



Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Intergroups Inequalities: The Case of Women

COVID-19 Salgınlarının Gruplar Arası Eşitsizlikler Üzerine Etkileri: Kadınlar Örneği

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has crucial implications for intergroup inequalities. The main aims of the current study are to examine how the COVID-19 affects inequalities between women and men, understand the causes of increasing gender-based inequalities during pandemic, and offer practical solutions on how these inequalities can be reduced. The results of studies from different countries demonstrated that gender-based inequalities that existed before the pandemic deepened with the COVID-19. After the COVID-19, there has been a serious rise in the level of physical, psychological and economic violence that women are exposed to, the labor they spend on housework and caring has increased dramatically, and the problems they face in business life ascended. Understanding why gender-based inequalities have increased during the COVID-19 is one of the influential steps to achieve gender equality. When the reasons are examined, it has been determined that many factors, including the policies implemented in the struggle against the pandemic and gender roles, play critical roles in this rise. Finally, in order to diminish gender-based inequalities, short and long-term solutions are presented such as carrying out gender-based awareness education, adequate representations of women in decision-making processes, developing gender-sensitive policies, strengthening the mechanisms that support women.

Key words: Pandemic, women, gender, inequality

ÖZ

Günümüzde etkileri devam eden COVID-19 pandemisinin gruplar arasındaki eşitsizlikler üzerinde önemli çıktıları söz konusudur. Mevcut çalışmanın temel amaçları, COVID-19 salgınının kadın ve erkekler arasındaki eşitsizlikleri nasıl etkilediğini irdelemek, bu süreçte artan toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı eşitsizliklerin nedenlerini kavrayabilmek ve bu eşitsizliklerin nasıl azaltılabileceğine ilişkin uygulanabilir çözüm önerileri sunmaktır. Dünyanın farklı ülkelerinden gelen bulgular sonucunda, salgın öncesinde var olan toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı eşitsizliklerin COVID-19 salgını ile derinleştiği anlaşılmaktadır. Pandemi ile kadınların maruz kaldığı fiziksel, psikolojik ve ekonomik şiddet düzeyinde önemli artışlar yaşandığı, ev ve bakım işlerine harcadığı emeğin kayda değer ölçüde yükseldiği ve iş yaşamında karşılaştıkları sorunların ciddi ölçüde arttığı görülmektedir. Cinsiyet temelli eşitsizliklerinin salgın sürecinde neden arttığını anlamak toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine ulaşmak adına atılabilecek önemli adımlardan biridir. Eşitsizliklerin artışındaki nedenler incelendiğinde, salgınla mücadele konusunda uygulanan politikalar, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine kadar pek çok faktörün bu süreçte kritik rol oynadığı tespit edilmiştir. Son olarak, cinsiyete dayalı eşitsizliklerin zayıflatılabilmesi için toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı farkındalık eğitimlerinin gerçekleştirilmesi, kadınların karar alma süreçlerine dâhil edilmesi, toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı politikalar geliştirilmesi, kadınları destekleyen mekanizmaların güçlendirilmesi ve bu mekanizmaların görünürlüğünün artırılması gibi kısa ve uzun vadede gerçekleştirilecek olan çözüm önerileri sunulmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Pandemi, kadın, toplumsal cinsiyet, eşitsizlik

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic which is caused by the coronavirus has dramatically changed living practices all over the world. In the literature, it is seen that global crisis such as pandemics do not affect everyone in the same way (Huo 2020). The effects of pandemics on the individual, group and society significantly differ from each other. How and to what extent the pandemic will

affect the individual is shaped by the groups' position of which the person is a member in the society. Studies conducted on this subject revealed that disadvantaged groups such as women, immigrants, and minorities are more damaged during pandemics (Byrd and Clayton 2000, Quinn et al. 2011, Ribeiro et al. 2021). Pre-existing inequalities between groups have widened as a result of the various pandemics that have occurred to date (Herek and Capitano 1999, Hutchins et al. 2009). Studies conducted on this subject have shown that the COVID-19 also exacerbates

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inequalities between groups (Banerjee et al. 2020, White and Nafilyan 2020). One of the groups most affected by the COVID-19 is women. The main aim of the current study is to identify the repercussions of the COVID-19 on gender equality. In addition, among the central purposes of this study are to determine why gender-based inequalities rise during the COVID-19 and focus on what can be done to reduce the inequalities. Firstly, the influences of the COVID-19 on women were examined. Then, it was determined which factors were associated with the increasing gender-based inequalities during this period. Finally, various prescriptions have been presented on how to reduce the inequalities between men and women. This study will contribute to the relevant literature by providing practical suggestions on how to combat gender-based inequalities that have deepened with the COVID-19.

Intergroup Inequalities during the Pandemic Periods

Epidemic diseases that occur in a wide geographical area and affect a significant part of the world population are defined as *pandemic* (Denemark 2022). For an epidemic to qualify as a pandemic, the virus causing the epidemic must be a new type of virus, have minimal population immunity to the virus, have spread over a wide area, show a high contagious rate, and cause severe symptoms (McMillen 2016). Millions of people have died due to pandemics throughout human history. Pandemics have also serious consequences in different areas such as health, economy, security and politics (Qiu et al. 2017). Diseases such as Black Plague, tuberculosis, smallpox, AIDS, SARS are just some of the important pandemics observed throughout history (Taylor 2019).

Every individual is affected by pandemic periods in a different way, and the relationship that people establish with the diseases is shaped by the positions of the groups they belong to in the hierarchical structure (Kocabaş 2020). Studies conducted on this subject demonstrate that disadvantaged group members such as the poor, immigrants, minorities, and women are more affected by the pandemics compared to the advantaged and majority groups. For example, during different pandemic periods (e.g. *AIDS*: Piot et al. 2001, *Influenza*: Rutter et al. 2012, *COVID-19*: Ribeiro et al. 2021) diseases cause more devastating effects on individuals, groups and societies with low socioeconomic status. Furthermore, research demonstrate that not only people with poor socioeconomic level, but also disadvantaged and minority group members are significantly more negatively affected by pandemics than members of the majority and advantaged groups (Byrd and Clayton 2000). The fact that disadvantaged groups are more vulnerable to pandemic effects causes the inequalities between groups to deepen during the diseases.

One of the pandemics that continue to affect the whole world today is the COVID-19. The COVID-19 caused by the coronavirus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. According to WHO records, on January 6, 2022, the number of COVID-19 positive cases

worldwide was 296.496.809, and the number of deaths was 5.462.631. According to research findings, the COVID-19 has more deeply affected members of disadvantaged groups such as the poor (Ribeiro et al. 2021), minorities (Banerjee et al. 2020), the elderly (Soto-Perez-de-Celis 2020), and women (Power 2020) when compared to advantaged group members. The risk of contracting the coronavirus (White and Nafilyan 2020), dying from the virus (Ribeiro et al. 2021), being unemployed (Cortes and Forsythe 2020), and being discriminated against (Eniç 2021) is substantially higher for disadvantaged group members than for advantaged and majority group members.

Gender Equality/Inequality during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As mentioned above, one of the groups severely affected by the COVID-19 is women. Numerous studies have been conducted to explore how the pandemic has affected women and its effects on gender equality/inequality (Fortier 2020, Overall et al. 2020, Reichelt et al. 2021). Although this infectious disease causes significant difficulties in the lives of both women and men, the influences of the COVID-19 on two groups differ from each other (Kalaylıoğlu 2020). Studies have indicated that the effects of the COVID-19 on women are quite devastating and have seriously deepened gender inequality (Landivar et al. 2020). In those studies, examining the impacts of the pandemic on gender inequality, it is seen that women are exposed to more violence, take more household and care responsibilities due to spending more time at home, and participate in employment at a lower level.

Experiences of Gender-Based Violence

With the COVID-19, there has been a serious rise in the cases of physical, psychological, and economic abuse against women. It is known in the literature that violence against women intensifies during crisis periods such as earthquakes, hurricanes and floods (Parkinson and Zara 2013). History repeated in the COVID-19 crisis and it was revealed that violence against women deepened with the pandemic (Marques et al. 2020). Evidence that violence directed at women is on the rise during the pandemic is based on police reports, emergency services, increased demand for shelters, calls to support lines, and statements of individuals (Kalaylıoğlu 2020, Sánchez et al. 2020).

The augmentation in the time spent at home with the pandemic has led domestic violence against women. The findings regarding the rise in the violence during the COVID-19 clearly demonstrated in data from different countries. For example, according to the news published in The Guardian on 28 March 2020, with the quarantine measures, domestic violence cases in Brazil increased by 40% to 50%. In that news, it was stated that in Hubei City of China, where the first case of coronavirus emerged, domestic violence cases recorded by the police ascended more than three times during the quarantine period in February 2020, and more than 90% of these cases were related to COVID-19 (Graham-Harrison et al. 2020). In March 2020, the French Ministry of

Interior stated that violence directed at women in the country increased by 30% during the pandemic (Euronews 2020). In Singapore, there was a rise of more than 30% in calls to helplines related to gender based violence with the coronavirus (Hingorani 2020). During the pandemic, an increase was also observed in the deaths of women due to violence. Between 23 March and 12 April 2020, when the quarantine measures were implemented in the UK, the number of women who died due to domestic violence was twice as high as the average of the last 10 years (Grierson 2020).

The picture faced by women living in Turkey during the pandemic is comparable to that of women in other countries. After the pandemic, there has also been a serious rise in abuse of women in Turkey. The report, in which the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey was handled in the context of gender by the United Nations, revealed that women in Turkey heard and felt the rise in the level of domestic violence more with the COVID-19 (Kalaylıoğlu 2020). The Federation of Women's Associations of Turkey determined that during the pandemic, physical violence against women augmented by 80%, psychological violence by 93%, and the demand for shelters by 78% (Evrensel 2020). In a separate study, in which data was collected from participants living in different cities of Turkey by the Socio-Political Field Research Center (Sosyo Politik Saha Araştırmaları Merkezi 2020), it was found that violence against women increased threefold during the pandemic. Globally, this rise is largely related with lockdown policies and quarantine measures. Movement restriction during quarantine and staying at home with the perpetrator make it difficult to escape violence, report domestic abuse, and seek help (Usta et al. 2021).

In addition to the reports published by different institutions, academic studies conducted in various countries have revealed that women around the worldwide are exposed to violence more intensely following the pandemic (e.g. *Italy*: Bellizzi et al. 2020, *United States*: Boserup et al. 2020, *Spain*: Farré et al. 2020, *Turkey*: Kalaylıoğlu 2020, *India*: Pattojoshi et al. 2021, *Brazil*: Telles et al. 2021). Moreover, the violence that women are subjected to during the pandemic is not limited to the home environment. According to research results, they begin to experience more online violence after the COVID-19. Examining how gender-based violence emerged in social media during the pandemic period, Jatmiko and colleagues (2020) found that the COVID-19 augmented the use of social media, and as a result, the use of social media increased digital abuse. The findings showed that women are exposed to offline violence in daily life and this violence continues in the online environment. To summarize briefly, the level of violence experienced by women living in different parts of the world has intensified significantly with the COVID-19.

Challenges of Increased Time Spent at Home

In consequence of the rise in the time devoted at house with the COVID-19, the dynamics and balances in the home have changed. With the pandemic, strict measures have been taken in many countries to fight with the coronavirus. For instance, working from home has been applied in some sectors, face-to-

face education has been suspended, travel restrictions have been imposed, quarantine measures have been implemented, and social distance has been paid attention. Eventually, significant increases were appeared in the time spent at home and therefore in the duration devoted to household, education of children and caring. Psychological difficulties were occurred due to these changes.

A situation that women face at home is invisible labor (Sancar et al 2006). The concept of invisible labor refers to the unpaid physical or emotional labor that women spend on home/family relationships, caring for relatives, children, the elderly and the sick. Domestic/household chores, which constitute a significant part of invisible labor is free, consumed quickly and seen as worthless (Bora 2005). Furthermore, working hours are long and there is no overtime. Unpaid labor is invisible because it is naturalized within the framework of the gender division of labor (Acar-Savran and Demiryontan 2016). In this context, it is mentioned that women are subjected to sociocultural and economic violence at home (Ünal and Gülseren 2020). In other words, unpaid labor is associated with the level of violence women are exposed to.

As the time spent at home increased with the pandemic, the unpaid labor of women in the home augmented (Chauhan 2021). The rise in the time devoted to household and care during the COVID-19 was not equally reflected to men and women (Nash and Churchill 2020). Studies have revealed that most of the housework is carried out by women during the COVID-19 (Farré et al. 2020) and the time spent by women on household and caring has increased more than men during the pandemic (Nash and Churchill 2020). For example, in a study conducted by the United Nations with 1508 participants living in Turkey, it was found that the increased workload of women in housework due to the COVID-19 was higher than that of men. 77.6% of the women participating in the survey expressed that the time they spend on housework and 59.9% on cooking increased with the pandemic. The time allocated to housework and cooking increased with the COVID-19 in men, but the rate of rise in men was lower than in women. 47% of the men participating in the study stated that they spent more time on housework and 23.9% on cooking (Kalaylıoğlu et al. 2020).

The time devoted to caring for others has also ascended with COVID-19. Again, the rise in caregiving was reflected disproportionately to men and women (Nash and Churchill 2020). Although the burden of men in domestic caring increased during the pandemic, women continued to carry a large part of the care burden in this period (Öztürk et al. 2020). According to the report of Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO), COVID-19 has augmented the responsibility of care for individuals, with one out of every five people reporting that they take care of a relative due to COVID-19. It was found that women (21%) were more likely to care for a dependent family member or friend than men (15%). In addition, with the closure of schools, the childcare responsibility of individuals with children increased and women took more responsibility than men in childcare during the pandemic (CSO

2020). The gender gap on this issue is quite high in Turkey. In the study conducted by UNDP, it was found that the workload of women has gone up 4 times compared to men during the pandemic in Turkey (İlkkaracan and Memiş 2020). Öztürk, Üstünelan and Metin (2020) found that the burden of women in household chores such as doing housework and taking care of children and the elderly increased by 60% on average after the pandemic in Turkey. Furthermore, women with children who started to work from home or became unemployed during the outbreak, this rise has increased to five times of the previous. Working women with relatively high economic and cultural capital were able to delegate their household chores to other women before the pandemic. With the COVID-19, housework became a burden on women in many cases. Housework and work became intertwined, as most women in this class position worked from home (Öztürk et al. 2020).

Single mothers are among the people who feel the widening responsibility of care during the pandemic (Fortier 2020). With the school closures, it is seen that the childcare responsibility of women who take care of children alone has intensified significantly (National Women's Council 2020). Although the care responsibility of single fathers increased during the COVID-19, there are serious differences between the ratio of women and men who take care of their children alone. For example, it has been reported that there are 73.5 million children under the age of 18 in the United States during the pandemic and 70% of these children live in dual-parent families. 21% of the remaining children live only with their mother, and 4% of them live with only their father. Therefore, the current health crisis has affected single mothers more intensely than single fathers (Alon et al. 2020).

One of the increasing responsibilities of women at home during the pandemic is the rise in the time they spend on children's education (Nesbitt-Ahmed and Subrahmanian 2020). Studies have demonstrated that finding and creating educational content for children among parents during the pandemic is viewed as the mother's responsibility (Petts et al. 2020). Therefore, along with the care and housework obligations, the time women spend on education has increased with the pandemic.

Women's caregiver roles under COVID-19 are not restricted to children; women are also responsible for disabled, sick, and elderly adults who need to be cared for at home (Nash and Churchill 2020). In the global report published by IRC and CARE, it was reported that 76.2% of unpaid caring was provided by women during the pandemic. It means the labor spent by women on caring during the pandemic is more than three times of the labor spent by men (Haneef and Kalyanpur 2020). Strict measures such as social distance, quarantine, schools closure for fighting with the pandemic led to the inability of official and unofficial care resources during this period (Nash and Churchill 2020). For example, findings from a study conducted in Germany showed that the degree of caregiver grandparents has decreased from 8.3% to 1.4% since the pandemic began (Möhring et al. 2020, as cited in Dugarova 2020). That is, women's increased caring

duties could not be shared by grandparents, friends, relatives and caregivers because of severe rules.

Rising care duty and unpaid labor of women during the COVID-19 negatively affects both their physical and psychological well-being. The demand for women's unpaid caring in the home is higher in lower income household with more dependent people. In these environments, while infected people live in houses with little space, it is very difficult to keep their distance and avoid the virus for women during the pandemic (Dugarova 2020). Therefore, increased care responsibility brings the risk of infection for women on the one hand, and the psycho-social influences of providing care to an infected relative on the other hand (Dugarova 2020, Nesbitt-Ahmed and Subrahmanian 2020). Studies have shown that people have caregiving obligations are more likely to experience mental health issues than those who have not (Pinquart and Sörensen 2003). In short, the augmented care duties and unpaid labor of women during the pandemic can be detrimental to their physical and mental health.

Work Life and Economic Inequalities

One of the areas where women have the most problems with the COVID-19 is business life. During the pandemic, the health crisis turned into an economic crisis; economic stagnation and contractions were observed on a global scale. Due to factors such as the quarantine of cities and countries, the transition to home working system in many sectors, the fear and panic caused by uncertainty the economic activities were interrupted, production was disrupted, and the unemployment rate increased significantly (Jackson et al. 2021). Women are among the groups that are seriously affected by these global economy's negative implications. Studies from different countries have shown that with the pandemic, women's the unpaid domestic labor has increased (Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020, Xue and McMunn 2021) while their employment participation rate has decreased (Aygüneş and Ok 2020, Farré et al. 2020, Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020).

In the literature, it is seen that the rate of women losing their jobs during the pandemic is higher than men (Farré et al. 2020, Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020). Working women are more likely than males to continue working from home (Farré et al. 2020). In addition, changes were observed in the working hours of many people who could continue to their work and studies have demonstrated that the reduction in working hours for women, especially women with children, is higher than for men (Landivar et al. 2020, Collins et al. 2021). For example, Dang and Nguyen (2021) examined gender differences in working life with data from six different countries and demonstrated that women were 24% more likely than men to lose their job permanently due to the pandemic. In addition, it has been determined that women expect their labor income to decrease by 50% more than that of men.

Working from home during the pandemic and trying to carry out home and work responsibilities together elevated women's stress levels and created conflicts between these roles (Nash

and Churchill 2020). Women who strive to balance their job and family life stated that their working capacity is limited (Chung et al. 2020). It has also been observed in the experiences of female academicians that increased responsibility at home reduces women's working capacity and negatively affects their productivity. Elizabeth Hannon, in a tweet on April 18, 2020, said that the article submissions they received from women March 2020 decreased considerably compared to the previous years (Taylor 2020). Another claim came from Andy Casey and the researcher emphasized that the submissions from women declined by more than 50% to Preprint Servers- which published the preprint of their studies in the field of astrophysics- between January and April 2020 compared to the submissions made in the same period of the previous year (Kitchener 2020). Parallel findings came from study of Vincent-Lamarre et al. (2020). Researchers examined different preprint servers and various platforms and found that women had lower submission rates in the first months of 2020 compared to the previous year. Also, Nature Journal announced that female academics both published less and participated less in research projects compared to men during the COVID-19 (Viglione 2020). Andersen et al. (2020), on the other hand, found a 19% decline in the rate of articles in which women were the first authors compared to the same period of the previous year. Furthermore, pandemic has changed the job priorities of academic mothers (Amano-Patiño et al. 2020, Minello et al. 2021). During the pandemic, female academics who had children devoted most of their work related time to teaching, greatly reducing their academic research (Minello et al. 2021).

The situation is not different in Turkey. Parlak et al. (2021) (2021) examined the family and academic life experiences of women in Turkey during the COVID-19 period in terms of gender roles and inequalities, and they found that the pandemic deepened the gender inequalities experienced by female academics and negatively affected their academic productivity. Women also asserted that they spent more time on housework and child care during the COVID-19, and that the increased workload at home reduced their academic productivity. Some of the women published less during the quarantine period, while others had to set aside their projects and theses. In a qualitative study conducted by Elmas-Atay and Gerçek (2021) with women academics in Turkey, it was seen that the physical unification of the work and living spaces of female academics during the pandemic caused blurring of the boundaries between the fields, field overflow, role conflict and difficulties in responding to different demands.

In the light of all the information and findings mentioned above, negative influences of the COVID-19 on women's economic freedoms were determined. As can be noticed, the productivity of women, who are stuck between housework and professional responsibilities due to their gender roles, is negatively affected from the pandemic.

Reasons for Increasing Gender Inequalities during the COVID-19

Diminishing gender inequalities that deepen during the pandemic

is only possible by understanding why inequalities intensified during the COVID-19. The most important source of gender inequality in society is the patriarchal structure. Principles and mechanisms of patriarchal order cause the production of gender inequality in every field (Uhn 2004). It gives absolute priority to men (Sultana 2010), leads to widespread acceptance of domestic violence by society (Sweeney 2016), causes the production and perpetuation of gender inequality in division of labor (Uhn 2004), and limits the human rights of women (Sultana 2010). Structural inequalities and power hierarchies based on pre-existing patriarchy have left women more vulnerable during the pandemic (Javed and Chattu 2021).

The concept of disaster capitalism, included in Naomi Klein's book *The Shock Doctrine*, is one of the explanations that can be used to explain the impact of the epidemic on gender inequality (Ensler 2021). Klein argues in her book that global capitalism instrumentalizes human-made or natural disasters (such as military coups, terrorist incidents, economic crises, wars, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes) in order to renew and restructure itself (Klein 2007). The "shock doctrine" is a political strategy that uses large-scale crises to enact policies that systematically deepen inequality, enrich the elite, and cause the collapse of everyone else. Gender based inequalities deepening during COVID-19 can be evaluated through the concept of disaster capitalism. Considering the negative effects of the measures taken to combat COVID-19 on women, it can be stated that patriarchy all over the world benefits from the virus to regain power (Ensler 2021).

Another critical factor in the rise of gender inequalities with the pandemic is *gender roles* (Fisher and Ryan 2021). Gender roles can be defined as patterns which define how women and men should behave and what their duties and responsibilities are (Dökmen 2014). Despite cultural differences (Van de Vijver 2007), housework, cooking and caring duties are generally considered appropriate for women while tasks related to the outside world, such as earning money, are attributed to men (Brown and Roberts 2014). These roles attributed to women and men contribute to legitimizing the patriarchal social structure and inequalities between the sexes. Furthermore, there are strong expectations in society for both men and women to fulfill gender roles (Parlak et al. 2021, Safdar and Yasmin 2020). Societal expectations regarding these roles produce strong norms for behavior deemed suitable for both sexes (Eagly and Wood 2012). These expectations and pressures also have serious impacts on growing gender inequality during COVID-19.

Following the COVID-19 and the measures taken to fight with it, gender roles that characterize being a woman and a man have become more visible (Parlak et al. 2021). The sharpening of conventional gender roles, which were already widely accepted and internalized before the pandemic, with the COVID-19 has led to a rise in gender-based inequalities experienced by women in all areas of daily life. For example, women lost their jobs at a higher ratio than men, their salaries were cut, and their working hours decreased after the economic crisis that came with the pandemic

due to the fact that the role of making money was assigned to men. In addition, with the pressure of widely accepted gender roles women's responsibility at home has increased during the COVID-19 (Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020).

The pandemic has caused both gender roles to become more prominent in society and also has led to enhance in the level of women and men to adopt these gender roles. Rosenfeld and Tomiyama (2021) investigated the effects of the COVID-19 on people's acceptance of gender roles and behaving in accordance with those roles, and discovered that with the COVID-19, acceptance of gender roles and compliance with those roles augmented. According to the research findings, both sexes defined being a man and a woman with more gender roles during the pandemic. Furthermore, these effects did not differ according to participants' concerns about the coronavirus, political view or any other demographic variable. In other words, with the pandemic, men began to expect women to behave more in line with their gender roles, and women began to behave more in congruent with their gender roles.

Another reason for the rise in the gender-based disparities during the pandemic is that the policies adopted to combat COVID-19 are not designed to take into account the health, economic and social needs of both women and men equally. For instance, Mantouvalou (2020) analyzed three COVID-19 policies widely adopted in EU Member States and other countries (stay-at-home regulations, school closures, shifting to working from home) in terms of their results on men and women. Researcher concluded that these measures do not consider the needs of women and men equally so not affect men and women alike. Women are affected much more negatively by the policies implemented in the fight against COVID-19. School closures, the transition to the working from home in many sectors and the rise in the time spent at home due to quarantine measures are among the factors that play a role in the increase in the violence against women at home (Aygüneş and Ok 2020). Strict measures such as home quarantine and lockdowns may in some cases prevent women from leaving the house to seek help from friends, family, shelters or helplines (Noman et al. 2021). During the quarantine period, the risk of victims being locked in the home with their abusers heightened (Bradbury-Jones and Isham 2020, Yenilmez and Çelik 2020).

The unexpected economic recession that comes with COVID-19 is also one of the factors that cause an increase in domestic violence (Noman et al. 2021). Economic difficulties left the couples in financial stress, making it difficult to meet the basic needs of life. This has increased the risk of domestic conflict and violence (Yenilmez and Çelik 2020). On the other hand, economic dependence of women is another factor for the rise in domestic violence during the outbreak. Women have a higher rate of working in informal jobs and being dismissed than men due to coronavirus has made them economically dependent on their partners. Women's economic dependence has not only increased their vulnerability to gender-based violence, but also made it difficult for them to separate from the perpetrators of violence

(Mittal and Singh 2020).

Another element that play a role in the serious impacts of women's employment from the COVID-19 is that the sectors (e.g. the service sector) that experienced significant contractions during the pandemic are the areas where women work intensively (Dang and Nguyen 2021). In addition, the fact that women work more in informal, less secure and temporary jobs compared to men, they are more readily dismissed due to the COVID-19 (Aygüneş and Ok 2020, Kalaylıoğlu et al. 2020). On the other hand, the fulfillment of household responsibilities attributed to women who were not dismissed from their jobs and continued their working life during the pandemic caused them to be stuck between home and work duties and also reduced their professional performance (Xue and McMunn 2021).

While focusing on efforts to cope with the pandemic, the disruption of the struggle for women's rights due to the pandemic is another factor that complicates the fight against inequalities and plays a role in the rise of inequalities. In research carried by the Socio-Political Field Studies Center (Sosyo Politik Saha Araştırmaları Merkezi 2020), although 68.1% of women who were faced with violence during the pandemic period said that they knew the lines to get help in case of violence, 98.5% of these women did not reach to these resources. The reason why women do not apply to support mechanisms during the pandemic is that they are worried about the spread of the coronavirus. Due to the risk of virus transmission, the majority of women who were subjected to violence did not seek assistance from a hospital, police station, or any other place (Aygüneş and Ok 2020).

Another cause why the reflections of the COVID-19 on women and men differ significantly from each other is the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes (Kalaylıoğlu et al. 2020). During the pandemic male-dominated voices have a say in decisions made at local, national, and international levels, including measures to combat COVID-19, leads to women being ignored in decisions that directly and indirectly affect them (Bali et al. 2020, Kalaylıoğlu et al. 2020). The involvement of women and other disadvantaged groups in decision-making processes is critical for a pandemic implementation to be effective and adaptable.

To summarize, numerous variables contributed to the rise in gender-based inequality between sexes during the COVID-19. Determining the factors that cause the disparities between groups to strengthen is of critical importance in the fight against the inequalities.

Recommendations for Reducing Gender Inequalities

One of the main purposes of the current study is to offer practical suggestions on what can be done to mitigate gender-based inequalities. In order to achieve gender equality, it is necessary to examine the disparities between women and men during the pandemic, and to identify how the disease is reflected in women's lives (Fortier 2020). As previously stated,

the COVID-19 has intensified the level of physical, psychological and economic violence experienced by women. Also, it negatively influenced women's economic independence and participation in employment. After the COVID-19, women's unpaid labor at home has intensified. In summary, the experiences of women's gender-based inequality faced during the pandemic have deepened.

Many measures and intervention methods can be taken to diminish gender inequalities that have deepened during the pandemic. First of all, the health and well-being of women must be protected by measures. Priority should be given to the prevention and elimination of increased violence against women during the COVID 19 (Azcona et al. 2020). Precautions regarding the economic independence of women should be taken urgently. In order to ensure economic independence, it is critical to take measures to support women's employment during the crisis and recovery period. Enhancing women's incomes through social protection mechanisms can be a solution to economic congestion to some extent (Tang et al. 2021). In addition, it is necessary to diminish the gender imbalance in care responsibility. Therefore, interventions for women's free childcare should be carried out. Precautions to address this problem can include better recognition of unpaid work, reducing the amount of it, and rebalancing unpaid work between the genders (Madgavkar et al. 2020). Strengthening the prevalence and affordability of care services for children, the elderly and the disabled and expanding the access to paid leave can be listed among the measures that can be taken for increased care responsibility. Practices such as flexible working arrangements and access to paid family leave can help to balance working parents' unpaid care responsibilities (Tang et al. 2021).

Examining the variables that play a role in the rise of inequalities between men and women plays important roles in the fight against inequalities. Studies carried out on the factors leading to the inequalities between groups will change the picture with the full of inequalities. As stated before, one of the most important reasons for the rising gender-based inequalities during the pandemic is gender roles. Gender roles became more evident during the COVID-19; the acceptance level of these gender roles by both women and men has increased with pandemic. One of the most important ways to weaken the inequalities is to strengthening gender-based awareness educations and thus transforming the widely accepted perceptions and expectations about women and men in society (Aygüneş and Ok 2020, Fuhrman et al. 2020). Transforming social values and norms to support gender equality through education requires multidimensional influences from a variety of sources (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi 2008). Revealing the transformative potential of education will be possible with the participation of different institutions and organizations, from state institutions to local and international civil society organization. Both boys and girls should receive gender-sensitive education at all levels, from pre-school to tertiary education. These educations will not only contribute to the transformation of gender perception, but also strengthen the motivation of women to battle inequality. By raising awareness about the gender, it will be possible for women to realize the disparities

between the sexes, question the legitimacy of inequalities, and recognize their rights and to fight against inequalities collectively (Gurin 1985).

It is very important for women to know that they are not alone in the face of inequalities in order to cope with these problems. So as to fight the gender-based inequalities that have increased with the COVID-19, the support mechanisms offered to women in health, security and psychosocial fields by state institutions, non-governmental organizations or private organizations need to be strengthened and made more visible (Aygüneş and Ok 2020). With the strengthening and more visibility of support channels, women who are the victims of violence or discrimination will know which resources to apply in the face of these situations. New technologies such as social media tools offer the potential to access support channels and expand these mechanisms (De Paz et al. 2020). Besides all these, barriers to women's and girls' access to support services need to be considered and defined.

Language plays a critical role in societal transformations. For a transformation in disparities between groups, a language transformation is required (Tollefson 1991, Eniç 2021). The language used predominantly in the media has important effects on human behavior. The transformative effect of the media on human behavior is widely used to promote positive behavior change in various fields such as gender equality, family planning, and sexual education (Bilali et al. 2017). The dominant language in media channels can be both an obstacle and a solution to progress in gender equality (Padovani et al. 2019). In order to combat with gender-based disparities that have intensified with the pandemic, the use of gender-sensitive language in media channels and the absence of content such as TV series, movies and advertisements that reconstruct gender inequality play a crucial role. Leader discourses are among the factors that significantly shape group behaviors. It is seen that the use of discriminatory language by political leaders during the pandemic exacerbates conflicts and inequalities between groups (Budhwani and Sun 2020). For this reason, using a more inclusive and equality-based language in media channels and leader discourses instead of reinforcing gender-based inequality is one of the important solutions for combating with gender inequalities. Using gender-sensitive language in the media and leader discourses makes it easier to recognize the significant differences between the needs of women and men, enables people to break down their rigid beliefs about gender roles, contributes to the spread of gender equality in society, and enables people to express themselves more easily (EIGE, 2019).

Another meaningful step that can be taken for gender equity is the inclusion of women in decision-making processes (Bali et al. 2020, Haneef and Kalyanpur 2020). When the extent of women's involvement in decision-making mechanisms is investigated, it is understood that there is a male-dominated structure in local, national, and international decision-making mechanisms and that women are not adequately represented in high-level decision-making systems (Porter 2003). On the other hand, in order to reduce disparities between women and

men, women should have a voice in decisions that directly and indirectly affect them. According to Bozkır, President of the UN General Assembly, gender equality can only be achieved if women are involved in decision-making processes (UN 2021). Adequate representation of women in decision-making mechanisms plays a crucial role in improving the socio-economic status of women, preventing violence, and reducing the inequalities that have increased with COVID-19, and contributes to the realignment of political priorities. With more fair gender representation, response measures may be adjusted to take into account the ascended incidence of domestic violence or economic hardship of women. In this way, taking gender-sensitive measures in the fight against COVID-19 can prevent the deepening of inequalities between the men and women (Van Daalen et al. 2020). In short, for weakening inequalities, it is necessary to develop policies that will ensure women's actual participation in the highest levels of national and international decision-making mechanisms. Re-evaluation of the policies implemented during COVID-19 from a gender-based perspective is needed for gender equity (Betron et al. 2020). Institutions should primarily examine whether their practices are causing a widening of the gender gap or not. At this point, policies that support gender equality should continue to be implemented and disseminated; practices that amplify inequalities need to be reconsidered or terminated (Cardel et al. 2020).

Another way to reduce gender-based inequalities is the adoption of gender-based budgeting policies (Fuhrman et al. 2020). Using a system that incorporates a gender perspective at all levels of the budget process and restructures income and expenditures based on promoting gender equality is one of the most important steps to be taken in reducing inequalities between men and women (Dlamini 2021).

In short, every unit of society has important responsibilities in reducing gender-based inequalities that have deepened with the COVID-19. Looking at the measures and solution proposals listed above, it is understood that some of these steps can be implemented in the short and some in the long term. Practices to be applied both in the short and long periods will provide preparation for the next crises. In a new crisis, it is essential to take measures in order not to deepen the inequalities between sexes.

Conclusion

As demonstrated by the studies reviewed above, gender-based inequalities at different regions of the world strengthened with the COVID-19. Identifying the causes of increased inequalities during the pandemic is critical to combating with those inequalities. In this study, the causes of rising disparities during the pandemic were examined and it has resulted that many different factors played a role in this rise such as gender roles, the disruption of the struggle for rights of women due to COVID-19, inadequate representation of women in decision-making mechanisms. However, it is important to remember that the group called women is not a monolith, but different processes of inequality and discrimination operate within it.

For example, refugee women, women with disabilities, women from minority or majority groups, married or single women, women with or without children, women with weak or strong economic and cultural capital, etc. Just like before the pandemic, the experience of each of these women's groups is different from each other during the pandemic process. Women who were in a disadvantaged position before the pandemic were more deeply affected by the pandemic than women who were members of advantaged groups.

Increasing gender-based awareness education, strengthening support systems, use of equality-based language in media and leader discourses, and proper representation of women in decision-making processes were provided as solution options that may be implemented in the short and long term. This article, which deals with gender-based inequalities in a holistic manner during the pandemic, will contribute to the relevant literature. It should not be forgotten that there is a need for cooperation between individuals, groups, societies and countries in order to overcome a global crisis such as a pandemic and to get rid of the negative effects of this period. Overcoming the COVID-19 and avoiding the destructive effects of the pandemic will only be possible when all units of the society act together.

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