
”You Got Into This Job Too?”: Gendered Encounters of Women Couriers in Platform-Based Delivery Work in Turkey

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Abstract

Despite some growth in the past decade, women’s labour market participation remains overall low in Turkey. The platform economy, especially delivery platforms, has opened new job opportunities, especially since COVID-19, yet women’s participation in the platform economy in Turkey remains unexplored. This is despite the fact that several platforms have rolled out programmes to make the jobs more attractive for women workers. Hence, in this research, we focus on the experiences of women couriers in Turkey, a male-dominated industry, in a patriarchal and majority-Muslim country. Drawing on interviews with women couriers and presenting an analysis of the ”inclusivity discourse” put forth by some of the platforms, we explore women’s gendered encounters, strategies of survival and occupational belonging in a seemingly newly emergent, but male-dominated sector. We conducted 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews (2 face-to-face and 8 online) with women couriers in multiple cities in Turkey (Izmir, Istanbul, Ankara, Bolu) in April and May 2025. The findings demonstrate that the courier is imagined as male, which influences women’s labour practices in their interactions with platforms, co-workers, and platform customers. First, the gender-blind nature of the platforms in assigning heavy packages to women couriers, designing work uniforms, organising workplaces like warehouses, and providing assistance to report issues creates structural disadvantages that overlook women’s specific needs and reinforce gendered inequalities in the labour process. Second, women couriers face discriminatory remarks from male co-workers about their participation in platform work, often avoid joining WhatsApp groups due to the highly masculine tone and frequent swearing in conversations or perform strategic invisibility by concealing their identities to avoid receiving non-work-related private messages from male colleagues. Third, although women couriers largely receive positive and supportive reactions from platform customers-which motivates them to continue platform work-they also encounter inappropriate situations, such as customers answering the door in revealing or indecent clothing, a consequence of the platform’s gender-blind design that does not disclose couriers’ gender to customers. Despite these gendered encounters, women’s occupational belonging largely stems from their passion for motorcycling and the sense of freedom it offers, their preference for avoiding enclosed and hierarchically controlled workplaces, and the flexibility to set their own working hours. Overall, these gendered encounters reveal how platform-based delivery work is embedded in the gender-blind nature of the platforms, gendered work cultures, and localised patriarchal structures that shape women’s everyday and work experiences, limiting women couriers’ sense of safety and belonging.

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