

Home-Based Woman Workers: The Case of Turkey / Eskişehir

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Abstract

Home-based work is usually performed at “home”. However, it is a type of work that is different from other works such as child care and cleaning that are performed at homes. It is seen that the scope of home-based work broadened in terms of people and places even though it had been argued that home-based work would end due to adoption of modern modes of production in the economy. Spread of post-Fordist mode of production in Turkey, as in other countries, within the scope of globalization, and informalization diversified home-based work, and the number of people working in this field increased. This study examines working conditions of home-based woman workers living in Eskişehir province, and their place and importance in the work life. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used together in the present study where the place and importance of home-based woman workers in the work life were examined in terms of demographic, social and economic variables in Eskişehir province.

1. Introduction

Home-based work is one of the homework types. In the agricultural society, production used to be carried out by family members at homes. With appearance of factory production as a result of the Industrial Revolution, work has become an activity carried out at “work places” outside homes. Home-based work has continued its existence though appearance and weight of it have changed depending on change and transformation in the mode of production. The concept is generally dealt with in association with informal sector, poverty, insecurity and women’s work. Globalization trends that accelerated especially in the 1980s, decreasing rates of profit, and competitive pressure in which the lowest-cost production conditions are required through division of production into pieces draw attention to the concept of home-based work.

Nowadays women are articulated to the capitalist manufacturing process rapidly and increasingly in line with the new forms assumed by capitalist social relationships and capital accumulation requirements. This process covers various fields of production and/or reproduction including traditional paid employment, paid domestic work, care work, home-based work and unpaid family work which are all interrelated. The boundaries of invisible labor are drawn not by the capitalist system which is currently prevailing but rather by patriarchy, a form of social relationship dominating in the pre-capitalist era. Men can enjoy their spare time at the end of the business day freely at their own discretion. The proportion of home based workforce to total work force increases rapidly with inadequate statistical data regarding the magnitude of the workforce employed in this field. The main reason for this inadequacy is the fact that the majority of the population working in this field comprises women. These women who are classified in the statistics as housewives or unemployed individuals are not categorized as workers (Akdemir and Tezcek, 2006: 56).

2. The Concept of Home-Based Work

Home-based work covers a wide area from work at home in electronic medium to bead work at home. These different types of work with different reasons, working conditions and income levels are distinguished as “home work” and “home-based work” in the literature. Those engaged in traditional production are defined as “home-based workers” and those working in modern sectors utilizing new technologies are defined as “home workers”.

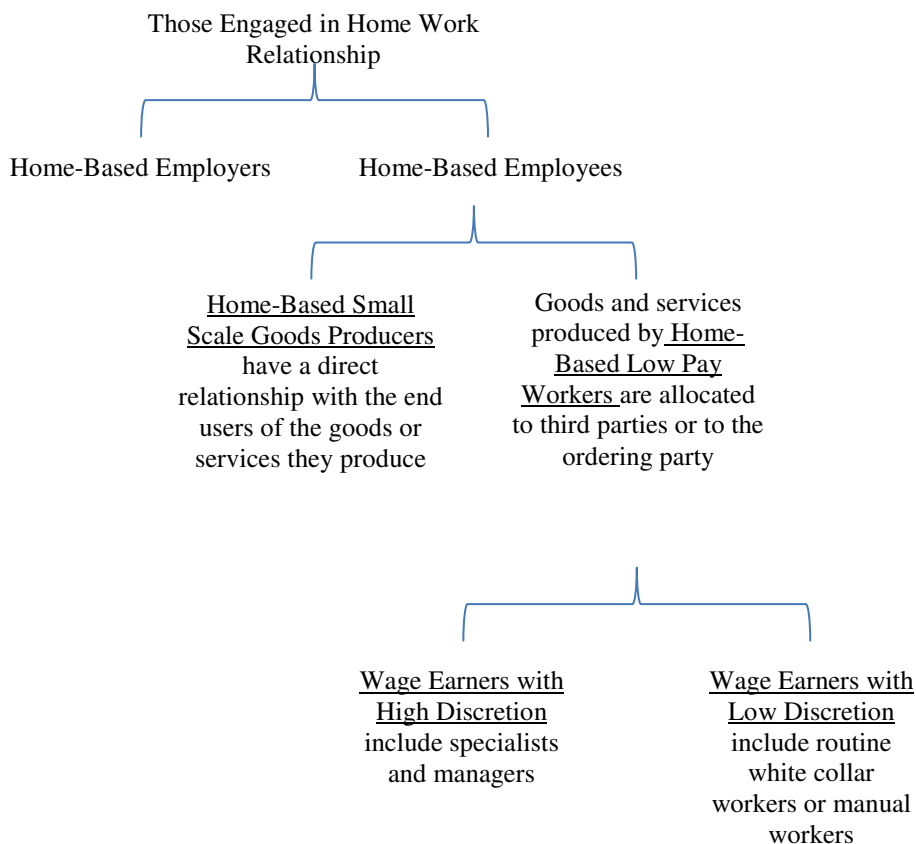
The history of home-based work is older than home work. The concept of home work includes type of work such as remote working or teleworking. However, the scope of this study covers women engaged in home-based work such as handcrafts, bead work and home cooking.

In general, home-based work involves production of goods and services to be offered to the market at homes of individuals. International Labor Organization (ILO) defines home-based worker as follows in the “Home Work Convention” dated 1996 and numbered 177 and the “Recommendation on Home Work” dated 1996 and numbered 184:

“Any person working in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer for remuneration which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used”

Home-based workers do not have the degree of autonomy and of economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations or court decisions. Both employees and employers may be regarded as home workers. Those engaged in home work relationship are described in the Diagram 1.

Diagram 1. Home Work



Source: Feldstead and Jewson, 2000: 16

The determining factor with respect to home work is the location where the work is performed, which is the home of the worker. A home worker may produce the goods in his or her behalf or for a subcontractor, employer or factory. Since home workers are usually not registered, it is difficult to define the type of work performed by them.

The rights to be granted to home workers equally with other workers are listed in the Convention numbered 177 by ILO. These include protection against discrimination in employment and occupation, protection in the field of occupational safety and health, remuneration, statutory social security protection, access to vocational training, minimum age for admission to employment or work, and maternity protection.

Only a few countries have special legislation covering workers producing goods at home. The labor relations of individuals working at home on their behalf are covered under the Code of Obligations as “freelance contracts”. Home work comprises labor relations where the worker fulfills the obligation to perform work under a service contract at his/her home rather than the work place, within the context of labor law. Home worker is a person producing goods or services for remuneration alone or together with other members of his/her family in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, for one or more employers.

3. Types of Home-Based Work

Home-based workers are classified in three groups, namely working on their behalf, working on order, and contract working.

Those working on their behalf engage in designing and producing food, clothing, woven fabrics, needlework and lacework and selling such products at the market. Those working on their behalf produce their products by using materials chosen by them at their own discretion and sell them through channels they deem appropriate. Generally they sell their products at local markets.

Those who work on order produce products such as lacework, needlework, dumplings, pasta, wrapped or stuffed food based on orders received from nearby customers and deliver them to those customers. Those who work on order use the models and materials provided by the ordering party and deliver the products in accordance with the schedule stipulated by the ordering party.

Contract workers produce the work they receive from intermediaries or subcontractors in accordance with the specifications and time schedule stipulated by the principal. Contract workers usually process scales/beads or produce lacework received from factories or principals through intermediaries. These types of work are commingled within the context of home-based work. Whereas working on one’s own behalf is recognized as independent work, working on order or contract working are considered as dependent work.

4. Reasons for Home-Based Work

The transformation in the mode of production caused by globalization has led to significant changes in the concepts of work and labor. New types of work such as part-time work, outdoor work and work through the internet reduced the number of workers in factories and offices and increased the number of home-based workers. To this end, the demand side of home-based female labor is driven by low costs thanks to cheap supply of female labor and unregistered employment. The supply side on the other hand is driven by gender roles, the cost of outsourcing child and elder care services, and pecuniary costs of going out to work.

Although males are also engaged in home-based work, this type of work is generally perceived as a mode of work specific to women. One of the main reasons for this is that women whose level of education and qualifications are not suitable to engage in wage earning jobs in labor markets prefer home-based work. Contrary to various home work types utilizing technology, home-based work is associated with female poverty. Jobs such as lacework, bead work or making dumplings on one’s own behalf on order or as a contract worker do not yield a high level of income. To this end, such jobs may yield relatively higher levels of income for women who act as home-based employers by organizing other women to perform such tasks (Bergan, 2009: 220).

The ability to fulfill their obligations assumed by their gender roles such as domestic work and child and elder care and to contribute to the family budget at the same time creates an advantage for home-based female workers. However, this advantage may also prove to be a significant disadvantage depending on the circumstances. Other members of the household, young girls in particular, are obliged to help with domestic work or production in cases where the production has a tight deadline. Moreover, since working outside home imposes additional costs on women, they prefer home work to working outside.

The work/personal life balance of women is upset in cases where the boundaries of the work cannot be drawn strictly, and more importantly women may also be deprived of socialization under such circumstances. As a matter of fact, the number of women who prefer home-based work due to their spouses who keep their wives at home and do not permit them to work outside at labor markets, driven by gender discrimination, is very high.

5. Home-Based Work in Turkey

Other types of work without social security including home-based work become increasingly widespread in Turkey as it is in other countries throughout the world. A majority of women in Turkey is left outside the work life in the form of paid employment in outdoor labor markets. Domestic work is “invisible labor” due to social reasons, patriarchy, etc. While women work as unpaid family workers in rural areas, they perform domestic services such as home-based work, child care or cleaning in the cities (Toksöz, 2007: 66). According to the data provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), a majority of individuals working at home is women. The proportion of individuals over the age of 15 who indicate their home as their work place in the list of employees classified according to the work place is provided in the Table 1.

Table 1. Home Workers in Turkey (15+, One thousand persons)

Yıllar	Woman			Men		
	Home	Total	%	Home	Total	%
1995	182	5 976	3,04	32	14 935	0,21
1997	174	5 805	2,99	43	15 400	0,27
1999	274	6 335	4,32	114	15 713	0,72
2001	175	5 969	2,93	27	15 556	0,17
2003	221	5 891	3,75	23	15 256	0,15
2005	260	5 700	4,56	23	16 346	0,14
2006	249	5 810	4,28	22	16 520	0,13

Source: http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt_id=41, (Accessed: 29.06.2012).

As it can be seen in the Table 1, the rate of women working at home is around 4 %, which is much lower for men. In Turkey, women are generally employed in the agricultural sector as unpaid family workers. However, official statistics overstate the number of unpaid female family workers and understate the number of paid female workers. It is seen that the wages paid to women are lower when compared to men almost in every sector and level in Turkey. This difference is justified with the fact that female work force is less qualified than male work force with respect to school education, on the job training and professional experience (Makal, 2001: 117).

One of the most significant barriers preventing women from working outside their homes in Turkey is sex based work sharing. There are two other barriers against female employment caused by sex based work sharing. The first one is the heavy work load imposed on working women due to the fact that they continue to fulfill their housekeeping responsibilities. Thus they prefer not to work unless financial circumstances force them to work. The second barrier is the fact that family members who do not find it appropriate for women to be present in public areas under the pressure imposed by their kith and kin do not permit women to leave the house. Although female employment is generally low in Turkey, the rate of highly educated professional women in the “scientific and technical personnel” category is at the same level with or higher than Western countries where female work force is higher (İlkkaracan, 1998: 288).

Female employment comprises three main groups;

- Women in rural areas working as unpaid family workers in the agricultural sector,
- Women in the lower socioeconomic status, without any education or with limited education, who are employed in low pay labor intensive jobs in cities,
- Highly educated professional women in the middle or middle high class.

Even though women in all these three categories are subjected to discrimination due to sex based work sharing and the secondary status of women in the society, they face different problems based on class distinction.

According to the Family Structure Survey carried out by TÜİK in 2006, the dominating opinion is that the main duty of women is child care and domestic work. The most interesting part is that women and men agree with this opinion almost equally. Opinions regarding female employment are provided in the Table 2.

Table 2. Considered About Working Women (1), 2006

Düşünceler	%	
	Kadın	Erkek
The main job of women is teh housework	64,7	60,7
It breaches our traditions	14,1	12,0
Work environments are not safe for women	9,5	16,5
Children of working women suffers	7,8	7,0
A paid job exhaust women	2,5	2,0
Other	1,4	1,8
Total	100,0	100,0

(1) 23% of males, and 10% of females think that it is not appropriate for women to work.

Source: http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt_id=41, (Erişim Tarihi: 29.06.2012).

Turkey has not signed the ILO Convention number 177 yet. Moreover, the quantity and scope of efforts for organizing home-based female workers are not sufficient. The first comprehensive effort for organizing home-based female workers was the 1st Country Conference of Home-Based Female Workers that was held in 2004. The 2nd Country Conference of Home-Based Female Workers was held on 3-4 December 2011. In the final declaration of the conference, the requirement for escalating the efforts addressing the problem of invisibility of female labor, raising awareness regarding this problem, collaboration of trade unions on this issue, and developing projects to this end was emphasized. The Prime Ministry has underlined the requirement to strengthen women in a number of areas including domestic violence, employment and representation with the “Circular on Increasing Female Employment and Ensuring Equality of Opportunity”, dated 25.05.2010. Additionally, unionization efforts which have been continuing since 1994 address invisibility of labor, which is the major problem of home-based female workers. Getting organized is of critical importance to ensure visibility of home-based female workers, but the methods to be followed and the difficulty of getting organized shall not be overlooked. Another important issue regarding home-based female workers is to ensure their registration.

6. The Purpose and Significance of the Present Study

The status and importance of home-based female workers in the business life in the province of Eskişehir are examined in this study through statistical methods. It is believed that the comparative studies to be conducted on the basis of the findings to be obtained in this study will make an authentic and important contribution to the literature.

7. Assumptions and Limitations

This study is based on the following assumptions:

- The reasons causing home-based female workers to work are various,
- Working conditions of home-based female workers are various,
- Home-based female workers will be highly motivated to answer the questionnaire.

This study is limited to:

- Women between the ages of 15-74 who are covered under the scope of this study,
- Home-based female workers living in the city center of Eskişehir province,
- The statements in the questionnaire and level of agreement with these statements by the women covered under the scope of the study.

8. Scope and Method

The research model, study group, collection of data and validation and reliability procedures are explained in this section, and statistical methods and techniques used in the study are described under the heading “analysis of data”.

8.1. Research Model

The comparative relational screening model was used in this study. Under this framework, the questionnaire technique was used in addition to statistical procedures in order to measure the values of the study group. A pilot study was conducted to measure the applicability of the questions to be asked in the research, and the question sheet was reviewed. The questionnaire form comprises two sections. The first section comprises questions regarding the demographic characteristics, social origins, family structure, and quality of living and economic conditions of the women covered under the scope of the study. The second section comprises a 5 point Likert type scale including statements regarding the attitude of women towards home-based work. This scale aims at finding out the attitude of women towards home-based work and their expectations of the future.

8.2. Population and Sample

The population of the study comprises home-based female workers. Firstly the number of home-based female workers in Turkey and the distribution of this work force among various sectors were calculated in order to determine the sample. Based on the fact that women are mostly employed as home-based workers in the textile sector, it is anticipated that the number of home-based female workers in Eskişehir province, which is increasingly playing an important role in this sector recently, is increasing significantly. Eskişehir province was chosen as the sample in accordance with this fact, the criteria of Human Development, and the share of women in total employment. As a matter of fact, Eskişehir province has progressed significantly with respect to Human Development criteria recently, and has become the number one in this area in Turkey. Moreover, the share of women in total employment is relatively higher in Eskişehir province compared to other provinces. These facts make it meaningful to choose Eskişehir province as the sample.

9. Findings of the study

In this section of the study, demographic characteristics of home-based female workers in Eskişehir province and the reasons for them to prefer home-based work are examined in this section by taking into account different variables. 39.3 % of home-based female workers who are included in the study group are between the ages of 40 and 49. 72.6% of them are married and 47.6% of them have finished primary school. Spouses of 56% of home-based female workers who are included in the study group are also working and spouses of 32% of these women are high school graduates. 45% of home-based female workers who are included in the study group have two children. Classification of home-based female workers who are included in the study group on the basis of their demographic characteristics is provided in detail in the Annex Table 1. 70.2% of home-based female workers who are included in the scope of the study do not have a previous paid employment experience, in other words they have not worked outside their homes. 29.8% of them have previously worked as tailors, factory workers, baby sitters or cleaning ladies, worked in their husbands' business or in the field of sales and marketing. The main reason for 45.2 % of them not to work outside their homes previously is family and relative pressure. When this finding is evaluated together with the data provided in the Table 2 asserting that the main duty of women is child care and domestic work, the social perception regarding employment of women is clearly understood. 73.8 % of home-based female workers who are included in the scope of the study are engaged in handcrafts such as weaving baby shoes or socks, lace work and needle work. 10.7 % of them are engaged in beadwork. Work performed by home-based female workers include ornaments or wrapped or stuffed food, pastes or home made dishes such as flap cakes or packaging wedding candy.

Table 3. Classification of Home-Based Female Workers Who Are Included in the Study on the Basis of Their Professional Background

Variable	N	%
Did she work as a wage earner previously?		
Yes	25	29,8
No	59	70,2
Total	84	100,0
Where did she work?		
Tailor	2	2,4
In her husband's shop	10	11,9
Sales and marketing	9	10,7
Factory worker	5	6,0
Teacher	8	9,5
Secretary	2	2,4
Baby sitter	1	1,2
Cleaning lady	1	1,2
No reply	46	54,8
Total	84	100,0
Why did not she work?		
Was not able to find a job	6	7,1
Family/relative pressure	38	45,2
Did not want to work	3	3,6
Inadequate education	4	4,8
Others	6	7,1
No reply	27	32,1
Total	84	100,0
What is she doing currently?		
Beadwork	9	10,7
Handcrafts (Baby shoes, Needlework)	62	73,8
Marketing (Catalogue selling)	2	2,4
Homemade dishes (Wrapped food, Paste)	3	3,6
Ornaments	5	6,0
Packaging wedding candy	2	2,4
No reply	1	1,2
Total	84	100,0
Is her job related to her profession?		
Yes	3	3,6
No	48	57,1
No reply	33	39,3
Total	84	100,0
Reason to prefer home-based work		
Economical requirements	66	78,6
Husband is unemployed	1	1,2
Leisure business	16	19,0
Others	1	1,2
Total		
Does she encourage others to engage in home-based work?		
Yes	67	79,8
No	17	20,2
Total	84	100,0
How did you find your current job?		
Relatives	16	19,0
Neighbors	60	71,4
Advertisements	3	3,6
Other	5	6,0
Total	84	100,0

Table 3 indicates that 78.6 % of home-based female workers who are included in the scope of the study have preferred this type of work due to economic requirements. When home-based female workers were asked whether they encouraged others to engage in this type of work, 79.8% of them said yes. Only 20.2% said no.

This finding is interesting when the difficulty to balance between work and personal life, low salaries and other negative factors in the literature regarding home-based work are taken into consideration. Although women state that they have chosen home-based work due to economic requirements, they recommend this type of work to others. As a matter of fact, home-based work had been recommended to 71.4 % of these women by their neighbors. They even learn the job from their neighbors or friends, collaborate with respect to designs and patterns, and socialize within social networks established in their communities rather than socializing in the wage earning model in professional life. This is important in forming gender roles and perceptions regarding professional life.

The levels of agreement of home-based female workers who are included in the scope of the study with the statements of perception regarding home-based work are provided in the Table 4. Contrary to the opinions in the literature which do not consider home-based work type as “working” arguing that it is invisible labor, home-based female workers regard themselves as “working”. They highly agree with the statement that their spouses are happy to see them working at home. A majority of home-based female workers who are included in the scope of the study have agreed (39.3 %) with the statement, “Working at home makes life easy for me to carry out domestic work”, while some others (33.3 %) have been uncertain. It is believed that this is due to difficulties in balancing the difficulties and advantages of home-based work with respect to work/personal life balance. A majority of home-based female workers who are included in the scope of the study (51.2 %) have stated that they wish to have the opportunity to perform their work outside their homes. A majority of home-based female workers who are included in the scope of the study (% 27.4) have been uncertain regarding the statement, “I wish to be employed at a job which cannot be performed at home at the first opportunity”. Women included in the scope of the study wish to perform work such as handcrafts, which they are currently engaged in, at another location, rather than being engaged in a wage earning job.

Table 4. The Levels of Agreement of Home-based Female Workers Who Are Included in the Scope of the Study with the Statements of Perception regarding Home-based Work

Perception Level	N	%
I regard myself as “working”.		
Strongly agree	12	14,3
Agree	44	52,4
Uncertain	16	19,0
Disagree	10	11,9
Strongly disagree	2	2,4
My husband is very positive about my working at home.		
Strongly agree	21	25,0
Agree	31	36,9
Uncertain	2	2,4
Disagree	4	4,8
Strongly disagree	2	2,4
Working at home makes life easy for me to carry out domestic work.		
Strongly agree	6	7,1
Agree	33	39,3
Uncertain	28	33,3
Disagree	16	19,0
Strongly disagree	-	-
I would like to perform my work outside my home if possible.		
Strongly agree	7	8,3
Agree	43	51,2
Uncertain	16	19,0
Disagree	13	15,5
Strongly disagree	5	6,0
I wish to be employed at a job which cannot be performed at home at the first opportunity		
Strongly agree	22	26,2
Agree	18	21,4
Uncertain	23	27,4
Disagree	14	16,7
Strongly disagree	7	8,3

10. Conclusion

39.3 % of home-based female workers who are included in the study group are between the ages of 40 and 49. 72.6% of them are married and 47.6 % of the have finished primary school. When the work performed by women who have previously worked outside their homes is examined, it is seen that these jobs do not have regular employment records. It is seen that these women have mainly worked in jobs such as sales and marketing, cleaning and baby sitting and in secondary jobs such as “helping their husbands”. Home-based female workers regard themselves as “working” due to their activities which increase their rate of participation in domestic decisions. However, all of the women included in the scope of the study work without social security. Although a majority of women included in the scope of the study have stated that they have chosen this type of work due to economic requirements, they are uncertain and reluctant to be engaged in another type of work as a wage earner. It can be said that this is because their average age is 40, they do not have a profession, and their level of education is low. However, it is interesting that they wish to perform the same job at another location outside their homes.

Under the findings obtained in this study, it can be said that home-based work which has been increasingly preferred in Turkey as in the rest of the world in the recent years, is the result of social requirements as well as economic requirements. Consequently, in order to make the labor of home-based female workers visible, to help them get organized, and to provide better living and working conditions to them:

- Women who are restricted to their social community in their neighborhood should be provided with support in line with their existing social networks, by establishing local administrations, trade unions and cooperatives in this field addressing women in the same society,
- Awareness should be raised with respect to participation of women in social life by working as a wage earner in labor markets, which is more important than the economic benefits of such type of employment,
- Activities should be carried out to help home-based female workers balance their work life and personal life,
- All related social stakeholders should provide support and guidance in this field.

Although “working” is generally perceived as employment as a wage earner in labor markets, the transformation in the mode of production has helped growth of home-based work. Moreover, when the reasons causing home-based work to be a preferred type of work are considered, the best thing to do is to improve working conditions regarding this type of work.

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Annex Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Home-Based female Workers Included in the Scope of the Study

Variable	N	%
Age		
27-39	13	15,5
40-49	33	39,3
50-59	26	31,0
60-69	11	13,1
70-79	1	1,2
Total	84	100,0
Marital Status		
Married	61	72,6
Single	9	10,7
Divorced	5	6,0
Widow	9	10,7
Total	84	100,0
Level of Education		
Primary school	40	47,6
Secondary school	10	11,9
High school	29	34,5
University	5	6,0
Total	84	100,0
Is Your Husband Working?		
Yes	47	56,0
No	15	17,9
No reply	22	26,2
Total	84	100,0
Occupation of Husband		
Retired	25	29,8
Public servant	5	6,0
Worker	14	16,7
Teacher	2	2,4
Self employed	14	16,7
No reply	24	28,6
Total	84	100,0
Level of Education of Husband		
Primary school	10	11,9
Secondary school	11	13,1
High school	27	32,1
University	12	14,3
No reply	24	28,6
Total	84	100,0
Number of Children		
1	9	10,7
2	38	45,2
3	23	27,4
4	3	3,6
No reply	11	13,1
Total	84	100,0