

Transformation of Work Practice in The Digitalized Labor Process: Freelancers in Turkey¹

Melis KARATABAN²
Çisel EKİZ GÖKMEN³

Received: 16.04.2022, Accepted: 24.06.2022
DOI Number: 10.5281/zenodo.6850809

Abstract

The unprecedented worldwide spread of freelance work is seen to be one of the most important changes created by the development of digital technologies with a dramatic effect on work relations and practices. This study aims to examine how freelance work has changed the working practices in Turkey, the motivations and working conditions of freelancers, the gendered nature of freelance work, and the perceptions of women. For this purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 freelancers in Turkey. According to the field research findings, the education level of the interviewees is high and their freelance work experience varies between 1-12 years. The main reasons to work as freelancers is mainly the result of the sense of being flexible and “free” working environment. However, the research findings show that the promise of freedom is mostly an illusion and brings precarious working conditions with it. Although women are less visible than men in the freelance work, some of the male interviewees think that female freelancers are more successful in taking responsibility and being creative. Based on the discourses of the male interviewees towards female freelancers, it is possible to say that the majority of the male interviewees have developed a positive attitude towards gender equality.

Key words: Freelance Work, Working Conditions, Gender

JEL Code: J16, J21, J81

1. Introduction

¹ This study is derived from the master thesis conducted by Melis KARATABAN under the supervisor of Çisel EKİZ-GÖKMEN titled as “Transformation of Work Practice and Freelance Work in the Digitalized Labor Process” (in Turkish).

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments and suggestions on a previous version.

² Master Degree, Mugla Sıtkı Kocman University, Turkey, melis.karataban@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0412-5081>

³ Assistant Professor, Mugla Sıtkı Kocman University, Turkey, cekiz@mu.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7450-0265>

In recent years, the labor processes have become more flexible with the development of digital technologies (Berg et al., 2018: 6). By changing the traditional form of relationship between the employee and the employer, the short-term and temporary work has provided employees leverage to work with different customers (employers). The emergence of new work practices has led to the fact that the structure of long-term employment guarantee of traditional working relations has lost strength. As a result, more and more people have turned to alternative forms of working and freelance work has become widespread.

Freelance work is a form of work performed by people who are not tied to any company or employer with long-term contracts and are hired to perform certain tasks or services. Although not know an exact number, it is estimated that as of 2021, approximately 35 percent of the global workforce (about 1.1 billion people) are working as freelancer and this rate will reach 80 percent by 2030 (Finances Online, 2022). The general manager of a digital platform (SanalUzman) in Turkey also estimated that in 2018, approximately 1.2 million people were working as freelancer in Turkey, and this number would reach 8.5 million by 2023 (Maxi Haber, 2018). With the digitalization of the labor process, the tendency of people to work freelance both in the world and in Turkey is increasing day by day.

This study aims to examine the freelance work practices in Turkey to reveal the perceptions on freelance work, working environment at home, and the transformation in the labor process. This paper also examines the sense of being a woman and the perceptions on women in freelance work, which generally exhibits a male-dominated structure. The main discussion carried out is that freelance work is the result of transformations generated through dynamics of current capitalist accumulation process. The analysis in the paper is based on the interviews done with 28 freelance workers.

In the study, first of all, the phenomenon of freelance work and self-employment were discussed in a conceptual perspective, then the literature on freelance workers and working conditions was shared. Afterward, the method of the study and the findings of the field research are given. Finally, a general evaluation was made.

2. Freelance Work and Self-employment

Freelance work is used to describe work performed by people who are not tied to any company or employer with long-term contracts, do not have regular and permanent employment opportunities, and are hired to perform certain duties or services (Mallon, 1998: 169). In freelance work, the concept of working with a client or employer in exchange for piecework is adopted. Freelancers earn in return for their performance or output.

A freelancer can work with any employer or company to perform a specific task or project without a long-term contract. In this respect, freelancers are different from atypical workers employed on a short-term and temporary contract or as subcontractors (Walters et al., 2006). Because they may work without being tied to any employer or company. At this point, individuals are paid based on the result of the task or service they perform, rather than in return for the hire of their labor. Apart from this, freelancers are not dependent on or obligated to obey employers, while other atypical workers establish a subordinate working relationship with their employers (Davidov, 2012: 172).

The most important point that distinguishes freelance work from those working self-employed, which is inherent in this form of work. Self-employed people work independently of time and place, in a way, by having control of their labor. In a similar way, freelancers have the opportunity to work simultaneously with more than one employer in the same sector, instead of working for a single employer (Vosko et al., 2003). In this sense, freelancers can be defined as self-employed people who sell their services based on their experience, expertise and skills to an employer (Platman, 2004: 577-578). In other words, freelance work emerges as a sub-type of the atypical work style accepted within the self-employment work model (Nies and Pedersini, 2003: 8).

The phenomenon of self-employment has existed throughout history, both as a work activity and as a work status. However, the phenomenon of self-employment has gained importance as an alternative employment creation method, especially with the increasing unemployment in recent years. This is because self-employment, promoted by innovation and creativity, is seen as a driving force for job creation and economic growth (Startienė et al., 2010: 262). However, with the birth of the digital economy, the number of self-employed people has increased (OECD, 2017: 28). These changes in the labor market have created high value-added self-employment forms such as freelance work. Freelancers are defined as creative thinkers who work on their own account in the service-based and intellectual industries (Rapelli, 2012).

Unlike traditional self-employment forms such as architecture or law, freelancing has spread to many different sectors such as web-based enterprises, graphic design and entertainment with the development of digital technologies, (Pedersini and Coletto, 2010: 5). In this sense, it is possible to say that the most important factor that distinguishes freelance work from traditional self-employment forms is the use of digital technologies and home-based work.

3. Literature Review

In line with the development of the digital labor market, employers can now select self-employed individuals collectively in a large-scale digital pool for short-term projects without spatial commitment. Self-employed individuals in this pool, on the other hand, can choose from among the projects in the pool and do business with customers living anywhere in the world. In this sense, it can be said that digital transformation has a feature that spreads a super flexible working style.

The popularity of the concept of freelance work has increased in recent years and a quantitative increase has been observed in the academic literature in this field. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected the whole world, is also greatly affected the freelancing practices. The pandemic has accelerated the digitalization process of working life and therefore labor more than ever before. Although the digitization of the working life and labor process is not a new phenomenon, this period, which has brought about a compulsory digitalization process, has also led to a tremendous acceleration in freelance work. Thus, freelance work has become an atypical form of work, which is becoming increasingly important all over the world, especially in developed countries.

Freelancers access to work through their own networks and digital employment platforms such as Upwork, Care.com, Fiverr, TaskRabbit and TopCoder (Hannak et al., 2017). The relevant literature shows that digital platforms have some advantages and disadvantages for freelancers. Digital platforms provide job opportunities to people who cannot find a job in full-time and salaried traditional positions or who want to contribute to their current income (Baruch, 2004: 59; Moore, 2018), and offer flexibility to individuals in choosing suitable jobs (Hannák et al., 2017). It also offers freelancers the opportunity to promote their names and work (Dedeoğlu, 2020:27). However, Hannák et al., (2017) point out in their studies that, unlike traditional job search processes, digital algorithms replace prejudices and reduce discrimination in the workplace by offering objectivity in finding a job. One of the disadvantages of these platforms is the high wage competition among job seekers, which drives the wage level down. For these reasons, digital platforms are generally preferred by new graduates who want to promote their names and work, while experienced and skilled freelancers prefer to get work through their own networks (Dedeoğlu, 2020:27-28).

It is seen that there are generally two different approaches to freelance work and working conditions in the literature. In the first approach, freelancing is considered as a modern exploitation method of the capitalist system through precarious, flexible, temporary and variable working conditions, while in the second approach it is associated with independence, freedom and entrepreneurship.

Some studies examine freelance work as a form of precarious work and show that many people working in professions such as translator, copywriter and graphic designer are employed as freelancers instead of being employed full time, although in some cases they have a dependent employment relationship with the

employer, thus they have become a product of the capitalist form of labor (Nies and Pedersini, 2003; Willnat et al, 2017). Ornebring (2018), in his study, draws attention to the increase in the number of freelance journalists working in the media industry and argues that insecurity has become the “new normal”. There are also studies pointing out the increased control over workers, erosion in worker organization and social isolation. In these studies, it is stated that freelance work, which has become an atypical working style, increases the control and control over employees (Cohen, 2014), harms worker organization (Fenwick, 2006), causes social isolation and asocial behaviors (Clinton et al, 2006).

In the Turkish context, İlyas’s (2019) doctoral thesis, which is one of the few studies that deals with the transformation in the labor market in Turkey emphasizes the precarious and flexible working conditions of freelance work in the context of class politics. Çiğdem and Erdoğan (2019) analyzed the precarization process in the media industry through the experiences of freelance journalists and found that freelance work is an insecure work and encourages the increase of the precarisation process in the media industry. Çiğdem and Erdoğan (2020), in another study examining the working conditions of freelance journalists in Turkey, discussed the issue not only in the context of labor relations but also in terms of the transformation of the journalism profession. In their study, it was revealed that the roles of freelance journalists in the sector have changed, on the one hand, they have the opportunity to develop new skills in their careers thanks to digital developments, on the other hand, they experience significant problems in terms of wages, job security, social security and union organization. In the report where Dedeoğlu (2020) analyzes the work dynamics of industrial home-based piece-rate workers and individuals working as freelancers, she reaches a striking conclusion that freelance workers prefer informal and insecure working relationships in order to reach higher wage levels. Dedeoğlu (2020), who also evaluated freelance work from a gendered perspective revealed that the vulnerability level of men working as informal, unregistered and without a social security coverage is relatively higher.

Another strand of research on freelance workers focus on the freedom and autonomy. For Arthur and Rousseau (2000), working freelance provides individuals with a free and independent work area, and a statue that offers the opportunity to have the control over their work processes and to engage in creative activities. Cohen and Mallon (1999), in their examination of individuals who left the institutions to be able to provide freelance consultancy, concluded that the freelance work has many positive features such as individuals feel freer than other work arrangements, being their own boss and being independent. Clinton, Totterdell, and Wood (2006), conducted their research in different occupational groups, found out that almost all freelance workers have the freedom to decide not to work when they don’t want to, and they determine their own working hours and hours. Fraser and Gold (2001) also point out similar findings on freelance translators that they can have an autonomous working environment and have control over their working conditions. The majority of the interviewees stated that the most important advantage of freelancing is that it allows them to work at home and provides an

independent working environment and they would not accept to stop working freelance and work in a full-time job even if given the opportunity. Hunter (2015)'s study on freelance journalists found different results from other studies on autonomy and control. Almost all of the journalists included in the research stated that they do not have the final control over the content they produce, and that they have to make arrangements in accordance with the expectations of the customers while preparing their news content.

Based on the aforementioned literature, it is possible to evaluate people's freelance work motivations in two different ways. The first of these, freelance work is preferred voluntarily due to factors such as independence, freedom, job satisfaction and more income. The other is that freelance work has been adopted as a necessity because of inability to find a job due to widespread unemployment in the economy the absence of any suitable alternative in the labor market or the disadvantages such as discrimination, mobbing and, low wages in the last workplace (Dawson et al., 2009; İlyas, 2019; Çiğdem and Erdoğan 2020).

4. Methodology

This study aims to examine the working practices and motivations of freelancers, the status of being a woman in freelance work, and the perceptions on women freelancers in Turkey. Although the focus of the study is freelance workers, the findings also provide qualitative data about the practice of working in the digital labor process. In this context, it is considered that the study will be an important resource on the digital labor process and freelance workers.

In-depth interviews were used in the study. Although freelance work is carried out independently of the place due to its nature, most of the interviews were held in metropolitan cities such as Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir, since physical interaction with customers is still important. That's why the most live close by to their pool of customers in large cities of Turkey. The research covered the findings from 28 freelancers, who were reached through snowball sampling method. Some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face (17 people), and some of them were made online via skype (11 people). The interviews took place in two phases, between February-May 2021 and August-October 2021 due to the limitations imposed by global pandemic conditions.

In the interviews, a set of semi-structured questions were asked to the interviewees regarding their demographic characteristics, past work experiences, freelance work motivations, current working conditions, social rights, work-family life balance and being a woman in the sector. During the face-to-face interviews, a voice recorder was used with the permission of the respondent.

5. Field Research Findings

General Characteristics of the Interviewees

Within the scope of the field research, 28 freelancers from different professions, 12 women and 16 men, were interviewed. Information about the interviewees is presented in Table 1. According to the field research findings, the interviewees are between the ages of 21-43. The education level of the interviewees is high and most of them (16 people) are university graduates. Freelance work experience of the interviewees varies between 1 year and 12 years. 12 interviewees have experienced both freelance and regular paid work. Three of the interviewees work simultaneously as both freelancers and regular wage earners.

As can be seen from Table 1, the interviewees work as freelancers in various occupational groups such as translators, web content editors, website designer, web content writer, e-commerce specialist, IT specialist, software developer, graphic designer, computer engineer, digital marketing specialist, blogger, interface developer/designer and logo designer.

Table 1. Information About the Interviewers

Interviewer Number	Gender	Age	Education Level	Occupation	Freelance Experience (years)
1	Female	26	Studying (University)	Translator/Interpreters	3
2	Female	31	Graduated (University)	Web Content Editor	5
3	Male	30	Graduated (University)	Web Content Editor	4
4	Male	29	Graduated (University)	Website Designer	5
5	Male	23	Graduated (High School)	Web Content Writer	4
6	Female	37	University Dropout	Web Content Writer	2
7	Male	36	Graduated (High School)	E-Commerce	1
8	Male	32	Graduated (Master)	IT Specialist	5
9	Female	32	Studying (Doctorate)	Programmer	10
10	Male	35	Graduated (University)	E-Commerce	5
11	Male	38	Graduated (University)	Computing Expert	8
12	Male	42	Graduated (University)	Graphic Designer	12
13	Male	32	Graduated (University)	Computer Engineer	6
14	Male	43	Graduated (University)	Web Content Writer	10
15	Female	27	Graduated (University)	Web Content Editor	3
16	Male	30	Graduated (University)	Computing Expert	5
17	Male	31	Graduated (University)	Programmer	5
18	Female	33	Graduated (University)	Web Content Writer	2
19	Female	28	Graduated (University)	Digital Marketing Specialist	2
20	Female	22	Studying (University)	Web Content Writer	3
21	Female	21	Studying (University)	Blogger	2
22	Male	32	Graduated (University)	Interface Developer/Designer	5
23	Male	31	Graduated (University)	Logo Designer	6
24	Male	32	Graduated (High School)	E-Commerce	7
25	Female	35	Graduated (University)	Website Designer	5
26	Male	35	University Dropout	E-Commerce	10
27	Female	31	Graduated (High School)	Website Designer	4
28	Female	27	Studying (University)	Blogger	3

Why Freelance Work?

There are some motivations that push or pull interviewees to work as freelancers in these different fields. A number of factors such as not being able to find a job suitable for their qualifications, the difficulties of the current working conditions or dismissal may force people to work as freelancers.

According to the results of the field research, 8 of the interviewees stated that they turned to freelance work because they could not find a full-time job that they could adapt to in the labor market, while 9 of them said that they left their full-time jobs and turned to freelance work. It has been observed that the perceptions of the interviewees that the working conditions are not acceptable and that they are more likely to be made redundant for different reasons have a significant impact on their tendency to leave their current jobs and work as freelancers. During the field research, it was determined that another important reason that pushes individuals to work freelance is the impositions of the corporate work culture. For most freelancers, working full-time in an organization is not preferred. One of the interviewees explains this situation as follows:

“The reason I turned to freelance work was that I was overwhelmed by the monotony and drudgery of corporate life. There were so many procedures that I could not find time to spare for myself. When you do not have time to spare for yourself, you cannot do the things you need to improve yourself. Get out of the house every morning, go to work, come home, eat, take a shower and sleep. In fact, this is a way of life that will lead people to depression in the long run. After all, you're only born once, you don't have another life.” (Interviewer No:16).

Although it varies differently in different sectors, the income level, which is usually higher than the minimum wage - the minimum monthly wage is 2,825.9 TL in 2021 - in freelance work, makes freelancing attractive for some interviewees.

“In today's conditions, it is very difficult to live on the minimum wage or the pension... In this sense, freelancing gives you the opportunity to earn an income, even if it is not regular. The income I am talking about is never below the minimum wage.” (Interviewer No: 10).

Freelance work is also preferred because of the attractive opportunities it offers to individuals such as freedom and autonomy. The advantages of flexible working style are one of the most important factors that lead individuals to work freelance. As a matter of fact, the features such as freedom and autonomy inherent in freelancing as a form of self-employment are quite compatible in occupations such as architecture, editorial, copywriting, journalism and designer. Most of the interviewees emphasized the liberating nature of working in their motivation for freelancing. Participants expressed their views on this issue as follows:

“I cannot do business by taking orders from anyone. This is the main reason why I prefer to work as a freelancer.” (Interviewer No: 4).

“Freelancing is actually a freely form of work. Ability to work remotely, from anywhere, without being affiliated with any company.” (Interviewer No: 22).

Having Access to Work

Interviewers often use a variety of local or global digital platforms to access the work, such as Freelancers.com, Indeed, Fiverr, Upwork, and Bionluk. These platforms also help freelancers, especially at the beginning of their careers, to increase their reputation in the market and to establish relationships with customers. Among the interviewees, there are also those who access to work through their own networks. The interviewees described how they accessed to work and the digital platforms they used as follows:

“When looking for a job, I usually prefer platforms like Freelancers.com, Indeed or Fiverr. These platforms are popular platforms in the freelance world. The more members of the platform, the higher your chances of finding a job.” (Interviewer No: 8).

“My intention was to make my name known in the sector and to create a customer network for myself in this way. There are too many platforms where I write for free. But over time, an audience formed who read what I wrote with interest, and I started to reap the fruits of my work.” (Interviewer No: 6).

Working as a Freelancer: Precarisation

The promise of “freedom” that freelance work offers to individuals also includes certain insecurities. These insecurities manifest themselves in the form of job insecurity, income insecurity, working without social security coverage, occupational health and safety problems.

Job Insecurity

Job insecurity is one of the most important components of freelance work (Çiğdem and Erdoğan, 2019: 165). Job insecurity includes situations that arise as a result of all kinds of legal or illegal organizational changes that will prevent the continuity of the current job, and that cause the employees to worry about losing their job based on the idea of uncertainty (Çakır, 2007:120). A freelancer can be terminated with or without a notice (Dedeoğlu, 2020:41). This is generally due to the lack of legal regulations and written contracts regarding freelancing. There are no or very limited legal regulations on protecting the rights of freelance workers around the world and in Turkey. Even in the UK, where more than two million people work as freelancers, there is no generally accepted freelance work status in terms of law (Pedersini and Coletto, 2010: 5). This situation is the main source of the problems experienced by freelancers in the labor market.

According to the Labor Law No. 4857 in Turkey, the common feature of flexible working styles is that they fulfill a dependency requirement based on employment contract (Kuzgun, 2004: 17). In this context, while other non-traditional working relationships are generally created with a single employer, in the freelance work, due to the nature of the concept, it is possible to work with more than one client at the same time (Platman, 2004: 577). Freelancers work in short-term jobs by making written or verbal agreements with more than one client. In the field study, more than half of the interviewees stated that they made business agreements verbally. This situation causes freelancers to experience job insecurity. One of the interviewees explains the importance of written contracts in the face of precarious working conditions as follows:

“Turkey offers a more insecure environment for freelancing, as in all other matters. It is always much more advantageous to make a written contract, as if the word flies away. But, unfortunately, this is not the case in our country.” (Interviewer No: 7).

However, the fact that the employment contract is based on a written agreement does not mean that freelancers are legally dependent on a particular employer. For this reason, even if a written contract is made with the employer, this contract cannot go beyond being a commercial contract. Therefore, freelancers are vulnerable if the employer arbitrarily terminates the employment contract or gives up working (Çiğdem and Erdoğan, 2019:166). Most of the interviewees stated that they did not feel safe, that they were worried about their jobs would be terminated at any moment and they could not find a job.

“Working as a freelancer in Turkey is really not easy; A word from the mouth of the person you work with can destroy all your future plans in an instant.” (Interviewer No: 13).

“Although you have a sufficient social environment to work as freelance, sometimes you cannot get a job for 2-3 months.” (Interviewer No: 15).

Income Insecurity

Freelancers also have income insufficiency and insecurity problems (Çiğdem and Erdoğan, 2019, Dedeoğlu, 2020). According to the field research findings, the income of freelancers varies according to the sectors they work in, but the monthly average is around 5000-6000 TL. This finding coincides with the results of Dedeoğlu's (2020) study, which was carried out on approximately similar dates. This income level, which is higher than the minimum wage, makes freelancing attractive for some interviewees. However, compared to the working hours and the intensity of the work, the inadequacy of the wages received was expressed by many interviewees.

“We delivered an incredibly difficult project two months ago... I worked full-time for 8 months, I even ate my meals in front of the computer, let me tell you. But I only earned an income of 43.000 TL.” (Interviewer No: 13).

“Sometimes I work so hard that I can't find time to brush my hair...The salary I get for all that effort is often not enough to even cover my hairdresser's expenses.” (Interviewer No: 18).

In the field research, it was also determined that the interviewees were only paid on the basis of the product or project, and all other costs such as insurance, food, transportation, and accommodation were ignored in this process. An interviewee's statement on this issue was as follows:

There is no event that I did not attend in order to get to this point. When you think about it, these are all expenses. Sometimes you have to go out of town. Traveling, eating, drinking, staying, there is a lot of expense. You need to consider all these costs before you decide to work as a freelancer.” (Interviewer No: 27).

Participants are also faced with income insecurity, such as not getting paid on time or not at all and receiving less for the work they do. The fact that the participants usually make their business agreements verbally prevents them from seeking their legal rights in the face of these injustices. The interviewees describe their income insecurity as follows:

“Sometimes the customer does not pay you. Sometimes he says 'I will do 50% at the beginning of the job and 50% at the delivery of the job' but when the job is finished, he does not give the 50% he promised by saying 'I did not like the job'. We're running after the man so that he can at least give 5% of it. If you try to take legal action because the agreement was not like this, the costs you have to endure are already higher than the wage you will receive for that job. That's why people don't prefer to take legal action. Unfortunately, that's the way it is in our industry.” (Interviewer No: 28).

“You face situations where you don't get the pay you deserve. Like a joke. You earn good wages in this job, but it does not offer you any guarantees or assurances.” (Interviewer No: 9).

Income insecurity can also result from job insecurity. An interviewee expressed her problems and income insecurity during her unemployment as follows:

“In the last 2.5 years, I have earned almost nine times my salary while working in a corporate company. Of course, this is not always the case. Before that, there was a period where I was unemployed for 4 months and it is very difficult for me to put into words the depression I experienced at that time. If you are doing this job, you have to accept the income imbalance and take your steps accordingly.” (Interviewer No: 20).

Social Security and Health Insurance

Freelancers do not have social security and health insurance rights linked to the job, in Turkey. Paying social security contributions are entirely voluntary. There are two methods of insurance for freelancers. The first of these methods is that freelancers who have companies in their own name and those who are taxpayers can be insured pursuant to article 4/B of Law No. 5510. People in this situation can both retire and benefit from health services by paying an insurance premium every month on a monthly basis. However, there is a disadvantageous situation for freelancers since the pensions of 4/B people are low and the number of premium payment days required to retire is higher than those with 4/A. In the second method, if a freelancer is not taxpayer or company partner in real or simple procedure, and is not registered in the tradesman and craftsman registry- this time he/she can be optionally insured. In this case, the freelancer can be entitled to a pension when he/she retires and benefits from health services by paying an insurance premium on the basis of a premium that he/she determines. A person with optional insurance pays lower premiums than a person with 4/B. However, it does not have the opportunity to benefit from the assistances provided by the short-term insurance branches (Kılıç, 2015).

Most of the interviewees work without social security coverage. In the field research, it has been observed that some of the interviewees took out optional insurance in order to provide a guarantee for themselves:

“Freelancing has become an increasingly common form of work. But unfortunately, our work has no legal title. In order not to experience any unjust treatment, we make our own insurance from outside by making savings in the periods when we earn income.” (Interviewer No: 3).

Occupational Health and Safety

Freelancers generally work on their personal computers with an internet connection at home. Working with computers is often perceived as less dangerous than working on a construction site or factory. However, working long hours using a computer has risks in the form of psycho-social hazards such as ergonomics, isolation and poor work-life balance (Dedeoğlu, 2020: 31). In this sense, freelancing creates an unsafe environment in terms of occupational health and safety and therefore conflicts with decent work. In the field study, the interviewees stated that working with a computer for long hours negatively affects their eye health and causes focusing problems as follows:

“As the design process requires meticulousness, I sometimes have to look at the screen for 12 hours a day. That's why I have "chronic dry eye.” (Interviewer No: 12).

“You really need to focus on what you're doing when producing content. You should also adjust the dose of this focus well. When you miss the end of the rope, you may find it difficult to focus on the developments in your social life. I have an intense "focus problem" related to matters outside of my work. I have not received any treatment for this issue, but I am trying to overcome this problem with the “NLP” classes I attend online.” (Interviewer No: 18).

The insecure, uncertain, flexible, temporary and variable nature of freelance work causes individuals to have serious concerns about the future due to reasons such as not being able to maintain their livelihood, not being able to save and paying their social security premiums. These anxiety disorders can also cause psychological-based health problems. Some of the interviewees expressed this situation with the following words:

“Everyone has a concern for the future, the question of what we will be when we get old. At the moment, I do not pay any premiums other than my private pension insurance premium. I've been investing in private pension for the last few months. Actually, I don't want to think too much about the future, it creates some anxiety when I think too much.” (Interviewer No: 18).

“My period of not being able to find a job took much longer than I expected. At that time, I had psoriasis for the first time in my life. You know, psoriasis is a psychological disease and if you have a high level of anxiety, it can take over your immune system.” (Interviewer No: 15).

Delusion of Freedom

Against a possible threat, capitalism has always developed new forms of production and control mechanisms suitable for these forms of production in order to survive. In this context, the concept of autonomy and freedom in freelance work is a controversial issue.

As mentioned before, the most important reasons why interviewees prefer to work freelance are that they have control over time and do not feel pressure from any institution or employer. However, the real experiences of freelancers show that freedom or autonomy cannot go beyond discourse. Some interviewees state that the perception of freedom varies from person to person and is just an illusion. Because in order for customers to buy the work, the work must be produced in accordance with their expectations. This situation causes freelancers to feel pressure to work in line with the expectations of their customers. Thus, as it is revealed in the excerpts below, employees have to comply with the procedures of customers or institutions.

“Even if I don't go to a company to work, I can't really say that I act freely. After all, I have to sell my work to someone. When you have such an obligation, you cannot add your own interpretations to the translations and a standard text emerges. You are no different from the others. This causes you to not enjoy your work.” (Interviewer No: 1).

“Sometimes I have clients who manipulate me too much about my designs. Even though they do not have any specialization, they come with various requests such as 'I did not like this color, let's do some shading at the back of the article'. No matter how much I resist, I have to prepare logos in line with their wishes. Because I earn my income thanks to them.” (Interviewer No: 12).

Working Hours and Workload: The Problem of Work-Life Balance

Employees do not have regular working hours, as freelancing is a flexible form of work. However, the delivery date of the work or project is certain. In this sense, working time is completely output based. While most of the interviewees stated that having flexible working hours offered them attractive advantages, they also said that they had a busy work schedule in a limited time and they lacked control over their adaptation time. This situation was described by one of the interviewees as follows:

“If they offer you a good income, know that they want to buy at least 90% of your time. There is no clause in the contract about how long you have to work, but you have to be ready for sleepless nights to deliver the work on the date specified by the customer.” (Interviewer No: 14).

Freelancing increases the workload of the employees, as it imposes many different responsibilities apart from their own duties, such as finding a job and following the employment process. Therefore, as the relevant literature reveals (Çiğdem and Erdoğan, 2020), a freelancer takes responsibility for the entire process from the design to the completion of the job.

“When I work, I have to take on all the work and the burdens that those jobs entail. For example, most simply, I have to find my own work. This is the hardest part anyway, the process of finding a job is often painful. Apart from that, I have to personally manage all monetary affairs such as accommodation, travel expenses, telephone bills. Actually, in a sense, you are considered the boss of your own business, but there is a moral pressure on you and you have to deal with it. If you have a problem while working in a company, you can directly put the responsibility on the company or you want compensation, the issue is resolved. But while working as a freelancer, all responsibility is yours from start to finish.” (Interviewer No: 9).

Freelance jobs that require creativity, such as copywriting and journalism, take the working time and workload beyond the hours spent in front of the computer due to their unique dynamics. The interviewees expressed this situation as follows:

“Freelancing is a very different way of working with its own dynamics. It is not possible to squeeze your work into certain working hours. To be a copywriter, you need to think, read and edit 24/7. The process of reading and editing is very important as your written content reflects the energy of your personal brand.” (Interviewer No: 14).

“Since I am engaged in a creative work, inspiration does not come immediately, and I often cannot write something even though I think for hours. (Interviewer No: 18).

Almost all of the interviewees stated that they were satisfied with the flexible working opportunities offered by freelance work, but at the same time they had to be constantly alert in order to deliver the work in the way the customer wanted on the deadline. Freelancers are not subject to the internal regulations and working hours of the people or institutions that invite them to work. However, the requested work must be delivered to the relevant person or institution by the deadline. Therefore, the freelancer has to arrange his working hours accordingly. This situation causes work life and private life to be intertwined.

The general view on freelancing, which is a flexible working form, is that employees have more free time for themselves, their relatives and families. However, this view does not fully reflect the truth. An interviewee expressed his work-life balance problem with following words:

“Sometimes, even though I work so hard, I can't complete the work. When you work so hard, you can't take care of anything related to your social life. I've had so many friendships that ended because of this. People may not be able to adapt to this pace.” (Interviewer No: 5).

Covid 19 Pandemic and Freelancing

The fact that more people have to adapt to working conditions from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic has caused freelance work to become more popular. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the destruction created by this process in the traditional full-time working routine and the gap created by this destruction are filled by the freelance working style. Some of the interviewees' statements on this subject were as follows:

“The use of digital products, or the digital needs of a freelancer for work, is actually increasing logarithmically, not slowly. Especially this pandemic period has really accelerated these needs and digital adaptation.” (Interviewer No: 19).

“I can say that the pandemic has increased the pace of competition in our industry. The number of people who subscribe to online platforms such as upwork, which we apply especially when looking for a job, has increased tremendously.” (Interviewer No: 22).

In the interviews, almost all of the interviewees stated that the global pandemic has advantages in terms of freelancing. Some interviewees evaluated the pandemic process from an economic point of view and said that they could easily find a job due to the expansion of the market. On the other hand, some interviewees stated that they got rid of the “feeling of loneliness” in the industry to some extent by developing a spiritual perspective on the pandemic process:

“If you do some research, you will see that the way e-commerce will come in five years has only been reached in the first six months of the pandemic. This is very interesting data, for example. The growth of a market that will grow in five years will open up incredible opportunities for us. I'm not just talking about freelancers.” (Interviewer No: 10).

“During the shutdown, my friend (who works at the bank full time) had to work from home for a while. I remember my friend calling me in the middle of the night and telling me how hard she/he's been working and telling me: "I understand you now.” (Interviewer No: 27).

Women in Freelancing and Gender

Women, who are assigned responsibility for domestic service and child care, cannot participate in the labor market at all or may have to leave working life in some periods of their careers (Dedeoğlu, 2000; Dayıoğlu and Kırdar, 2010; Memiş et al, 2012; Ekiz-Gökmen 2022). In this sense, freelancing and the flexibility it offers provide the opportunity for women to continue their career processes at home.

“While working as a freelancer, it is possible to spend your time at home as much as you want. I can witness every moment of my child and I don't have to worry about keeping a babysitter.” (Interviewer No: 2).

Freelance work, which women consider as an “advantage” in order to continue childcare and housework, can also lead to the reproduction of gender inequality. For this reason, women with careers can experience “time poverty” even if they do not live in income poverty (Ekiz-Gökmen, 2017:1967). In her study, Dedeoğlu (2020:32-33) determined that freelance work intensifies the unequal gender roles, especially for women, who are married or with children. Field findings similarly point to increasing gender inequality and the increasing double burden of female freelancers:

“Due to being always at home, the number of responsibilities I took on domestic work increased in a strange way. In the past, I didn't have duties such as "buying bread for the house" or "putting the laundry of the household in the machine", now all these responsibilities are on me.” (Interviewer No: 28).

“If you are a female freelancer, the people with whom you share the house get the perception that "you can handle it anyway" by throwing whole burden of the house on you. Sometimes I get this perception, too, and I find myself dealing with cleaning and cooking for 7-8 hours apart from paid work. I can say that the hardest part of working as a freelancer is to struggle with this perception.” (Interviewer No: 1).

Since freelancers are unregistered, there is no statistical data on the number of freelancers in Turkey. However, findings from the relevant literature and the field show that the number of freelancer women is low compared to men. A male interviewer expressed the inadequacy in the number of freelance women with the following sentences:

“Women do it really well, but there are no enough women in the market. I think it's because women don't realize their potential. Since I've been in this business for a long time, when I look at a project, I can immediately tell if a woman did it.” (Interviewer No: 22).

Although women are less visible than men in freelance work, some of the male interviewees think that female freelancers are more successful in taking responsibility and creativity, and they express it as follows:

“Women are much more successful in our industry. Their numbers are less than men, but when you give a job, they deliver it on time. They're definitely better than us at taking responsibility. It is also very important to think in detail and to carry out several tasks at the same time in this business. Men are very weak in this regard. As a man, I can say this with confidence. If a man and woman have a parallel career experience, a conscious client will definitely prefer women.” (Interviewer No: 11).

“I think that women are more successful in jobs that require creativity. Creativity is very important in this business. You design something from scratch in your brain and put it into writing with the most appropriate sentences. Women have a very developed structure compared to men in terms of expressing themselves. It's like two plus two four. Most of the people I take as an example in this business are women.” (Interviewer No: 14).

Based on the discourses of male interviewees towards freelancer women, it can be said that the vast majority of interviewees have a positive attitude towards gender equality.

6. Conclusion

The digital revolution, built on the dynamics of the industrial revolution, has changed the nature of job in working life, created different forms of employment, and allowed a brand-new labor to be created and employed through digital platforms, independent of time and place. Thus, it led to a radical change in the nature of the labor market. In the study, the working motivations of freelancers in Turkey, their working conditions, being a woman in freelance work and the perception of women were analyzed. In this context, in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 freelancers from different professions. According to the field research findings, the majority of the interviewees have a high level of education and their freelance work experience varies between 1 year and 12 years.

In the research, it has been determined that the main motivations of the interviewees to work as freelancers are factors such as freedom, autonomy and flexibility. The field research findings reveal that the interviewees are willing to be deprived of job and income security for the sake of these motivational sources. It can be said that this consent and the new normalization of insecurity is due to the increase in layoffs, the lack of sufficient demand for those who have started the career process, and especially due to the pandemic in recent years. In this sense, it would not be wrong to describe the phenomenon of freelance work in the form of a Medusa coin, one side of which represents free work and the other side of insecure work. However, it has been determined in the study that the promise of freedom of freelance work is mostly an illusion.

The idea that freelancers have more free time and use their time better than those working in full-time jobs does not fully reflect the truth. Because, apart from the basic duties that freelancers have to perform while doing their jobs, they also have many duties related to the business and customers. Freelancers have to manage the whole process from the design stage of the job to the stage of finding the customers. They also have to make an effort to ensure the continuity of their relations with customers. From this point of view, it is concluded that the flexibility promised by freelance work blurs the boundary between work and leisure time. All these can be considered as important challenges facing freelancers at the point of establishing a work-life balance. In addition, it has been determined that the wage is paid only on the basis of product or output, and all other costs such as insurance, food, transportation, and accommodation are ignored in this process.

According to the research findings, the idea that freelance work allows them to provide work-life balance underlies the working motivation of female freelancers. However, this way of working, which women consider as an “advantage” in order to maintain domestic services, also leads to the reproduction of gender inequality.

In summary, field findings show that the jobs of freelancers, who are seen as a privileged class with a high level of education in Turkey, include the vulnerability and insecurity of working from home. In this sense, freelancers constitute a fragile group of the labor market that cannot find much opportunity to seek their legal rights and improve working conditions. However, the fact that more people turn to freelance work with the Covid-19 pandemic process may pave the way for freelancers to make the work they continue under “precarious” conditions “visible” in two aspects in the near future. The first of these is the opportunity that freelance work can provide to establish a legal basis in Turkey. The other is that freelancers feel less “lonely” and their work may be perceived as a “value-attributed” job by the society. “Ofissizler-Freelance Solidarity Network” which aims to identify and make visible the problems of freelance work in Turkey, to reduce the insecurity of freelance workers and to ensure a fairer working order (Ofissizler, 2022), also, plays an important role in this sense.

REFERENCES

- Baruch, Y. (2004). Transforming Careers: From Linear to Multidimensional Career Paths. *Career Development International*, 9(1), 58-73.
- Berg, J., Furrer, M., Harmon, E., Rani, U. and Silberman, S. (2018). Digital Labour Platforms and The Future of Work: Towards Decent Work in the Online World. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Çakır, Ö. (2007). İşini Kaybetme Kaygısı: İş Güvencesizliği. *Çalışma ve Toplum*, (1), 117-140.
- Çiğdem, S. and Erdoğan, E. (2019). Medya Endüstrisinde Yeni Bir Prekarizasyon Süreci Olarak Freelance Çalışma. *Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Yönetim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7(2), 159-169.
- Çiğdem, S. and Erdoğan, E. (2020). Türkiye’de Freelance Gazetecilerin Çalışma Koşulları. Available at SSRN: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/sosyoekonomi/issue/57521/678983>
- Clinton, M., Totterdell, P. and Wood, S. (2006). A Grounded Theory of Portfolio Working Experiencing the Smallest of Small Businesses. *International Small Business Journal*, (2), 179-203.
- Cohen, L. and Mallon, M. (1999). The Transition from Organisational Employment to Portfolio Working: Perceptions of ‘Boundarylessness’. *Work, Employment & Society*, (13), 329-352.
- Cohen, N. S. (2014). Bir Mücadele Alanı Olarak Kültürel İş: Freelance Çalışanlar ve Sömürü. In V. Mosco, C. Fuchs (Eds.), *Marx Geri Döndü: Medya, Meta ve Sermaye Birikimi* (pp. 45-82). Ankara: Nota Bene.
- Davidov, G. (2012). Freelancers: An Intermediate Group in Labour Law? In S. M. and K. S. Judy Fudge (Eds.), *Challenging the Legal Boundaries of Work Regulation* (pp. 171–182). Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- Dawson, C., Henley, A. and Latreille, P. (2009). Why Do Individuals Choose Self-Employment? The Institute for The Study of Labor (IZA). Available at SSRN: <http://repec.iza.org/dp3974.pdf>
- Dayıoğlu, M. and Kırdar, M. (2010). *Türkiye’de Kadınların İşgücüne Katılımında Belirleyici Etkenler ve Eğilimler*. T.C. DPT ve Dünya Bankası Refah ve Sosyal Politika Analitik Çalışma Programı. Available at SSRN: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/403561468311115746/pdf/754670NWP0Box300Participation0Women.pdf>
- Dedeoğlu, S. (2000). Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rollerini Açısından Türkiye’de Aile ve Kadın Emegi. *Toplum ve Bilim Dergisi*, 86, 139-70.
- Dedeoğlu, S. (2020). *Evden İçeri Bir Dünya: Türkiye’de Ev-Eksenli Çalışanlar*, ILO Çalışma Belgesi 21, Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Ekiz-Gökmen, Ç. (2017). Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Zaman Yoksulluğu: Ücretli ve Ücretsiz Emegin Hane İçerisindeki Dağılımı. *Çalışma ve Toplum*, 55(4), 1967-2000.
- Ekiz-Gökmen, Ç. (2022). A New Perspective on Women’s Care Burden and Employment in Turkey. *New Perspective on Turkey*, (66), 11-34. doi:10.1017/npt.2021.21

- Finances Online, (2022). 405 Freelance Statistics for 2022: Market Size, Profile Data & Salary Rates. Available at SSRN: <https://financesonline.com/freelance-statistics/>
- Fraser, J. and Gold, M. (2001). “Portfolio Workers”: Autonomy and Control Amongst Freelance Translators. *Work, Employment & Society*, (15), 679-697.
- Hunter, A. (2015). Crowdfunding Independent and Freelance Journalism: Negotiating Journalistic Norms of Autonomy and Objectivity. *New Media and Society*, 17(2), 272-288.
- İlyas, Ö. (2019). *Reframing Freelancing for Difference: Towards a Post-Fantasmatic Politics of Class and Work*. (Unpublished Thesis of Master of Arts in Sociology). Boğaziçi University, İstanbul.
- Kılıç, C. (2015). Freelance Çalışma Kayıt dışı Olmamalı. Available at SSRN: <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/cem-kilic/freelance-calisma-kayitdisi-olmamali-1995149>
- Mallon, M. (1998). From Public Sector Employees to Portfolio Workers: Pioneers of New Careers? In C. Mabey, D. Skinner and T. Clark (Eds.), *Experiencing Human Resource Management* (pp. 169-86). London: Sage.
- Maxi Haber, (2018). Türkiye’de Yaklaşık 1.2 Milyon Kişi Freelance Olarak Çalışıyor. Available at SSRN: <https://www.maxihaber.net/turkiyede-yaklasik-1-2-milyon-kisi-freelance-olarak-calisiyor/>
- Memiş, E., Öneş, U. and Kızıllırmak, B. (2012). Housewifisation of Women: Contextualizing Gendered Patterns of Paid and Unpaid Work. In S. Dedeoğlu, A. Y. Elveren (Eds.), *Gender and Society in Turkey: The Impact of Neo-liberal Policies, Political Islam and EU Accession* (pp.87–102). London and New York: IB Tauris.
- Moore, A. (2018). The Changing Workplace and The New Self-Employed Economy. Reason Foundation. Available at SSRN: <https://reason.org/policy-study/the-changing-workplace-and-the-new-self-employed-economy>
- Nies, G. and Pedersini, R. (2003). Freelance Journalists in the European Media Industry. EFJ and IFJ Reports Brussels.
- OECD, (2017). The Missing Entrepreneurs 2017: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship in Europe The European Commission.
- Ofissizler, (2022). Ofissizler kimdir? Available at SSRN: <https://ofissizler.org/kimdir/>
- Ornebring, H. (2018). Technology and Journalism as Labor: Historical Perspectives. *Journalism*, 11(1), 58–74.
- Pedersini, R. and Coletto, D. (2010). Self-Employed Workers: Industrial Relations and Working Conditions. Dublin.
- Platman, K. (2004). “Portfolio Careers” and The Search for Flexibility in Later Life. *Work, Employment & Society*, (3), 573–599. Available at SSRN: <http://doi.org/10.1177/0950017004045551>
- Rapelli, S. (2012). European I-Pros Designing Economic Cultures, European Forum of Independent Professionals. In European Forum of Independent Professionals. Available at SSRN:

<http://www.designingeconomiccultures.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/EFIPreport-English.pdf>

- Startienė, G., Remeikienė, R. and Dumčiuvienė, D. (2010). Concept of Self-employment. *Economic and Management*, (15), 262-274.
- Vosko, L. F., Zukewich, N. and Cranford, C. (2003). Precarious Jobs: A New Typology of Employment. *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, 15(4), 16-26.
- Walters, E., Warren, C. and Dobbie, M. (2006). *The Changing Nature of Work: A Global Survey and Case Study of Atypical Work in The Media Industry*. Switzerland: The International Federation of Journalists. Available at SSRN: https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/images/General_Reports_-_moved_from_old_wesbite/The_Changing_Nature_of_Work_A_Global_Survey_and_Case_Study_of_Atypical_Work_in_the_Media_Industry_April_2006.pdf
- Willnat, L. Weaver, D. H. and Wilhoit, G. C. (2017). The American Journalist in the Digital Age. *Journalism Studies*, 20(3), 1-19.