EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORK ACADEMICS IN TURKEY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ SOSYAL HİZMET AKADEMİSYENLERİNİN COVİD-19 SÜRECİNDEKİ DENEYİMLERİ

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Öz

This study aims to explore and understand the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on personal and professional lives of social work academics. Phenomenological approach was used in the study, which was designed with qualitative research method. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 23 social work academics who had lecturing experience before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis method was used for the analysis of data. The following five main themes were determined as a result of the analysis: social work academics' perception of Covid-19, effects of the pandemic on personal lives of social work academics, the challenges faced by social work academics in their professional lives due to the pandemic, the opportunities they found in their professional lives, and their search for new methods in field practicum. It is observed that the experiences of social work academics in their personal lives during the Covid-19 cannot be considered independent of their professional experiences, and that both aspects are intertwined. As a result of the research, it was concluded that social work academics faced many challenges due to the pandemic such as adaptation problems to the use of technology, reduced interaction with students, inability to make classroom practices in classes, encountering technical problems and they had advantages such as the elimination of physical barriers and the opportunity to keep up to date.

Keywords: Social Work Education, Social Work Academics, Covid-19 Pandemic, Qualitative Research.

Öz

Bu çalışmada Covid-19 pandemi sürecinin sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin kişisel ve mesleki yaşamlarına yansımalarını keşfetmek ve anlamak amaçlanmıştır. Nitel araştırma yöntemiyle tasarlanan bu çalışmada fenomenolojik yaklaşım kullanılmıştır. Covid-19 öncesi ve sırasında ders verme deneyimine sahip 23 sosyal hizmet akademisyeniyle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla veriler toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde tematik analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Yapılan analiz sonucunda sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin Covid-19 algısı, pandeminin sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin kişisel yaşamlarına yansımaları, pandemiyle sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin mesleki yaşamlarında karşılaştıkları zorluklar, mesleki yaşamlarında karşılaştıkları fırsatlar ve alan uygulamasında yeni yöntem arayışları olmak üzere 5 ana temaya ulaşılmıştır. Covid-19 sürecinde sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin kişisel yaşamlarında karşılaştıkları deneyimlerinin mesleki yaşamlarındaki deneyimlerinden bağımsız düşünülemeyeceği ve her iki boyutun birbiri üzerinde etkiye sahip olduğu görülmüştür. Araştırma sonucunda sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin pandemi nedeniyle teknoloji kullanımına uyum sorunları, öğrencilerle etkileşimin azalması, derslerde sınıf içi uygulamaların yapılamaması, teknik sorunlarla karşılaşma gibi birçok sorunla ve fiziksel engellerin ortadan kalkması, günceli yakalama imkanı gibi avantajlarla karşılaştığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Hizmet Eğitimi, Sosyal Hizmet Akademisyenleri, Covid-19 Pandemisi, Nitel Araştırma.

Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Çalışmanın Amacı

Covid-19 salgınının, hem akademik toplulukların günlük yaşamlarında büyük etkilere yol açtığı hem de bunun sonucunda öğretme, öğrenme ve yeni düşünme yollarının tasarlanmasını sağladığı ifade edilmektedir (Cabiati and Gomez-Ciriano, 2020). Uzaktan eğitim yönteminin yükseköğretim eğitimine ve aktörlerine etkileri bugün araştırma konularından birini oluşturmaktadır. Sosyal hizmet alanında yapılan alanyazın incelemesinde Türkiye'de Covid-19 pandemi sürecinin sosyal hizmet akademisyenleri tarafından nasıl deneyimlendiğine dair herhangi bir nitel veriye rastlanmamıştır. Bu çalışmada da Covid-19 pandemi sürecinin sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin kişisel ve mesleki yaşamlarına ne gibi yansımalarının olduğunu keşfetmek ve anlamak amaçlanmıştır.

Araştırma Soruları

Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda şu araştırma sorularına yanıt aranmıştır: Sosyal hizmet akademisyenleri Covid-19 pandemisini nasıl algılamaktadır? Sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin Covid-19 pandemisinin sosyal hizmet eğitimine yansımaları ile ilgili deneyimleri nelerdir?

Literatür Araştırması

İnsanlık, bugüne değin Veba, Çiçek, İspanyol Gribi ve benzeri pek çok salgın hastalıkla yüzleşmiştir. Fakat hiçbirinin bugün içinde yaşadığımız modern, dijital, teknolojik dünyanın sosyo-kültürel ve ekonomik yapısına yansımaları bu denli olmamıştır (Samadashvili, 2020). Covid-19 pandemisinin; bireylerde travma sonrası stres bozukluğu, yalnızlık, kızgınlık vb. ruhsal sorunlar (Brooks vd., 2020), cinsiyet eşitsizliklerinin artışı (Fisher ve Ryan, 2021), savunmasız grupların dezavantajının artması (Webber-Ritchey vd., 2021), ekonomide kriz, durgunluk ve yavaşlama endişeleri (Gotiphian, 2020; International Monetary Fund, 2020), kitlesel işsizlik ve geçimi sağlayamama (Onalu vd., 2020), küresel sağlık sisteminin zarar görmesi (Maria vd., 2020) ve eğitimin aksaması (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021) şeklinde yansımaları olduğu görülmektedir. Tüm bu sorunlar sosyal hizmet mesleğinin gündemini ve sosyal hizmet uygulamalarını da doğrudan etkilemiştir. Sosyal hizmet, Covid-19 pandemisiyle birlikte ortaya çıkan yeni sosyal sorunlar ile derinleşen sorunlara yanıt verme sorumluluğuna sahiptir. Sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının pandemi süreciyle birlikte alışılagelmiş sosyal hizmet uygulamalarını gözden geçirme ve mevcut koşullara yönelik bilgi ve becerilerini güncelleme ihtiyacı ortaya çıkmıştır. Benzer bir durum sosyal hizmet eğitimi için de geçerlidir. Nitekim Covid-19 pandemi sürecine yönelik alınan önlemler kapsamında sosyal hizmet eğitimi Kanada (Archer-Kuhn vd., 2020) Türkiye (Yükseköğretim Kurulu, 2020a), Yunanistan (Papouli vd., 2020), Malezya (Azman vd., 2020) ve diğer pek çok ülkede online şekilde yapılmaya başlanmıştır. Türkiye'de Covid-19 pandemisine yönelik alınan önlemler kapsamında uzaktan eğitime geçen sosyal hizmet bölümleri süreç içinde çeşitli zorluklarla karşılaşmışlardır. Uzaktan eğitimin alt yapısından kaynaklı sorunlar, ölçme ve değerlendirmeyle ilgili sorunlar, öğrencilerle sınırlı etkileşim, uygulama derslerinin uzaktan eğitimle yapılması ile ilgili endişeler, teknik sorunlar, mesleki uygulama

becerilerinin öğrenilmesiyle ilgili endişeler ile sosyal hizmet eğitiminin uzaktan eğitimle etkili olmadığıyla ilgili endişeler sosyal hizmet akademisyenleri ve sosyal hizmet öğrencilerinin süreç içinde karşılaştığı sorunlardan bazılarıdır (SHOD, 2020). Nitekim küresel düzeyde de Covid-19 pandemi sürecinin yüz yüze eğitimden online eğitime geçilmesi, sosyal hizmet müfredatına sınırlamalar getirmesi, uygulama eğitiminin yapılamaması, sosyal hizmet eğitimine kabul şeklinin değişmesi, sosyal hizmet eğitiminde yeni online eğitim yol ve yöntemlerinin keşfedilmesi şeklinde yansımaları olduğu vurgulanmaktadır (Azman vd., 2020; Kourgiantakis ve Lee, 2020; McFadden vd., 2020).

Yöntem

Covid-19 pandemi sürecinin sosyal hizmet akademisyenleri tarafından nasıl anlamlandırıldığının ve nasıl deneyimlendiğinin anlaşılmasının amaçlayan bu çalışma nitel araştırma yöntemiyle tasarlanmıştır. Sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin Covid-19 pandemi sürecindeki deneyimlerinin keşfedilmesi ve anlaşılması için nitel araştırma desenlerinden fenomenolojik yaklaşım uygulanmıştır. Çalışmaya toplam 23 akademisyen katılmıştır. Katılımcıların belirlenmesinde amaçlı örnekleme tekniği olan maksimum çeşitlilik örneklemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaya dahil olmak için iki kriter belirlenmiştir. Birinci kriter: akademisyenin Covid-19 pandemi öncesi ve Covid-19 pandemi sürecinde sosyal hizmet bölümlerinde ders verme deneyimi olmasıdır. İkinci kriter ise; akademisyenin bağlı bulunduğu sosyal hizmet bölümünün hali hazırda tüm eğitim kademelerinde öğrencisinin olmasıdır. Çalışmada maksimum çeşitlilik sağlamak amacıyla farklı özelliklere sahip akademisyenlerle derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın verileri, online görüntülü görüşme uygulaması üzerinden yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmelerden toplanmıştır. Verilerin analiz edilmesinde Braun ve Clarke'a (2006) ait 6 aşamalı tematik analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışma kapsamında 16.11.2020 tarihli "Sağlık Bakanlığı COVİD-19 Konusunda Bilimsel Araştırma Çalışmaları" ve Selçuk Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Girişimsel Olmayan Klinik Araştırmalar Etik Kurulu onayı alınmıştır.

Sonuç ve Değerlendirme

Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki farklı üniversitelerde görev yapan sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin Covid-19 sürecindeki deneyimlerini bütüncül bir bakış açısıyla görünür kılması açısından önemlidir. Araştırma sonucunda sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerinin Covid-19 sürecinde kişisel yaşamlarında karşılaştıkları deneyimlerinin mesleki yaşamlarındaki deneyimlerinden bağımsız düşünülemeyeceği ve her iki boyutun birbirini etkilediği görülmektedir. Covid-19 sürecinde sosyal hizmet akademisyenleri uzaktan eğitim sürecinde çeşitli zorluklar ve fırsatlarla karşılaşmakta ve alan uygulamasında ilgili yeni yöntem arayışına girmektedir. Söz konusu bulgular Covid-19 sürecinde sosyal hizmet eğitiminin nasıl yapılandırılması gerektiğiyle ilgili önemli mesajlar vermektedir. Bu doğrultuda YÖK'ün daha fazla sorumluluk alarak eğitimde standardizasyonu sağlayacak ulusal boyutta çalışmalar yapması, öğrencilerle interaktif eğitim faaliyetlerini mümkün kılacak şekilde üniversitelerin uzaktan eğitim

Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

sistemi alt yapılarının geliştirilmesi ve üniversitelerde akademisyenlere uzaktan eğitime yönelik eğitim ve destek çalışmaları yapılması önerilmektedir.

1. INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is a contagious respiratory illness caused by severe acute respiratory syndromes, which has brought radical changes to the lives of billions of people worldwide (Cifuentes-Faura, 2020). The novel coronavirus outbreak began in Wuhan, China, on December 31, 2019, rapidly spreading across Europe, USA and finally the entire world (Matias et al., 2020). It is known that the disease has spread across 192 countries; the total number of cases is 172,648,986 and the total number of deaths is 3,714,070 (CSSE, 2021).

Humanity has witnessed numerous plagues and pandemics such as smallpox, Spanish flu, etc. throughout history. However, there seems to be no pandemic that has made such a profound impact on the socio-cultural and economic structure of the modern, digital, technological world which we live in today (Samadashvili, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a variety of problems, including psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, loneliness, anger, etc. in individuals (Brooks et al., 2020), increased gender inequality (Fisher and Ryan, 2021), increased disadvantages for vulnerable populations (Webber-Ritchey et al., 2021), economic crisis, recession and slowdown concerns (Gopinath, 2020; IMF, 2020), mass unemployment and inability to earn livelihood (Onalu et al., 2020), disruption of the global health system (Nicola et al., 2020) and disruption of education (UNESCO, 2021). All of the mentioned problems have had a direct impact on the agenda of the social work profession and social work practices. Social work is expected to respond to new social problems that have emerged with the Covid-19 pandemic and to existing problems that have deepened. With the pandemic outbreak, social workers have faced the need to review their usual social work practices and to update their knowledge and skills according to latest conditions. The situation is similar in terms of social work education. Thus, social work education has been started as an online practice in Canada (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020), Turkey (YOK, 2020a), Greece (Papouli et al., 2020), Malaysia (Azman et al., 2020) and in many other countries within the scope of the measures taken against the Covid-19 pandemic.

With the first Covid-19 case reported in Turkey on March 11, 2020, schools were closed for 2 weeks and universities for 3 weeks (Sert Karaaslan, 2020). With the uncertainty and possible prolongation of the process taken into consideration, YOK has decided that the disrupted education process will be resumed with "distance education method", starting from 18 March 2020 (TUBA, 2020; YOK, 2020a; YOK, 2020b). The transition to the distance education system in Turkey was fairly quick. 121 out of 189 universities declared that they have completed the transition to the distance education system as of March 23, 2020, which was followed by 41 universities on March 30, 2020 and 25 universities on April 6, 2020. While the total number of courses conducted in universities across Turkey during the Academic Period 2019-2020 was 736,341, a total of 663,808 courses have been realized within the scope of distance education and training since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

90.1% of the courses opened in the Spring Term are conducted as per the distance education and training practice. During the Academic Period 2019-2020, distance education was implemented by 99.2% of the universities for theoretical courses, approximately by 89% for theoretical parts of applied courses, and by 75% for applied courses that are convenient for learning through distance education. Only 22% of the 663.808 courses opened across the country were conducted with live classroom practice (YOK, 2020c).

Departments of social work that experienced transition to the distance education system within the scope of the measures taken against the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey, have faced various problems throughout the process. Some of the problems faced by social work academics and social work students during the pandemic include challenges arising from the infrastructure of distance education, problems with assessment and evaluation, limited interaction with students, concerns about conducting applied courses through distance education, technical problems, concerns about learning vocational practice skills, and concerns as to ineffectiveness of social work education through distance education (SHOD, 2020). Moreover, it is noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has various global effects such as transition from face-to-face education to online education, limitations imposed on the social work curriculum, unavailability of practical training, change in procedures for admission to social work education, and the discovery of new ways and methods of online education in social work education (Azman et al., 2020; Kourgiantakis and Lee, 2020; McFadden et al., 2020).

It is indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic has made significant impacts on daily lives of academic communities, resulting in design of new ways of teaching, learning and thinking (Cabiati and Gómez-Ciriano, 2020). The effects of distance education method on higher education and its actors are one of the topics of the current study. The literature review in the field of social work reveals no qualitative data on how the Covid-19 pandemic is experienced by social work academics in Turkey. The study aims to explore and understand the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on personal and professional lives of social work academics.

2. METHOD

This study, which aims to understand how the Covid-19 pandemic is interpreted and experienced by social work academics, was designed with the qualitative research method. The study employed phenomenological approach as a qualitative research pattern to discover and understand experiences of social work academics in the course of Covid-19 pandemic.

2.1. Participants

Maximum variation sampling was used as a purposive sampling technique in the selection of the participants. Two criteria were determined for inclusion in the study. The first criterion is that; the academic must have lecturing experience in departments of social work before and during the Covid-19

pandemic. The second is that; the social work department which the academic is affiliated with must have students at all levels of education. In order to provide maximum variation in the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with academics of various characteristics.

A total of 23 academics participated in the study, including 1 Professor, 7 Associate Professors, 7 Instructors, 5 Assistant Professors and 3 Research Assistant Doctors. 6 of the participants are male and 17 are female. The youngest participant is 25 years old and the oldest is 57 years old; the average age of the participants is 37,7. The longest experience among the participants is 20 years and the shortest is 2 years. 13 of the participants are employed with state universities while 10 are employed with private universities.

2.2. Data Collection

The data collection process of the study was started with an invitation e-mail containing preliminary information about the research and an Informed Consent Form, which was sent on 01.12.2020 to corporate e-mail addresses of the social work academics meeting the criteria for the study; the process was ended with the final interview on 10.02.2021. An invitation e-mail was sent to 112 academics, 34 of whom replied to the e-mail. 6 of the academics who replied declined the invitation while 5 stated that they would participate in the study, but could not be reached afterwards. A total of 23 interviews with the participants meeting the criteria were included in this study.

The data of the study were collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted via an online video interview application. The average duration of the interviews was 70 minutes, with the shortest lasting 40 minutes and the longest lasting 103 minutes. Prior to the interview, the participants gave their verbal consent to the video and audio recording of the interview. The audio recordings were transcribed by the researchers after the interviews were completed; meanwhile no changes were made to the responses and the content.

2.3. Data Analysis

The six-step thematic analysis procedure prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used for analysis of the data. Firstly, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researchers, and subsequently, all of the interviews were transferred to MAXQDA software in order to facilitate data management. The body of data was read and re-read; initial ideas were noted. Then, preliminary codes were created by bringing together the data related to each code. In the next stage, the preliminary codes and related data were combined and gathered under preliminary themes. The preliminary themes were checked as to their compatibility with the data sets and codes, whereafter a thematic map was created. After their compatibility with the data set and codes was checked, the themes were defined and named. Finally, the quotes that are thought to best represent the codes and themes were selected; final checks

Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

were performed and the analysis was reported. In frame of the study, 5 main themes were obtained on the perception, experience and actions of social work academics in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Respondent validation and researcher triangulation techniques were used to ensure the credibility of this study. Two participants were asked whether the findings of the study correctly represented their opinions; all researchers played an active role in collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data. In order to ensure dependability, an audit trail was created and titled as field diaries starting from the beginning of the process.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Necessary approvals were obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health for "Scientific Research Studies on COVID-19" on 16.11.2020 and from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Selcuk University for Non-Invasive Clinical Research on 30.11.2020.

3. FINDINGS

Upon analysis of data performed within the scope of the study, the following five main themes were determined: social work academics' perceptions of Covid-19, effects of the pandemic on personal lives of social work academics, the challenges faced by social work academics in their professional lives due to the pandemic, the opportunities they found in their professional lives, and the searches for new methods in field practicum.

3.1. Social Work Academics' Perceptions of Covid-19 Pandemic

Social work academics often reported negative statements about the Covid-19 pandemic. The academics described the pandemic with the terms: fear, chaos, and uncertainty. Negative statements made by some of the academics are as follows:

"Ahh, definitely, this is a great uncertainty. To me, it is like a weird simulation constantly getting updates and never letting me predict its outcome." (A4, F)"

"At first, it gave me a feeling of fear, literally. …I was very scared at the beginning…" (A1, F)

Furthermore, some academics stated that the pandemic has brought along opportunities:

"I would call it as a process in which we learned solidarity and co-living." (A20, F)

3.2. Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Personal Lives of Social Work Academics

It is observed that the initial effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on personal lives of social work academics was the transition from office-work setting to home-based setting. An academic reported the following:

"We are having meetings all the time. You do not question the timing of the meeting, you just have to meet when an urgent task comes up at 10 or 11 p.m." (A15, M)

"Work-life balance has soon become blurred for all of us. You can get a call from colleagues at 12 a.m.. Literally, we have to be available all the time." (A10, F)

"In fact, everything has shifted to home environment during this process, so we have made ourselves available all the time for lecturing regardless of where we are." (A7, F)

It is observed that the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on the personal lives of academics has been in form of a violation of their personal boundaries. Some of them expressed their discomfort with the work-life blur. An academic who participated in the study described it as follows:

"Work-life balance is all blurred now. Once your camera is on, you have the background of your home with your kids or cats appearing at times, all seen by your students…Apparently, the academic's ivory tower has collapsed." (A1, F)

The academics reported that their roles as a parent, spouse and educator in home and work life were reflected on their personal lives as increasing and conflicting responsibilities during the pandemic. They describe the situation as follows:

"When I worked in the school, I could perform my scientific studies or make my preparations. Now I don't have such opportunity at home, which is a disadvantage of flexible work hours. I can spend time for that only after my son falls asleep. I admit that flexible work hours allow me to spend time with my son, but it kept me from scientific studies." (A17, F)

"I feel like a domestic man. My wife works in an office, and I have been at home since the distance learning was started. The kids are online on EBA learning platform from morning till evening. I have roles as a mother, instructor, primary school teacher, lecturer and academic. So I had to reduce one of those roles, and I reduced my role of an academic." (A19, M)

Some of the academics note that they use technology intensively in their personal lives and they are on their computer or smartphone all the time, which is affecting their health and causing technology addiction.

"It makes me concerned about my health. I mean, I feel very uncomfortable being exposed to the radiation emitted by those cellular base stations. Because we're not only on the computer, but also on the phone all the time. You know, students keep asking questions to you via WhatsApp or calling, texting…you can't put the phone away… I don't like this kind of electronic and technological stuff that will affect neurological functions. However, you have no choice but to use it." (A23, F)

Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

3.3. Challenges Faced by Social Work Academics in Their Professional Lives Due to The Pandemic

Social work academics reported that the Covid-19 has affected their professional lives as problems regarding adaptation to the use of technology. An academic stated that he had difficulty in using technology:

"I'm not very good at using technology…Therefore I've had some problems of adaptation. Instructors in a certain age group may experience more problems adapting to technology." (A22, M)

Distance learning activities performed during the Covid-19 pandemic has eliminated in-person interaction with students. Nearly all of the social work academics reported that they were unable to interact with students during this process, which became a challenge for them in their professional lives:

"The biggest challenge for us was the lack of interaction with students. During that period, I found it really hard to continue lecturing without an audience. It almost felt like I was talking to a wall." (A3, M)

"Students keep their cameras off while the instructor's camera is on; there is no interaction. …Our classes are like a monologue now, with the instructor speaking but not getting any response from the audience. (A6, M)

The majority of social work academics believe that theoretical and practical education cannot be separated in social work; they report that they benefited from a variety of in-class applications, such as group work, client-social worker role plays, workshops, etc., even in theoretical classes, for skill and value acquisition. They reported that another difficulty they faced during the pandemic was the inability to carry out in-class applications during the courses:

"Currently we don't have the opportunity to do the in-class practices. In the classroom setting, you could call on the students to do a role play. You would guide them, assign roles, and so on. Other students would watch the role play, give feedbacks. You would use various techniques. You cannot do these online." (A13, F).

"For example, our classes involved too much practice. Now the students can't have that experience…During role plays in the classroom, they would be assume roles as a client, expert or observer, and then switch their roles one after another. They would ask each other questions like "What would you say if you were in that role?". No matter how many students were in the classroom, every one of them would get a role and have that experience. Or when I lectured on group work, for example, I would run a group work process… But in the current period, this is not possible… We just can't provide that ground for critical debate with the students." (A5, F)

Social work academics reported that they experienced technical problems arising from poor infrastructure and the system they use:

"There are times when the system we use just stops responding or denies our access …Sometimes the audio cuts out or the camera stops working. These are all things that interrupt your speech. You just get distracted. …We have had lots of disconnections. And we still do." (A20, F)

Another challenge faced by social work academics during the Covid-19 pandemic is that the class length is short in distance education system compared to formal education, as a result of which the subjects are only addressed briefly and superficially:

"I had to shorten a lecture, which would normally take three hours in face-to-face education, to one hour in online education; it made me rush through the lecture content. I had to reduce the number of examples that I was planning to use. Formerly we would watch videos, movies, etc. but I had to limit the number of that content in order to highlight much more information. This also made me feel discontent… I'm not sure how much of the information I could pass on to the students." (A16, F)

Some academics reported that they had a feeling of uncertainty in checking whether the students listened to the lesson and understood the subject in the distance education system, which was another challenge they faced with the pandemic:

"The students can see me but I don't see them, so I don't have any clue if they are listening to me. I can't tell by looking at their facial expressions, I wonder if they really understand what I am talking about. I couldn't tell if they get distracted by anything during the class." (A11, F)

The social work academics reported that another challenge they faced during this process was assessment and evaluation of information. The majority of them mentioned that they had problems in assessing and evaluating knowledge acquisition of students due to reasons such as copying and pasting from sources for assignments and cheating by sharing the exam questions in online groups they created among themselves:

"You don't know the academic success of the student in online teaching because the exams are definitely problematic…I don't believe that an exam will ever be adequate for assessment unless it is face to face with the students with you supervising them in person. …I don't think that online exam would be a useful tool for assessment of learning. …How can I even know if the students have just looked up the answers?" (A23, F)

"In fact, students may fail to understand the subject even when I think they have understood. Are exams a good means of assessment?…We can't really see how well the lessons are understood. I think that tests and assignments are not best measures of performance." (A9, F)

Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

Some of the academics emphasized the political status of social work and its advocacy of rights in education and profession. They reported that situations that go wrong should be discussed from a critical point of view, yet the loss of privacy due to the recording of lectures in classroom settings restricts academic freedom, causing concerns both on the part of students and academics:

"After all, we are social workers; we are supposed to have a critical attitude towards injustice and a rights-based approach. We have a role of advocacy for people whose rights are violated. This should be explained to students. Social work is a political profession. Keeping all these in mind, we need to discuss clearly on unfavorable circumstances, social problems etc. so that we will be able introduce students to such a critical perspective and make them adopt a similar perspective… You do not feel comfortable because all these are recorded. Unfortunately, there is this fact in Turkey that anything can be recorded and such recordings can later be used as evidence against us." (A5, F)

3.4. Opportunities Encountered by Social Work Academics in Their Professional Lives Due to The Pandemic

The academics reported that physical barriers were eliminated through the use of technological tools in educational activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, providing advantages for them:

"There are some conveniences that come with the pandemic. …If it were not for the pandemic, perhaps we would not have considered having remote meetings with people from different cities. This is something we have learned during this process …We have had interviews with social workers from different cities such as Ankara, Kocaeli, etc.. " (A17, F)

The academics reported that the Covid-19 pandemic has compelled them to accelerate the process for a social work education that is more compatible with the current practices, providing them with the opportunity to keep up to date with current practices. This situation is described by an academic as follows:

"It has definitely revealed the necessity of a more technology-oriented social work education, so perhaps the pandemic has kind of accelerated this process at this point. We have always perceived counseling and therapy as a face-to-face practice and we have been so trained until today, but now we apparently need to reorganize that training and, of course, its content according to the current situation. (A12, M)

3.5. Social Work Academics' Search for New Methods in Field Practicum

The social work field practicum has been disrupted by the restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of the academics stated that the field practicum was carried out online as a theoretical course including various practices, such as analysis of films and series, case discussions, etc.. Some of them described the situation as follows:

"The students picked a field of study they were interested in, so now we have groups of 14 people for each field. We give theoretical classes for those groups. For example, my group's field of study is immigration and women. So, I lectured them on what immigration is, and who immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees are. We read the legislations and articles. …That process has now been transformed into a class. I think the biggest problem with this subject is the internship. What we have been doing is not clear enough. (A14, F)

"We attempted to work on films and series …That was something we did as a refresher course for the students. But I don't think that any course that can be done online can ever be a substitute to internship. We just saved the day." (A18, F)

Some of the academics reported that they invited social workers from different fields as visiting lecturers into the courses to share their experiences:

"We can't implement the internship right now. We only have social workers from the field to explain the practices; the students listen to their lectures and ask questions to them." (A19, M)

"We invited social workers from the field and held meetings with them. Firstly, one social worker for each particular field lectured on the practices in the respective field, explained the practices carried out and gave case examples. (A2, F)

On the other hand, due to their inability to perform field practicum, some academics helped students reach the clients in need, starting from their own social circles, and carry out social work practices for such clients:

"We asked students to find people available as clients for interviews from their social circles…We expected the students to acquire the skills to interview and start a relationship with the individual, initiate and maintain a helping relationship." (A8, F)

An academic reported that, in their search for new methods to minimize the effects of the pandemic on the field practicum, they reframed the situation into an opportunity with the individual practices performed by students with their guidance:

"In fact, we accomplished something great… At the beginning, we had students who had not started internship. We immediately began to produce solutions for them…We made a plan on what the students could do at their locations… We gave students a two-week period. Students found three families from their own social circles, each including individuals over 65 years of age and children. Then we started to do the practice… So we have achieved a progress far beyond what we had envisioned…. That was the real change. We let the students have individual interviews and group works. …We had expected very minor changes, but they made a huge difference and we witnessed it…This is what social work actually is. So we can say that we have turned the situation into an opportunity." (A21, F)

Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

While there have been studies on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on social work education (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020; De Jonge et al., 2020; Kourgiantakis and Lee, 2020), there are only a limited number of studies directly focused on the experiences of social work academics. The findings of this study present the perceptions and experiences of social work academics.

Studies carried out in various countries across the world reveal that the Covid-19 pandemic is associated with psychological distress (Feng et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Marzo et al., 2021), anxiety (Ahmed et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020), confusion and fear (Brooks et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2020), chaos and anger (Islam et al., 2020), negative and somatic emotions (Yarrington et al., 2021) in individuals. This study brings to the conclusion that, the course of Covid-19 pandemic is perceived by the majority of academics as a negative situation linked to concepts such as uncertainty, fear, and chaos, while some others contrarily perceive it as an opportunity. The findings of a research conducted by Schmiedeberg and Thönnisen (2021) for the discovery of perceptions of Covid-19 in Germany have revealed that personality plays a role in individual perceptions of the pandemic and that the individuals perceived not only negative but also positive aspects of the pandemic.

The study performed by Abu Jarour et al. (2020) presented the opinions of academics about the challenges that the pandemic has brought into their personal lives, such as working from home, developing course materials for online education, high amount of time spent on preparation for classes, negative effects of work-family conflict to work from home and the inability to establish a work-friendly home environment. Similarly, it is observed in this study that the pandemic has affected the personal lives of social work academics particularly in terms of transition of work to the domestic sphere and conflicting responsibilities. Chang and Satako (2020) suggest in their study that working from home has led to increased workload for academics who are parents. Another effect on the personal lives of academics is the increased responsibility and violation of personal boundaries. In a study performed in Canada, social work academics reported that the withdrawal of students from internship and the start of online education have placed numerous new responsibilities on academics, with their personal boundaries violated, such as having to use their personal cell phones for work-related calls (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020). Moreover, the study revealed that another effect of the pandemic on private lives of academics is the intensive use of technology.

It is stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to difficult circumstances in terms of social work education and practice (Kourgiantakis and Lee, 2020). Given the current conditions, online teaching has become the best option for higher education institutions, compelling social work academics more than ever to rely on digital tools. With school closures during the pandemic, social work educators had to implement e-learning as a substitute to face-to-face classroom-based pedagogy. Academics have faced various challenges in developing technology-based approaches, with probable psychological, emotional

or social impacts on themselves, including familiarization with new online technological tools for teaching, learning to use such tools, overcoming problems with internet access, increased workload in meeting course requirements, and personal issues (Azman et al., 2020). It is indicated that a rapid transition to online learning and distance education is difficult or even impracticable, even for teachers in countries with reliable information and communication technology infrastructure and home connections. It is reported that teachers themselves need trainings to effectively deliver distance and online education; however, assistance is rare, particularly in low-income countries (UNESCO, 2020). The research conducted in the Philippines by Alea et al. (2020) revealed that teachers have experienced a number of challenges in delivering distance education, such as difficulties regarding the knowledge and skills required in the delivery of online classes, problems of communication with students, problems with having a stable internet connection for distance education, the use of technological tools such as smartphones, laptops and tablets etc., time management in the conduct of classes, monitoring students' responses, accessibility to students, and finally, the difficulties between stress management at home and requirements of online classes. The research conducted by McCarthy et al. (2021), on the other hand, points to the conclusion that the personality, values, and technology literacy of social work academics have impacts on their online teaching experiences, that the majority of academics have concerns around expressing themselves in online education and that their workload has increased during this process. It is mentioned that the compulsory restrictions imposed on the social work curriculum due to the Covid-19 pandemic is another challenge encountered during this process (Azman et al., 2020). Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) suggest that, in addition to all these challenges, traditional exams will be replaced with online assessment tools in the course of online education that started with the pandemic, which is a new field both for students and teachers, with more assessment errors than usual expected during this process. Similarly to the findings of the previous study, this study shows that the academics have faced a number of challenges such as problems with adapting to the use of technology in their professional lives, the lack of interaction with students, inability to perform in-class practices, occurrence of technical problems, superficial learning, inability to control the learning process, problems with assessment and evaluation, and restriction of academic freedom with the recording of lessons.

It is emphasized that the compulsory distance education during the course of pandemic has brought a new perspective to the academics that the physical distance between social work schools, academics, professionals and students is not an obstacle to collaboration, and even further collaboration will be necessary during this process (Sepúlveda et al., 2020). Similarly, the study reveals that, academics have found opportunities, by using technology in their professional lives, to keep up with current practices as physical barriers have been eliminated. The Covid-19 pandemic may have countless impacts, both positive and negative, on the academics. Those impacts should be taken into consideration for their probable consequences on work motivation of academics (Kulikowski et al., 2021).

Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

Social work education has shifted to online platforms due to the pandemic, with field practices terminated or restricted (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020; Morley and Clarke, 2020; De Jonge et al., 2020; Kourgiantakis and Lee, 2020; McCarthy et al., 2021; McFadden et al., 2020; Mclaughin et al., 2020). In the view of the findings obtained from this study, it is observed that social work education has shifted to online platforms, with field practices restricted or terminated. With the pandemic, social work academics in Turkey have now been in search of new methods in their field practices. New methods have been discovered including theoretical application of the field practicum, with social workers invited to share their experiences and students encouraged to perform individual practice. In their study, Kourgiantakis and Lee (2020) set forth two suggestions regarding the social work field practicum that has been virtually conducted during the pandemic: "Virtual Practice Fridays and cross-cultural social work practice". Archer-Kuhn et al. (2020) indicated that they incorporated "telemedicine" into their own search of new methods for field education in social work, and developed a self-directed field practicum technique which has currently been in use by them. Similarly, to this study, Azman et al. (2020) explained in their study that the case study technique was used within the scope of the field practicum. Morley and Clarke (2020) stated that they collaborated with a team consisting of one social work academic and five students in community organizations within their search for a new method in field practicum, and that "Zoom Supervision" was practically applied.

In conclusion, this study is significant as it makes visible from a holistic perspective the experiences of social work academics in different universities of Turkey during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the research, it is observed that the experiences of social work academics in their personal lives during the pandemic cannot be considered independent of their professional experiences, and that both aspects are intertwined. During the Covid-19 pandemic, social work academics have been encountering a variety of challenges and opportunities in the distance education process, and seeking to explore new methods in field practicum. The current findings have important messages in terms of how social work education needs to be structured during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this frame, it is recommended that more responsibility should be assumed by YOK with further studies at national scale to ensure standardization in education, distance education infrastructures of universities should be developed in a way to allow interactive education with students, and distance education training and assistance should be provided for academics.

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Mehmet Akif Ersoy İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi - Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty
Cilt: 9 Sayı: 3 s.2139-2157 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 p.2139-2157
Kasım 2022 November

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