Examining Microagression Experiences of Women: The Case of İzmir

Kadınların Mikrosaldırı Deneyimlerinin İncelenmesi: İzmir Örneği

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Abstract

Microagressions are experienced almost in all social interactions. However most of the time they are not noticed. One of the dimensions that microagressions are experienced is gender dimension. Therefore, in the present study the microagresssions experienced by women living in İzmir, Turkey was examined. Ten women participated to the study. The data was collected by interviews and analysized by content analysis. According to the results, women in İzmir have difficulties in terms of living as a woman. It was also found that women experience almost all type of microagressions mentioned in literature about gender. How women experience the microagression process was also examined in detail and the findings were discussed under the light of literature.

Öz

Mikrosaldırılar hemen hemen tüm sosyal etkileşimlerde yaşanmasına rağmen çoğu zaman fark edilmemektedir. Mikrosaldırı-ların yaygın olarak yaşandığı boyutlardan biri de cinsiyet boyutudur. Bu nedenle bu çalışmada Türkiye'nin İzmir ilinde yaşayan kadınların yaşadıkları mikrosaldırı süreçleri incelenmiştir. Çalışmaya 10 kadın katıl-mıştır. Veriler görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve içerik analizi ile analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre İzmir'deki kad-ınlar; kadın olarak yaşamakta güçlük çek-mektedir. Ayrıca katılımcı-ların cinsiyetle ilgili alanyazında bahsedilen mikro-saldırı türlerinin ciddi bir kısmı-nı yaşadıkları tespit edilmiştir. Kadınların mikrosaldırılara maruz kalma süreci çalışma kapsamında detaylı olarak incelenmiş ve bulgular literatür ışığında tartışılmıştır.

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Introduction

Microaggressions are experienced almost in all social interactions whether they are noticed or not. Microaggression is defined by Merriam-Webster (2018) as words or behaviors that are hurtful and prejudiced against minority groups, but the performer is often unintentional and often unaware of the action or words he / she said. Pierce (1970) states that microaggression is deemed harmless, but hurts the exposed groups and defines microaggression as "subtle (implicit) and stunning aggressive expressions". The term microaggression was first used to describe intreactions between blacks and whites (Pierce, Carev, Gonzalez & Willis, 1978). Sue and collegues (2007) more broadly defined microagresions towards other disadvantaged groups. Although microaggressions are implicit behaviors, they have negative impact on the exposed ones. However, since these behaviors are highly normalized by society, they are often not noticed. For this reason, it is very difficult to handle microaggressions (Harris, 2017). Also, the majority of those who do microaggressions against disadvantaged groups are unaware that their behaviors, words are hurtful. When they are told that their behaviors and words are hurtful, they refuse to admit it and accuse the other party as being squesamish. Even if they accept that their behaviors and words are hurtful, they describe these behaviors as trivial and small things (Sue & Constantine, 2007; Sue et al., 2008; Sue et al., 2009).

Microaggression process has five stages as the event, perception, reaction, interpretation and results. *Event* refers to the situation that the individual is in. *Perception* is whether the individual who experienced the event perceives the event as an attack. *Reaction* is the individual's reaction to the event or situation he/she is in. The reaction has three components; cognitive (thought process), behavioral and emotional. *Interpretation* is the individual's making sense of the event or situation he/she is in. Finally, the *results* cover the individual's behaviors, cognitive inquiries, worldview, coping methods and psychological well-being (Sue, 2010).

When the literature is examined, it is seen that the studies on microagressions are relatively new. In a study conducted by Shenoy-Packer (2015), it was observed that immigrants working in the United States were exposed to microagressions every day due to their ethnic origins. Lilly and collegeues (2018) examined the relationship between minority group university students' exposure to microaggressions and their risk of depression. In this study, it was found that 98.8 % of minority students were recently exposed to microaggression and it was observed that exposure to microaggressions increased the risk of depression by 2.14 %. In the study conducted by Bonifacio and collegues (2018), the effect of ethnic origin and related microaggression on students' career planning and self-efficacy was examined and a negative relationship was found between these variables. In an other study conducted in Turkey, microaggressions faced by persons with disabilities were examined and it was found that disabled individuals experience denial of personality, denial of experiences, helplessness and second-class citizen (Canel-Çınarbaş et al., 2012). In very recent study, Büke (2021) examined microaggressions against individuals with disabilities based on hashtag activities on Twitter and found the themes of denial of identity, subordination and exoticization.

Microaggressions can be experienced due to any characteristics of individuals such as their language, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and being included in

disability groups, as well as their gender. It can be said that microaggressions on gender role have been more subtle than open attacks and turned into micro invalidations over time (Kağnıcı, 2019). Some basic microaggressions on gender roles are listed as follows; 1) *sexual objectification*: harassing a woman with eyes, verbal or physical contact, 2) *second-class citizenship*: the accepting women in a lower position, 3) *use of sexist language*: use of masculine language (like a man...), 4) *assumption of inferiority*: underestimation of women's abilities, 5) *restrictive gender roles:* beliefs about how women should behave, 6) *denial of the reality of sexism*: denial of the problems faced by women, 7) *denial of individual sexism*: doing the opposite despite rejecting sexist attitudes, 8) *invisibility*: ignoring women's achievements and 9) *sexist humor/ jokes*: making jokes that women humiliate (Sue, 2010).

In the study conducted by Akin (2007) it was observed that discrimination regarding individual's gender is experienced in using opportunities, allocating and using resources, and accessing to services. Women who had lower social status were more negatively affected than men. In a recent study conducted in Turkey, it was found that women are exposed to sexist discrimination such as not seeing the necessary respect and seriousness in their work, being exposed to closed attitudes in communication, and prolonging their working hours (Koloğlu, 2019). In another study, it was seen that there is a gender order shaped according to the cultural structure of the region. Accordingly, it was determined that women mostly behave in accordance with the society and live in harmony with a male-dominated understanding (Özten, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

Microaggression is a concept that has recently begun to be studied worldwide, and it is seen that the studies are mainly about race and ethnicity (Bonifacio et al., 2018; Caner-Çınarbaş et. al., 2012; Güleç & Özden, 2019; Lilly et.al. 2018; Shenoy-Packer, 2015). As Ustubici (2020) stated, there are few studies on the concept of gender and there is a need for studies on the subject. The present study focuses on women and aims to examine possible microaggressions against women living in Izmir. The advantages and disadvantages of being a woman in Izmir, the microaggressions they face, the thoughts, feelings and reactions of women about these microaggressions were investigated in the study. Since there aren't studies about microaggressions about gender in Turkey, it is believed that the present study might provide a point of view whether the microaggressions are perceived in Turkey as in other cultures or not. It is also expected that the knowledge about microaggressions perceived by women might contribute to multicultural counseling studies in Turkey, too. In this context, the present study searched for the answers of the following questions: "What are the microaggressions women living in İzmir experience and how do they make sense of these microaggressions?"

Method

This study, which was carried out to determine the microaggressions experienced by women, was planned to be carried out as a phenomenology study, one of the qualitative research designs. With this model, it is aimed to examine the experiences

of the participants about the research subject in depth. The pattern determined in this aspect allows the participants to examine, understand and discover the problems faced by women in daily life; "how" they define the microaggressions and "what" are their perceptions about these situations without any intervention. How a phenomenon is experienced by people, what it means to them and how it affects them are among the areas of interest in phenomenology (Creswell, 2018). In other words, it is not enough for individuals to just describe their own experiences, but also how individuals interpret these experiences, how they make sense of them, and how they follow these experiences (Miller, 2003).

Study Group

The study group of this research consisted of ten women with different demographic characteristics living in Izmir. The study group was determined by critical situation sampling. The aim of this sampling method is to examine the common or shared phenomena between the situations that vary rather than generalize (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). If the sample identified as the critical situation experiences the subject of research, it can be said that it will have similar experiences in the general group (Patton, 2018). The reason why İzmir is determined as a critical situation is that the gender and gender equality data are at higher levels in the studies conducted by TURKSTAT (2019) throughout the country compared to other provinces.

Participants of the present study had different demographic characteristics in terms of marital status of the participants (married-single-divorced), working status (student-employee-housewife), age (18-25; 26-40; 45- +) and education level (basic education, undergraduate). In phenomenology research, data sources are individuals or groups who experience the phenomenon that the research focuses on and can express or reflect this phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Since there is no general rule about the number of participants, it is generally recommended to be based on data saturation (Patton, 2018), ten participants' views about the topic were considered as enough.

Table.1 Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Participants	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Working Status
P1	36	Single	Undergraduate	Employee
P2	42	Divorced	Undergraduate	Employee
P3	21	Single	Basic Education	Student
P4	28	Married	Undergraduate	Housewife
P5	21	Single	Basic Education	Student
P6	47	Divorced	Undergraduate	Employee
P7	34	Married	Basic Education	Housewife
P8	52	Married	Basic Education	Employee
P9	27	Married	Undergraduate	Employee
P10	33	Married	Undergraduate	Employee

Data Collection Process and Data Analysis

The data in the study were collected by using the Semi-Structured Individual Interview Form (SSIIF). It was decided that the most appropriate data collection technique that can be used to find answers to the determined research questions is

the interview technique. During the creation of SSIIF, first the relevant literature was reviewed. Then, a pilot study was made in order to test the applicability of the form and to determine its' deficiencies. The pilot study was conducted with three women one week before the actual application. Participants in the pilot study were not included in the main study. The questions were expanded with probe questions in order to examine the answers given in depth. In addition, all questions in the interview form were asked to the participants within the scope of the study. The interview questions in the SSIIF were designed in the context of microaggression experiences. Some of the interview questions were as follows: "Complete the statement: Being a woman in Turkey/Being a woman in Izmir"; "Have you ever been treated like a second class human, even though you have similar qualities (skills, education level, competence…) with men?" "What is its frequency?" "What happened?" "How do you evaluate this situation?" "What is the impact on your life?" "What do you do when faced with these situations?"

During interviews, informed consent forms were obtained. The interviews lasted about 30 to 45 minutes. In this context, the study was expressed as a description of womens' experiences of "being a woman" in different fields and they were asked to respond sincerely. It was especially emphasized that the interview process was not conducted to evaluate the participants and personal information would remain confidential. In order to better analyze the data obtained from the interviews, to prevent data loss and to save time, a tape recorder was used in the interviews with the permission of the participants, and notes were taken from time to time in order to carry out the interview process effectively.

The transcription process was completed by converting the recordings in the voice recorder to text using the MS Word program on the same day of the interview, and the total data set was obtained. In order to confirm the written texts obtained in this process, the participants were offered to read. In order to analyze the data analysis process with content analysis, first all the data were read continuously at the same time, then a week break was taken and the data set of each participant was read separately at intervals. After the readings, the stage of coding the data was started and draft codes were reached by coding the data in the form of words, phrases or sentences to be meaningful. After the coding process, the themes were obtained by arranging the codes to form a meaningful pattern. Then, using the MS Excel program, the themes, sub-themes and codes were processed vertically, and the previously coded responses of the participants to be entered in the relevant section were processed horizontally. In this process, considering the ethical principles, the participant women were specified as "P1, P2, P3" in the order of the interview. The data was analyzed by the reasearchers and an academic field specialist with 24 years of professional experience.

Results

In the context of microaggression experiences, in the first part of the research "being a woman" in Turkey and Izmir was examined. The theme and codes of the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Being a Woman

Being a Woman in Turkey	Being a Woman in İzmir
Difficulty	*Privilege*
Not feeling safe	To be able to act freely
Inability to act free	Social communication
Worthlessness - Inequality	
Expectations	
Positive Discrimination	
Guardianship	
Getting help	
Enjoyment of rights	
Employment	

Being a Woman in Turkey

"The difficulty of being a woman" (n = 9) was commonly mentioned by the participants. One of the partipants reflected her thoughts as "It is very difficult to be a woman. Conditions always seem to be the oppressed party when the woman is mentioned..."(P 7). Another theme emphasized by the participants was "not feeling safe" (n = 5). For example, P4 replied the question as "... Life is unfair for women in Turkey. Exposure to death." The other theme emerged was "Inability to act freely". Participants mentioned that they don't freely act while going out at night, having social affairs, dressing up and they feel themselves constrained (n = 6). In addition to all these, "deprivation of fundamental rights" (n = 3) such as education, marital preferences, divorce, traveling, doing a job, "feeling of worthlessness" (n = 6) such as underestimation of their skills, "inequality" in the form of expulsion (n = 6) and finally, intense "expectations" (n = 4) in the form of housework responsibility and family-child responsibility were the other themes emerged.

When the advantages of being a woman in Turkey were examined, six themes emerged as "being protected" (n = 2), "being helped" (n = 1), "being preferred in some professions" (n = 1), "use of sexual attractiveness" (n = 1), "positive discrimination" (n = 3) and "benefiting from rights" (n = 3) in education, divorce, social and political rights. For example, one of the participants reflected her thoughts as "I am a teacher, you know that you can find a job more easily as a teacher, because families hand over their children to a female teacher more easily, they trust women more easily."

Being a Woman in İzmir

Women living in İzmir emphasized that being a woman in İzmir is generally "Privilege-Comfortable" (n = 4). Participants stated that living in İzmir enables them to "act freely" (n = 8) about going out at night, dressing up and expected roles. For example; P9 mentioned that;

> I am originally from ... compared to ..., it is easier to be a woman in Izmir.
> Izmir is an easy city. ... I don't think there are certain social rules. Everyone
> lives independently. This makes women's life a little easier.

Another theme emerged was "Having high social communication skills" (n = 4). P1's opinion on this issue was;

> ...I mean, the people of Izmir are generally more polite and their communication skills are higher compared to the other regions. Therefore, it is easier to communicate with people here. You can do normal things like greetings and so on. Well.... I lived in … People don't even say good morning to each other. Just like that, they have advantages in terms of communication and feeling comfortable....

In the second part of the study, the forms of microaggressions faced by women, how they perceive them, what kind of reactions they give, how they interpret their experiences and the effects of these experiences on the participants were examined. In the figure below, the types of microaggressions defined by the participants are listed according to the frequency and the cycle experienced afterwards is given in a schematic form in Figure 1.

Microaggressions Encountered

Nine themes were reached under this heading. These were sexual objectification, restrictive gender roles, denial of reality of sexism, assumption of inferiority, second class citizenship, use of sexist language, invisibility, denial of individual sexism and sexist humor.

Sexual Objectification

Participants stated that they experienced "whistling" (*n*=6), "spitting" (*n*=7), "annoying gaze" (*n*=5) and "touch" (*n*=4). One of the participants (P9) expressed her experience as;

> … I experienced these at university and during my high school period. I experienced a lot as a woman alone in the place I was appointed for the first time. I experience especially whistling and talking, sometimes looking at my body, but I did not experience anything like harassment "(P9). Another participant said that "For example, I got on the bus a boy of my child's age started harassing my leg with his leg, then I looked at him and he continued it to do it. (P8)

Restrictive Gender Roles

When the participants were asked what kind of behaviors are expected from them because they are women in their daily lives, five themes emerged; "Daily work" (*n*=8), "being a mother" (*n*=4), "obedience" (*n*=7), "legal restrictions" (*n*=1) and "social and daily life" (*n*=3). P4 expressed her thoughts as;

> You shouldn't pass in front of cafe; you can't chat with a man. You should mute your laughter, not laugh too high. I mean, can one's smile be restricted?

Denial of the Reality of Sexism

Participants stated that they witnessed denial of the reality of sexism in terms of "equal employment opportunity" (*n*=5), "legal situations" (*n*=2) and "daily life" (*n*=2). P2 expressed her opinions as follows:

> We are faced with this. Women and men are equal. In fact, women are positively discriminated at work, yes, I encounter such statements as women

are very valuable at work and even superior. But the truth is not like that at
all...

Assumption of Inferiority

Participants expressed that they experienced inferiorty assumptions in terms of
"attribution to abilities" (*n*=5), "attribution to intelligence" (*n*=1), "weakness" (*n*=1),
"family attitude differences" (*n*=1), "problem solving skills" (*n*=1), and "social life"
(*n*=3). P4 provided an example on this issue as;

> The simplest example is driving. Well, if there is a car in the street, if they
> do not see the inside of the car and the car is violating the rules, then it is
> assumed that the driver is a woman, it is not thought that the driver can be
> a man.

Second Class Citizenship

Participants stated that they are seen as second class citizenship in terms of "physical
activities" (*n*=1), "social life" (*n*=2) and "work life" (*n*=4). They explained the situations
they encountered. One of the participants expressed her opinions on this subject as
follows:

> Let's talk about the guests in the simplest way; first of all, the services are
> made to men. Men are seated in the most beautiful places of the halls. Isn't
> that right? You know, you know. So (P7).

Use of Sexist Language

Participants stated that they encountered the case of "glorification of men" (*n*=4)
and "use of streotype" (*n*=3). The opinions of one of the participants on this issue
was as follows:

> I come across with this very often in our society, every thing is done as a
> man. They never do a job like a woman. Don't cry like a girl, don't act like a
> girl. I hear this a lot, especially men use it a lot among themselves. They
> have a sexist attitude. There is only cursing against women. I hear these
> very often in daily life anyway... (P5).

Invisibility

Participants stated that they were faced with "attribution of responsibilities" (*n*=3)
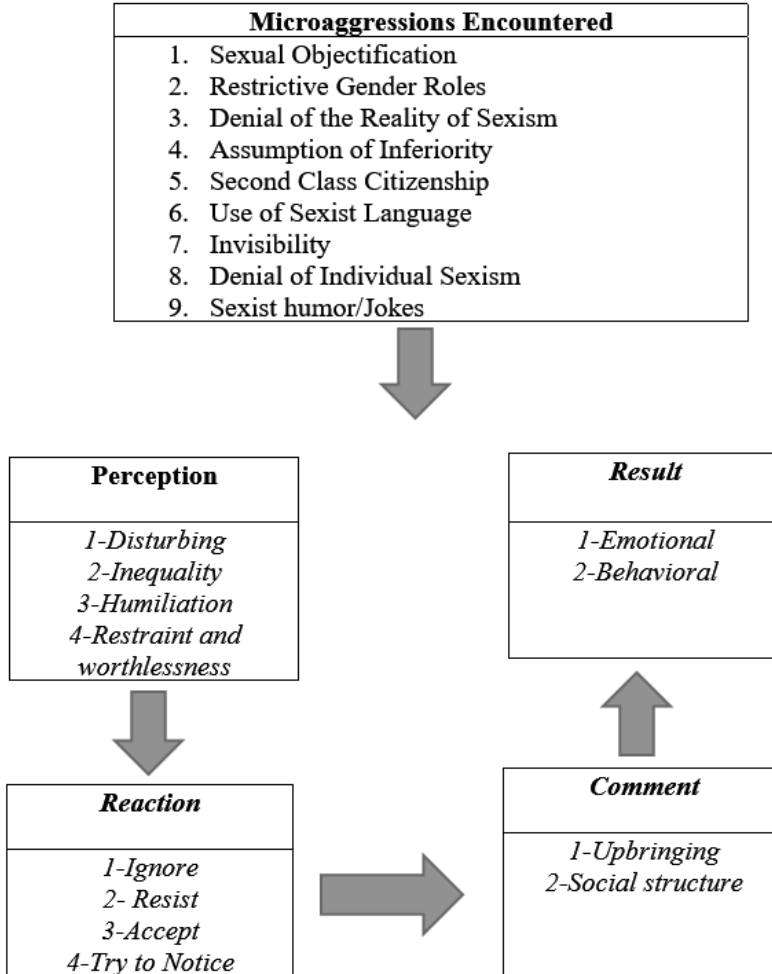and "not appreciation" (*n*=3). For example; P4 mentioned;

The simplest is in the family. You cook, well, it is a good meal. You finish the cleaning on time,
but these are tasks you have to do anyway. This is not a success, a woman already has to do it.
You are raising a child. The child grows up, but it is never appreciated. Because the mother has
to take care of that child any way. It is also in the housework. It is also in the outside life. ....
It will not be appreciated.

Denial of Individual Sexism

Participants stated that they faced denial of individual sexism in the areas of
"professional roles" (*n*=1) and "daily life" (*n*=5). For example, one of the participants
told;

For example, men often use a property in the marital union. Women and men are equal, but physically women are much more tired. Turkey's circumstances. (P4)

Figure 1. Microaggression Cycle

Microaggressions Encountered
1. Sexual Objectification
2. Restrictive Gender Roles
3. Denial of the Reality of Sexism
4. Assumption of Inferiority
5. Second Class Citizenship
6. Use of Sexist Language
7. Invisibility
8. Denial of Individual Sexism
9. Sexist humor/Jokes

Perception
1-Disturbing
2-Inequality
3-Humiliation
4-Restraint and worthlessness

Result
1-Emotional
2-Behavioral

Reaction
1-Ignore
2- Resist
3-Accept
4-Try to Notice

Comment
1-Upbringing
2-Social structure

Sexist Humor/Jokes

When the participants were asked whether sexual jokes were made to them in their daily lives; they stated that they encountered such jokes about "attribution to intelligence" (*n*=1), "among the same sex" (*n*=2) and "sensitivity to women" (*n*=2). One of the participants stated that there are also sexual jokes among the same gender.

This is something that can be done from women to women. Not just men. There are jokes about feminity among women. Even sometimes there are hurtful.(P6)

Microaggression Process

When the responses of the participants to microaggressions were examined, it was seen that the process proceeded in a cycle. In the microaggression process, first the incident is encountered, then it is evaluated, later a reaction is made according to the perception style and finally inferences are made about the experiences. Findings regarding this flow are detailed below.

Perception

When the data on the stage of perception are examined; the themes *disturbing, inequality, humiliation, restraint and worthlessness* have been reached. When these themes are examined in order, it is seen that the participants firstly and intensely evaluated the events they experienced as disturbing. A participant expressed her views as follows:

> After all, you were born as a woman. Men think of you as a sexual object. He sees you as a means of pleasure, satisfaction, and thinks about these while looking at you. He bothers you with his gaze. It feels like you, as a woman, were made for that, and that is embarrassing. (P9)

Another theme mentioned by the participants was that they are not treated equally with men in social, familial and business life. One of the participants expressed her thought regarding the feeling of inequality in social life as:

> In social life, men can go out at any time of the day, men can freely do whatever they want, but since you are a woman, your being in their freedom zone makes them incomfortable. So by meeting their own needs and by preventing you being in their zone, you are somehow excluded. I see that men and women are not equal. (P10)

Another theme mentioned by women is their perception of the humiliation they face due to their gender. Participants expressed that they are humiliated in different areas of life and in different ways, either explicitly or implicitly. The views of one of the participants on this issue were as follows;

> My colleagues and managers say why do you need to work? If I were you, I would spend my husband's money, I feel that I am subjected to such humiliations both in my business life and in my daily life, by men. (P9)

Participants stated that they feel restricted both by the society and by men because of being a woman, and they need to limit their behaviors by applying self-control over time. Regarding the subject, one of the participants said;

> Inability to tie a shoe that is untied on the street when the other person is talking about getting a different electricity from you, looking away, not being able to look eye to eye, not being able to make eye contact. Or not being able to use gestures, not being able to speak openly are all restrictions. I feel constrained.(P4).

The last theme reached in the perception dimension was worthlessness. Participants reported that they do not see the value they deserve in social and family life, on the contrary, they reported that they are devalued both verbally and behaviorally. For example, P7 said the following on the subject;

> At my first place of work, my manager started to ignore me while I was doing the same job as my colleagues and having the same status. He acted like I didn't exist. He did not call me by my name, when there was a situation related to me, he was talking in a veiled manner. (P7)

Reaction

When the reactions of the participants were examined, it was observed that they react in different dimensions including cognitive, emotional and behavioral. According to the intensity of these reactions, reactions are listed under different themes as *ignore, resist, accept and try to notice*. It was observed that the participants reacted by ignoring the microaggressions they experienced intensely and preferred to remain silent against the microaggressions as a reaction method. Sample statements of one of the participants on the subject are as follows:

> … I encounter at work. I do not engage in dialogue, it is forbidden, I ignore it. I am ignoring and ignoring. (P8)

Another reaction that is used frequently after ignoring is the acceptance of the microaggression. The views under this theme were as follows;

> … If I revolt alone, I will only be seen as an incompetent person and cannot change anything in society. That is why it is accepted in a way, but if a section of the society is like this, you will find courage and of course you want to rebel. (P4)

It is observed that the active response of women against microaggressions they encounter is displayed in the form of resistance. This situation is expressed as follows:

> … (In a state of speaking out and touching the body) I went to the police station and complained. They found him. They confronted. "Are you complaining?" they said. "Of course" I said. Young people were given financial penalties. (P8)

Another reaction was trying to make the perpetrator notice the situation by speaking up. A participant said the following on this issue:

> There are times when my achievements or skills are being ignored, but I try to make it visible. I'm trying to get it in their eyes. For example, I'm trying to announce. If there is a success, I do not let it be intimidated. I try to bring it to the agenda, I announce. I want it to be talked about. (P6)

Comment

When the comments of the participants about the microaggression processes are examined, it is seen that the views are gathered under two themes as "upbringing" and "social structure". Women think that the social norms and parenting styles of families have an effect on the problems they are exposed to. When the findings about the upbringing were examined, one of the participants said the following;

> I think the source of such behaviors to women is the way people are raised. In other words, from the movies people watch to social stories, what they read when they were little. Children always grow up with this discrimination, and after these children grow up like this, it is unfortunately very difficult to expect another behavior from them. Because he looks at the relationship between parents, there is a discriminatory attitude, he goes to school, and there is a discriminatory attitude. (P2)

Another factor that is seen as the cause of the microaggressions is seen as the social structure. Women express that they are exposed to microaggressions because of the influence of the society and culture they live in. One of the participants' opinion was as follows:

> I think we are at a point where society cannot improve. Society is really far behind. If our level of development was good, people would not looked like this, the cultural structure is very weak." (P4)

Results

It is seen that the participants reached to some "Emotional" and "Behavioral" inferences as a result of the microaggressions they experienced. In the "Emotional dimension" deadlock, fear, sadness, anger and anxiety; in the "Behavioral dimension" restraint, loss of motivation and social pressure were experienced. When the emotional dimension is examined, it was found that women are hopeless about the current situation and they don't have any belief about a solution. A participant expressed her thoughts on the insolvability as;

> There is a habit, so it definitely needs to change....I cannot think that the society will change, so it has come that way and it will go on. (P4)

Participants were also found to be behaviorally restricted, exposed to social pressure and lost their motivation. A participant expressed her thoughts as;

> I just refrain from going where there are men. Like taking the car for a visa. Because if there are 100 vehicles there, there are only 3 women or not. I didn't want to go last time. I asked a friend of mine. Because being in that environment bothered me a lot. (P6)

The participants stated that they lost motivation in other situations and that they had some difficulties in being motivated in the following periods. A particants' thoughts were:

> (On clothing)... I wonder if I am doing something wrong this time, whether I am doing something that does not fit the society. I can be excluded or not accepted at work, so it is better I wear a shirt so that I can enter that environment. The situation is happening inevitably. (P5)

Discussion and Conclusion

When the disadvantages of living in Turkey as a woman were examined, *feeling unsafe* has been the most underlined experience among the participants. When the types and rates of violence women are examined across the country, it was observed that 44 % of women were subjected to emotional violence, 36 % to physical violence, 30 % to economic violence and 12 % to sexual violence (Status of Women Directorate, KSGM, 2014). In a study conducted by Turkish Statistical Instute (TURKSTAT, 2019), it was reported that the rate of women feeling very safe when they are alone at home was 12.4 % and the rate of feeling very safe when they are walking alone at night was reported as 4.8 %. In the light of the mentioned statistical data, it is thought that the news in the media or the experiences directly witnessed cause women to feel insecure in general.

Another difficulty women face is that they do not feel free. Within traditional gender roles, it is stated that women are as free as their husbands

allow (Yıldız & Güder, 2016). In addition, it was emphasized that the anxiety of losing the authority of men over women causes women to be suppressed by men (Tosun-Altınöz, 2014). On the other hand, it is stated that women who tend to act freely are at higher risk of violence due to their opposition to traditional roles (Akyazı, 2010). In a study conducted with married women, it was found that although married women feel freer than they were before they got married, acting free is generally attributed to men (Oluk, 2019). In parallel with the literature, this study reveals that not showing the respect for the decisions made by women alone, making them dependent on men in different areas (eg, economic, dressing), and cultural characteristics, expectations and stereotypes cause women not to feel free. The other difficulty experienced by women was found to be the expectations of society. However, day by day, women are transitioning from private to public spaces, taking education and getting into business life and their roles are changing and diversifying (Erol, 2008). Although the participation rate of women in business life has increased and women have new responsibilities, it has been observed that their responsibilities related to housework continue in the same way and traditional roles and related expectations have not changed in any way (Esen et al., 2017).

The advantages expressed by women were found as positive discrimination, being protected by men and being helped for some rights (social-political). Women defined protection by men as a positive feature and an advantage. This situation shows that women internalize gender roles such as need to be protected and weakness, accept the power of men and have such an expectation culturally. In studies related to the subject; it was stated that men with protective sexism tendency show the low status and weakness of women with a positive approach (Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2002). Likewise, in the study conducted by Esen et al., (2017) with 1238 women, it was seen that 55 % of women stated that women should be protected or they were indecisive on this issue. In another study, it was stated that women, especially when they go out late at night, will be evaluated negatively, they will be labeled and they experience the contradiction of needing a man to protect themselves from male violence (Oluk, 2019).

It was found that the participants perceive living in İzmir as more advantageous than the country in general. As a matter of fact, it has been observed that women in rural areas accept traditional gender roles more, and women in urban areas have egalitarian expectations (Women's Status Directorate, 2014). Sertkaya-Doğan and Şahin (2021) state that women in urban areas have higher levels of awareness, quality of life and social rights than those living in rural areas. Similarly, it is seen that women living in the city center have a higher perception of violence than women living in towns and villages (Bedir et al., 2018; Büyükyılmaz & Demir, 2016). Women living in rural areas think that violence from their husbands can be a valid reason, and most of the women who oppose violence live in cities (Altınay and Arat, 2008). As can be seen, studies on the distinction between rural and urban areas or on a regional basis focus on types of violence, especially physical violence, and there are no studies on microaggressions. In this context, there is a need for further studies investigating the experiences of women living in the country or rural areas.

As a result of the study, it was found that women were exposed to various microaggressions related to their gender. One of main microagresions faced by women was *sexual objectification.* This also shows the extent of sexual violence that women are subjected to (Flinck et al., 2005; Köknel, 2013). In studies, it was found that women are intensely exposed to verbal-tactile sexual violence (Kayı, Yavuz, & Arıcan, 2000). Within the scope of the study, it was observed that all the participants had similar experiences, they were seriously affected emotionally, and the area they had the most difficulty was being seen as a sexual object.

Within the scope of *restrictive gender roles*, it was observed that the most common situation was traditional gender stereotypes. In the literature, it is noteworthy that there are stereotypes and restrictive roles regarding both how women should be and what they should do. Patterns of how a woman should be is defined as being quiet, calm, self-sacrificing, affectionate, emotional, sensitive, connected, naive, being shy (Curun, 2006; Saraç, 2013). Especially the intensity of housework such as ironing, sewing, washing, washing dishes, house cleaning, preparing food, serving tea in the evening is noteworthy (Günay & Bener, 2011; Saraç, 2013).

Another issue related to the use of language and communication style in culture is the *use of sexist language*. In the study conducted by Güden (2006) on the subject by examining the expressions in different newspapers, women were ignored, men were glorified (man smart, clergyman, statesman, businessman, human being, to be a father, to be a man of his word, to make a man, to be a man), women were used as a sexual object (like a girl, woman's honor, marketing women) and despised (crying like a mother, crying like a wife, bitching woman). When examined in terms of proverbs and idioms commonly used in the culture of the country, it is observed that women are generally characterized as sexual object, dependent, emotional, powerless, passive and attractive (Çer & Şahin, 2016). It is thought that the most dangerous aspect of these uses is that they turn into habitual expressions, they are not considered as microaggressions, their effects on the other party are not considered and thus their transmission continues for generations.

With the *denial of the reality of sexism*, the participants stated that their problems are ignored. Particularly, women cannot use union rights adequately, they cannot be represented in unions, so the problems encountered in working life cannot be expressed sufficiently, they are ignored in union activities (Adaçay, 2019). Because of the traditional roles, women had some problems before entering the job, therefore their employment rate decrease, they don't have the same opportunities as men in getting education, using maternity leaves outside the public sector, working at night shifts and being mobbed at work are common problems (Öztürk & Karakaş, 2020).

It is observed that women react passively; they accept, ignore or prefer to remain unresponsive. Similarly, in studies on different types of violence, it has been observed that women tend to show passive behaviors as a way of coping, they have an accepting tendency, and as an active coping style, they attempt to leave home in domestic violence (Özer, 2019). When the attitudes of women staying in women's shelters against violence were examined, it was seen that they intensely followed

strategies such as acceptance, emotional coping, mental disengagement, behavioral disengagement, withdrawal and joking (Irmak Altıntaş, 2017). In another study, it was observed that women especially postpone telling domestic violence in order to keep it confidential and tolerate attempts to prevent it, they try to cope emotionally rather than being problem-oriented, and as a result, they are exposed to more violence (Bişgin, 2019). On the other hand, it has been observed that women who actively react to domestic problems face problems in different areas such as being homeless and financial problems (Çetinkaya-Büyükbodur and Kayma, 2021).

Within the scope of the study, it was observed that women experience some emotional and behavioral problems as a result of microaggressions they were exposed to. In the literature, mostly the different types of violence as physical, sexual, economic and psychological violence, have been focused on and the results of these types of violence were examined. After domestic violence, women stated that they have feelings of fear, hopelessness, despair, shame, anger, self-blame and loneliness (Altun, 2006). Among the types of violence, women who are victims of psychological violence cannot fully realize the effects of this type of violence, however healthy thinking, healthy decision-making and self-confidence are negatively affected by the situation, they are exposed to more permanent negative consequences than physical violence (Kök-Can, 2010). In fact, studies have shown that emotional violence weakens women more than physical violence (Follingstad et al., 1990) and that verbal violence has a higher effect on marital satisfaction compared to physical violence (Özkan, 1995). From this point of view, it becomes even more obvious how difficult it is for people who are victims of microaggressions to notice and combat the situation, as well as how serious the effects are when considering their prevalence and types.

As a result, women's awareness of the different types of microaggressions they experience and being able to use effective coping systems will prevent the increase in the level and frequency of microaggressions, and will ensure that women are physically, emotionally and cognitively healthier. In order to achieve this, it is recommended to transform the perception of traditional gender roles into an egalitarian perception and organize some training and intervention programs (Esen et al., 2017). In addition, it is emphasized that women should not be left alone in order to strengthen and support the way women cope with violence (Kandemirci & Kağnıcı, 2014). Starting from a very early age, awareness of micro-attacks can be created within the education system. Cultural empathy can be gained through emotional interventions. Activities can be embedded in counseling programs in schools. Social awareness can be raised against microaggression.

The study has some limitations. First the study was carried out with women living in the city center of Izmir and the data was limited to a semi-structured interview form. Second, the other dimensions of multiculturalism such as ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation were not included in the study. For the furher studies, it is recommended to carry out studies on microaggressions in different regions, with different participants and methods.

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