglected.

These psychological outcomes were not limited to unemployed women. Even those in paid work described emotional strain from attempting to juggle professional and domestic roles without spousal support.

Women reported that their contributions in the public sphere did not shield them from criticism if household standards were not met. The invisibility of domestic labor thus compounded a sense of undervaluation and lack of recognition.

At the same time, some women internalized these patriarchal expectations, framing domestic work as a marker of femininity or a status symbol. Although they complained about their workload at home, it was clear that some did not want to give up doing these tasks, sometimes assessing their self-worth by their ability to maintain a household, even while expressing frustration at the unequal division of responsibilities. This ambivalence reflects the complex psychological negotiations women undertake in adapting to patriarchal norms, often internalizing these expectations as culturally reinforced roles assigned to women.

Religion, Tradition, and Patriarchal Attitudes

Religion emerged as a complex influence. In some cases, religious conservatism reinforced patriarchal gender roles and lowered women's likelihood of labor market participation. However, in other instances, Islamic values were used to support more egalitarian perspectives, with references to the Prophet Muhammad's contributions to household work cited as legitimizing arguments. This divergence suggests that tradition may have a stronger role than religion in maintaining restrictive gender norms, though the two often interact.

Institutional and Policy Gaps

Institutional and policy gaps were also evident. Despite legal reforms aimed at gender equality, patriarchal attitudes remained largely unchanged. Evidence showed that even as Turkey adopted constitutional amendments and labor protections, women's workforce participation did not significantly improve.

Policies often failed to address the structural barriers created by childcare responsibilities, lack of spousal support, and entrenched social expectations. Regulations to harmonize working life with family life were generally lacking. Childcare was consistently framed as the responsibility of women even within the laws regulating working life. Political conservatism in recent decades appears to have reinforced patriarchal values, offsetting some of the gains from earlier reforms. These findings carry important implications for policy, suggesting that addressing childcare provision, strengthening employment protections for women returning to work after childbirth, and implementing policies that encourage equitable domestic role-sharing are necessary steps to reduce women's double burden and enhance their labor force participation.

Limitations

This review was limited to studies published in English and Turkish and may not capture relevant grey literature or more recent unpublished work. The review also relied exclusively on cross-sectional studies, which restricts the ability to infer changes over time and limits conclusions about causality.

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that patriarchal norms in Turkey continue to shape women's lives by positioning them as the primary bearers of domestic and caregiving responsibilities. These expectations limit their economic

participation, reinforce unequal gender dynamics, and impose significant emotional and psychological burdens. While education emerges as the most consistent factor supporting women's empowerment, autonomy and labor force engagement, its potential impact remains constrained by persistent cultural norms, marriage, and childcare obligations. Importantly, the review highlights the emotional and psychological costs of these structures, with women reporting stress, invisibility, and social isolation alongside the practical barriers to employment.

Taken together, the findings show that patriarchal structures in Turkey operate across multiple domains—cultural, religious, and institutional. To advance gender equality, policy reforms must be accompanied by broader societal change that challenges entrenched patriarchal attitudes. Policymakers should prioritize childcare support, equal pay measures, and workplace protections that recognize the double burden many women face. Interventions must also address the cultural and ideological roots of gender inequality, not only educational or economic factors.

Future research could explore how newer policy reforms and grassroots activism are reshaping gender roles and examine the psychological consequences of patriarchal expectations in greater depth. It could also assess the effectiveness of interventions that combine structural supports, such as childcare provision and equal pay measures, with initiatives aimed at transforming social perceptions of women's roles in both the private and public spheres.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks Dr Elizabeth Li of University College London for her mentorship and guidance throughout this project. Her scholarly expertise and constructive feedback were invaluable in shaping the quality and direction of this work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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