Chapter 7

The Fight of Female Chefs Against Gender Discrimination: Case of Izmir 8

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Abstract

Gender discrimination in the workplace remains a challenge, impacting women's career progression, opportunities, and professional experiences. The study aims to explore the problems of female chefs in the tourism industry in Izmir according to gender discrimination. The face-to-face Zoom interview technique was applied to 10 female chefs in Izmir between 15 February 2023 and 20 March 2023. Each interview took 30 minutes. The results reveal that female chefs were exposed to a great deal of emotional discrimination, gender inequality, low wages, verbal, and physical harassment in Izmir. The lack of adequate training for executive chefs was seen as a career barrier for female chefs. Female chefs declared that they found the management of the head chefs and human resource executives weak and inadequate because of overthinking themselves. Due to the lack of education in male chefs, female chefs are less demanding and underpaid.

1. Introduction

Discrimination is defined as the unfair or prejudiced treatment of different categories of people based on race, age, or gender (Oxford Dictionary, 2019). Gender discrimination exists in professional kitchens in various ways. Historically, the culinary industry has been male-dominated, and this has led to a culture that often excludes women and reinforces gender stereotypes (Oktay & Guden, 2023; Septiani & Siscawati, 2023; Sull & Sull, 2023). According to Oktay and Guden (2023), Kelly (2015), and Szabo (2014),

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professional kitchens are male-dominant places. Although female chefs have started to gain an important place in the gastronomy world in recent years, they are still exposed to gender discrimination and face difficulties in the sector (Hendley & Hurwitz, 2023; Temizkan & Uslu, 2023; García-Henche & Cuesta-Valiño, 2022).

The gastronomy industry requires high-intensity working hours. This can be a difficult balancing act, especially when women have family responsibilities. One study reveals that there are no women even in the best restaurants and in 2014, only six women out of 110 chefs had three stars (Guide Michelin, 2014). The professional kitchen is a difficult and tiring area. The phenomenon of gender, which indicates the duties and responsibilities of women and men socially (Karakus et al., 2018), includes negative attitudes and behaviors for women, causing them to encounter various obstacles in their lives and laying the groundwork for the emergence of gender-based discrimination (Dogru, 2010). The contributing factors include societal expectations, cultural biases, and the demanding nature of the sector, which can make it challenging for women to balance work and family responsibilities. Salary inequality is another obstacle for women in gastronomy. While women are often paid less than men, women in leadership positions can earn up to 70% less than male leaders. It is stated that there is opposition to women's leadership and barriers for female chefs (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Building a strong professional network and connections is crucial for career advancement in any industry. However, women may face additional barriers in networking due to gender dynamics and the predominance of male networks in the culinary world. This can limit their access to opportunities for growth and promotion. This situation demonstrates that a gendered issue with a patriarchal order exists (Acker, 2012; Carvalho et al., 2019). Orido (2017) states that female chefs have difficulties with patriarchal behaviors, gender roles, and security concerns. Female chefs stated that they have faced health problems, work-life imbalance, sexual harassment, and unhealthy working environments. There was discrimination against female chefs even in France, one of the centers of food tourism (Lemoine, 2012).

Therefore, this unique study aims to address the reasons for discrimination against women in professional kitchens. In other words, the study expresses gender discrimination for female chefs working in hotels and chain restaurants in the heart of Izmir, which is a popular tourism destination. This exploratory study also looks at the image of the profession and mental and physical attributes for this field.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender Discrimination and Female Chefs

Researchers claim that unequal gender distribution in professions is caused by the fact that promotion criteria professions are gender-sensitive (Rouhanizadeh & Kermanshachi, 2021). Biased hiring and promotion practices within the culinary industry also contribute to the discrimination faced by female chefs (Temizkan & Uslu, 2023; Hendley & Hurwitz, 2023; Farrell, 2022). Implicit biases and gendered expectations can result in women being underestimated, overlooked, or excluded from job opportunities and career advancement. In an interview with women, in a metropolitan city like Istanbul, female chefs have difficulties going to the house after ending their shifts (Kurnaz et al., 2018). Even in the most developed countries of Europe, such as France, there has been gender inequality in the kitchen for many years. In the area of Haute Cuisine in France, female cooks need to overcome the difficult working conditions in the kitchen to become a chef, and to balance work and family against long working hours, which are becoming more difficult, especially in Michelin-starred restaurant businesses (Bartholomew & Garey, 1996).

In an opposite perspective, overcoming difficulties protects the motivations of working females and ensures that they become successful (Martin & Bernard, 2013). However, this opinion admits that women have difficulties in the kitchen. There is another study that women's work force participation in developed countries is high due to the level of education, the social and cultural development of society, specialization, etc., and it is low in emerging nations due to a scarcity of same factors (Uguz & Topbas, 2014).

Women in the culinary industry earn less than men (Temizkan & Uslu, 2023). This is partly because women are often employed in lower-paying positions such as commis chefs, while men are more likely to be employed in higher-paying positions such as head chefs. Accordingly, the woman doing the same job in the business life in the world gets paid 30-40% less than the man who does the same job and the ratio of male manager to female manager is seven in developing countries (Demir, 2011). Another study reached the following findings in tourism, which requires long and tiring working hours, women work in housekeeping and front desk departments. Although, they are employed in public relations, animation, and food and beverage departments (Pelit et al., 2016), are subjected to unequal treatment compared to men in various matters such as management positions and wages (Costa et al., 2012).

Most chefs and kitchen staff are male, with only a small number of women working in professional kitchens. This lack of representation makes the kitchen environment male-dominated and can make it hard for women to advance in their careers. Although societies have seen that kitchens are one of the main areas for women, is not right in the industry because lots of female chefs, working in the kitchen department are generally at low levels (Dogan, 2017). For instance, Chef Claire states that she put a lot of pressure on herself to exceed the expectations of male colleagues working in the kitchen (Capper, 2014). Another research mentioned the negativities of male hegemony in the kitchen environment (Lemoine, 2012). It is declared that women are physically weaker than men. Studies show that female chefs follow workplace rules such as "working for long hours", "managing home and work life", "learning to avoid feminine emotive demonstrations" and displaying their physical and mental strengths without being contrary to the masculine culture (Harris & Giuffre, 2015). Contrarily, one study states that gender discrimination in the kitchen profession decreases and the participation of women in their work life in the kitchen rises (Cruz, 2013).

3. Methodology

In this exploratory and qualitative study, the face-to-face Zoom interview technique was applied to a total number of 10 female chefs who are working in four-star and five-star hotels, and chain restaurants in Izmir. The interviews are held between 15 February 2023 and 20 March 2023. A total of nine questions were used to assess whether gender discrimination is a hassle for female chefs in professional kitchens. Semi-structured interview questions were asked to female chefs, including the demographic characteristics, such as their age, educational background, work experience, their current position, and the type of establishment they work in. The questions were inspired by the studies of Hendley and Hurwitz (2023), Orido (2017), and Szmodis (2018) that concern gender discrimination or gender inequality, which led to the following fundamental questions.

- 1) When you wanted to be a chef, did you think about your difficulties as a female?
- 2) What are the obstacles you come across as female at work?
- 3) Have you been verbally and physically abused in the kitchen where you work currently?
- 4) Did your head chef listen to you when you were subjected to psychological or physical abuse? What was his reaction? Did you report this to the management?

- 5) Have you ever been humiliated for being a female in the kitchen?
- 6) What are your disappointments in the kitchen?
- 7) Has any male colleague who has hired you in the kitchen been promoted before you even though he didn't deserve it?
- 8) Have you ever been discriminated against by a male manager?
- 9) Have you ever been underpaid for being female?

4. Findings

Table 1 reveals the demographic features in terms of age, gender, educational background, work experience in years, type of establishment, and the positions they hold at work.

Item	Percentage
Age	100
Between 22-35	70
Between 36-55	30
Gender	
Female	100
Educational background	100
Bachelor's degree	50
High school	25
Middle school	25
Work experience in years	100
5-10 years	60
11-16 years	40
Type of establishment	100
5-star hotel	50
4-star hotel	30
Chain restaurant	20
Positions	100
Chef de Partie	35
Commis Chef	30
Demi Chef de Partie	30
Senior Chef De Partie	5

Table 1:	Demographic	distribution
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Table 2 presents what the female chefs encounter in their job environment. The female chefs mentioned the physical and verbal abuse, bossy executives disappointing the female chefs, and whether the female chefs were listened to by the management or human resources staff when they were harassed at work.

Verbal and physical harassment against female chefs	Percentage
Physically abused female chefs	70
Verbally abused female chefs	80
Disappointed female chefs because of bossy executives at work	80
Female chefs who were not listened to by the management/ human resources staff when harassed	60

Table 2: Verbal and physical harassment against 10 female chefs at work

Table 3 shows the obstacles female chefs face in their work environment. According to the responses of female chefs, woman chefs were humiliated by the executive chef for being female. All female chefs think that male chefs have more rights than woman chefs. The vast majority of female chefs think that hierarchy in the kitchen does not apply to male chefs. Female chefs say that male chefs see them as inexperienced because of being female.

Problems that female chefs are exposed to	Percentage
Female chefs were humiliated by the executive chef for being a female	70
Female chefs who think male chefs have more rights than female chefs	100
Female chefs who think that hierarchy in the kitchen area does not apply to male chefs	80
Female chefs say that male chefs see them as inexperienced because of being a female	70

Table 3: Problems that female chefs at work are exposed to

A total of 10 questions have been asked to 10 female chefs about verbal and physical abuse, family work balance, limited work and career, discrimination against them due to the lack of inequality in the kitchen, and obstacles about pregnancy and marriage. Stunning information about physical and verbal abuse has been reached. Two female chefs said,

"My co-worker was constantly putting his hands on my shoulders. I warned him...didn't listen...told my chief executive. My chef told me not to prolong this issue and defended the male chef. My executive chief talks to the female chefs aggressively".

"I was harassed by the male chef. I told this situation to the executive chef, but he said that I must have misunderstood the male chef. My manager urged me to go to the male chef and apologize." According to the female chefs, there is gender discrimination in the food and beverage industry. Female supervisors and employees are often humiliated and harassed by their male colleagues. This can hinder women from being successful in their jobs and may result in them being stuck in lower-paid positions in the industry. Several female chefs declared that they were being discriminated against by married women. One of the chefs indicated,

"After my pregnancy, there were lots of obstacles about not turning back to my job. Adjustments are necessary for a better work condition."

Female chefs are allocated less rigorous tasks. They believe they have been cut off from informal networks. According to the responses concerning the challenges female chefs face in their workplace, two respondents declared,

"Male chefs think that I am inexperienced because I am a female. I do the final cleaning in the kitchen."

"I am 52 years old...been in the same position for 12 years. I asked my manager for a promotion. He refused it because of being a female...said I can't get any promotion because of my age."

Most of the participants think that they are tired of listening to swear words from male chefs. Male chefs cook one dish to show their skillset. Female chefs need to cook more dishes to prove themselves in the kitchen. Because of a lack of education of male chefs, female chefs are less demanding and underpaid. Even though women are permitted to work in professional kitchens, the interviewees thought that they do not have the same opportunities for advancement as men. It was seen in the interviews that a low-wage policy for women is also implemented in Izmir. Another participant stated,

"Male chefs always get promoted primarily than female chefs...doesn't matter to the management whether they are educated or not...worked with male cooks for 12 years, all started after me...promoted before me. I feel disappointed."

5. Evaluation of Findings

In this research, it is seen how much injustice female chefs are exposed to. The fact that male managers are unaware of gender equality makes it difficult for women to work in the kitchen. Male chefs attract the attention of managers not because they are educated but because they are men. Verbal and physical abuses were covered up by department managers and not taken into account. Female chefs do not remain silent against the verbal and physical harassment of male cooks in a professional setting, but their executives or managers do not listen to them as female chefs. The human resources department cannot work with kitchen managers objectively in Izmir. As a woman, one big mistake will create huge irreversible consequences for the female chef in the kitchen. The manager will use this fault against the female employee over and over again. De Silva and Thulemark (2022) agree that women will be active in various professions but it will take time for the female chefs. In addition, Yates and Skinner (2021) reveal that they are judged to be less capable than their male counterparts. The kitchen culture itself often perpetuates discrimination against female chefs. Male dominance and a prevalent "boys' club" mentality contribute to a hostile and exclusionary environment.

A lot of research has been done and suggestions have been made to eliminate the inequality in the kitchen. The first of the ideas put forward to correct the situation in favor of women is that "female chefs should guide other female cooks". Second, "it is a change of male gender understanding in the field of gastronomy". Thirdly, mentors in the commercial area should play a role in the dissolution of gender inequality. Fourth should be the change of norms and subcultures (Harris & Giuffre, 2015). The absence of adequate mentorship and support networks hinders female chefs' progress in the industry. Limited access to experienced mentors, role models, and support systems deprives women of valuable guidance and networking opportunities. The lack of representation and mentorship can contribute to feelings of isolation, hinder skill development, and discourage women from pursuing culinary careers or aspiring to leadership roles. Researchers support that female chefs need to be more involved and supported in the kitchen. The adaptation of social policies at the government level is critical to motivate more women to enter the field (Guerrina, 2002; Harris & Giuffre, 2015).

The hours in professional kitchens are notoriously long and demanding, which can be difficult for women who are trying to balance work and family responsibilities. To increase the number of female employees in professional kitchens; Promotion and incentive models are essential (Harris & Giuffre, 2015). The only way to get women out of the glass ceiling syndrome is to support them and get them promoted properly in their career path. The demanding nature of the culinary industry, particularly in high-end restaurants, can pose challenges for women who intend to balance their professional and personal lives. The long working hours and the physical demands of the occupation can create obstacles for women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities.

Szmodis (2018) declared that female chefs, who can create their programs, catch the work-family balance if they work in pastry kitchens where they can quickly establish their team and manage that they can progress. These kinds of studies supported women to work in a single department rather than in a heavy a la carte kitchen. The working areas of female chefs are not only the patisserie section. To solve discrimination problems, we cannot solve gender discrimination against female chefs by only employing them in the patisserie department in the kitchen. It is essential to foster inclusive and equitable environments within the culinary industry. Like male chefs, female chefs are also trained to work in every part of the kitchen. If there are few women in leadership roles or positions of authority in a kitchen, it can be harder for other women to succeed or feel welcome. It's crucial to recognize and appreciate the accomplishments of female chefs who have achieved Michelin stars or other prestigious culinary accolades. Many renowned female chefs have earned recognition for their exceptional skills and creativity, breaking barriers and inspiring others in the tourism industry.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the challenges of female chefs, who experience discrimination in their workplace through a semi-structured interview technique. Discrimination against female chefs can be rooted in traditional gender roles, negative stereotypes and prejudices, lack of exposure, workplace culture, and lack of representation. Women can take proactive measures to minimize exposure to gender discrimination in the workplace by empowering themselves, seeking professional growth, fostering relationships and alliances, challenging stereotypes, and reporting incidents. By advocating for their rights and contributing to the creation of inclusive work environments, women can help pave the way for gender equality and a more equitable professional landscape.

While some men in the industry are working to create more inclusive and supportive workplace cultures, addressing gender discrimination in professional kitchens will require a collective effort from everyone in the industry. To avoid gender discrimination, mixed-gender teams are key (Bourdain, 2013). Not only discrimination against women in the tourism industry should be investigated in Izmir but also in other metropolitan cities in Turkey. To dismantle gender stereotypes and create opportunities for women, diversity training can be organized, which increase positive attitudes toward women (Chang et al., 2019).

The study has a few limitations. 1) The study has the compact perspectives of female chefs concerning gender discrimination. 2) Regional boundaries

in a specific region on the west side of Turkey. 3) A qualitative and face-toface interview approach rather than a quantitative perspective is chosen for this exploratory study. For further research, the problems in the professional kitchen, including gender bias, lack of support and mentoring, long hours, physical demands, and harassment experienced by female employees in big cities such as Istanbul or any other tourism destinations should be investigated. For further research, the education levels of male chefs and executives should be investigated. The research should be done for male executives to accept women's existence in the kitchen and to work with them in harmony. Addressing discrimination against female chefs necessitates a multifaceted approach involving industry stakeholders and leaders. Creating inclusive kitchen cultures that value diversity and promote gender equality is important. Culinary institutions and associations can implement policies and initiatives that address bias, such as diversity training programs and mentorship opportunities. Encouraging more women to enter the culinary profession within the tourism industry through scholarships, internships, and apprenticeships can help diversify the talent pool and foster equal opportunities for female chefs.

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