

CHALLENGES FACED BY BSW STUDENTS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the difficulties encountered by BSW students through distance education in Turkey during the Covid-19 pandemic and to understand the effects of distance education. The findings of the study show that (n=756) 54% of the students have a computer and 54,4% have internet access. It was found that 73,9% of the participants found distance education less efficient than face-to-face education; 79,2% needed face-to-face education; 75,9% complained about infrastructure problems, and 73,5% complained about difficulty in focusing. 84,3% of the participants believed that distance education could not create environments such as friendship gained through face-to-face education, 60,4% reported that they learned more stress and exhaustion during distance education, and 47,8% reported that they forgot what they learned through distance education. In addition, in the study, it was determined that there was a significant difference between the participants' grade level and their concerns about negative events to be experienced in distance education, and between their grade point averages and feelings lonely in the distance education process. Among the participants who did not have a special field of study during the distance education process, 48,1% reported that they had problems in home/family relationships during the distance social work education process. These findings showed that the continuation of social work education through distance education during the pandemic period had various effects on BSW students, and recommendations were developed in this direction.

Keywords: Covid-19, Distance Education, Social Work Education, Pandemic, BSW.

SOSYAL HİZMET LİSANS ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN COVID-19 PANDEMİSİ SIRASINDA UZAKTAN EĞİTİMDE KARŞILAŞTIKLARI ZORLUKLAR

Öz

Bu araştırma, Covid-19 pandemi döneminde Türkiye'de uzaktan eğitim yoluyla sosyal hizmet eğitimi alan lisans öğrencilerinin karşılaştıkları zorlukları tespit etmeyi ve uzaktan eğitimin etkilerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma bulguları öğrencilerin (n=756) %54'ünün bilgisayar, %54,4'ünün internet erişimi olduğunu göstermektedir. Katılımcıların %73,9'unun uzaktan eğitimi yüz yüze eğitime göre daha az verimli bulduğu; %79,2'sinin yüz yüze eğitime ihtiyaç duyduğu; %75,9'unun altyapı sorunlarından, %73,5'inin ise odaklanma güçlüğünden şikayetçi olduğu saptanmıştır. Katılımcıların %84,3'ü uzaktan eğitimin yüz yüze eğitimle kazanılan arkadaşlık gibi ortamları yaratamayacağına inandığını, %60,4'ü uzaktan eğitim sürecinde stresli ve bitkin öğrendiğini, %47,8'i uzaktan eğitimle öğrendiklerini unuttuğunu bildirmiştir. Ayrıca araştırmada, katılımcıların sınıf düzeyi ile uzaktan eğitimde yaşanacak olumsuz olaylara yönelik kaygıları ve not ortalamaları ile uzaktan eğitim sürecinde kendilerini yalnız hissetmeleri arasında anlamlı bir fark olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Uzaktan eğitim sürecinde özel bir çalışma alanına sahip olmayan katılımcıların %48,1'i uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitimi sürecinde ev/aile ilişkilerinde sorun yaşadıklarını bildirmiştir. Bu bulgular, pandemi döneminde sosyal hizmet eğitiminin uzaktan eğitim yoluyla sürdürülmesinin, sosyal hizmet lisans öğrencileri üzerinde çeşitli etkileri olduğunu göstermiş olup araştırmada bu doğrultuda öneriler geliştirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Covid-19, Uzaktan Eğitim, Sosyal Hizmet Eğitimi, Pandemi, Sosyal Hizmet Lisans Öğrencisi.

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, the Covid-19 infection, caused by the Novel Coronavirus, emerged in the city of Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization declared a high likelihood of contagion associated with the virus, initiating widespread concern and anxiety at both individual and societal levels as the virus rapidly spread worldwide (Sahu, 2020). With the increasing transmission rate, outbreaks were declared in 114 countries. According to the announcement by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Turkey, the first case of Covid-19 in Turkey was observed on March 11, 2020. Following the initial case, measures were implemented nationwide to prevent/mitigate the spread of the virus (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Turkey, 2020a, 2020b; World Health Organization, 2020).

The global Covid-19 pandemic, which commenced in 2019, not only had medical ramifications but also significantly impacted various sectors, including the economy, law, education, transportation, and tourism (UNESCO, 2020). This multifaceted impact on different aspects of life necessitated the implementation of diverse measures and policies. During this period, measures such as travel bans, quarantine mandates, declaration of states of emergency, and regulations to maintain social distancing were enacted. To minimize the spread of the outbreak, at times, curfews were imposed, and calls were made to urge individuals to adhere to these restrictions. This practice aimed to minimize individuals' movements within the community (Murphy, 2020; Sharifi & Khavarian-Garmsir, 2020).

As stated above, one of the sectors most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic is the education sector. To prevent the spread of the virus in all countries, educational activities were either suspended or shifted to distance learning models. In Turkey, where the rate of participation in higher education is significantly high (Anadolu Agency, 2022), a decision was made on March 16 to suspend primary and secondary education for one week, and higher education institutions for three weeks, as a preventive measure based on the concern that student mobility could increase the rate of virus transmission. Due to the increasing rate of virus transmission, it was later decided that higher education institutions would conduct education and teaching through distance learning during the spring semester of 2020 (Council of Higher Education, 2020a, 2020b). Distance education is an increasingly popular form of learning that allows for instruction from your place of residence with physical separation between teachers and students, using various information technologies, and providing access to online/offline materials (Berg & Simonson, 2024; Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2024). Consequently, universities continued their educational activities through their distance learning systems.

In Turkey, during a certain period of the Covid-19 pandemic, social work education was conducted through distance learning models due to the measures taken (McFadden et. al., 2020). It is known that social work education comprises a curriculum that includes both theoretical and practical courses, aiming for BSW students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values required by the profession, enabling them to adapt to professional life seamlessly. In this regard, it is noteworthy that learning approaches that reinforce experiences, interactions, dialogues, and collaborations hold significant importance in social work education curricula. Given the interpersonal nature of social work as a profession focused on human relationships and interpersonal interactions, the question arises as to whether distance learning can be an effective method of education. In parallel to this question, debates arise regarding whether the skills required by the social work profession and discipline cannot be acquired through distance learning, and whether social work education would be adequate solely through a teaching method that emphasizes theoretical knowledge (Vernon et. al., 2009; Jones, 2010; Hamilton et. al., 2017; Tuncay, 2020; Saumya, 2022). However, a different perspective suggests that the distance learning

model creates an opportunity for equity for students/individuals who face difficulties accessing formal education due to economic, geographical, or health-related issues (Jones, 2010). For instance, research conducted in the United States showed that a majority of students receiving social work education through distance learning were married or single, active working women. In this regard, it is stated that distance social work education provides significant equity opportunities for women (Collins, 2008). Tuncay (2020) also notes that while there is a connection between social work's principle of equality and social justice and distance education contributing to equal opportunities, providing social work education solely through distance learning, which is based on practice and interaction, is challenging and brings both advantages and disadvantages.

This research was conducted to identify the challenges and difficulties encountered by students studying social work in Turkey during the Covid-19 pandemic period in distance learning, aiming to understand the effects of distance education on BSW students.

METHOD

In this study, a quantitative research method was employed. Quantitative research is a research method based on the collection and analysis of quantitative data, aiming to examine relationships between variables and to make sense of causal relationships between variables. The study utilized the survey model, which aims to describe a current or past situation as it is, and specifically employed the general survey model, which refers to surveys conducted on samples taken from the population to make any judgment about the population consisting of numerous components. The survey model and the general survey model were preferred in this study due to their ability to easily collect data from large groups and work with the determined sample (Karasar, 2008; Büyüköztürk et. al., 2022).

Participants

The participant of this study consists of BSW students enrolled in social work education at any university in Turkey. When determining the sample of the study, the convenience sampling method, which is one of the non-probability sampling methods, was utilized. Convenient sampling methods refer to the researcher selecting individuals, entities, or elements from the population scope that are easily accessible and suitable for evaluation (Korkmaz, 2020). The sample of this study comprises a total of 756 BSW students, with 675 females and 81 males. The participants of the study were reached by sharing the link to the data collection tool on social media groups.

Data Collection Tools

During the preparation stage of the questionnaire used in the research, a relevant literature review was conducted, and a pool of questions related to the topic to be measured was created. Subsequently, questions suitable for the research were selected and organized from the pool of questions. The questionnaire consists of a total of 63 questions, including 26 questions related to the distance education process, 21 questions related to distance social work education and its effects on BSW students, and 16 questions related to sociodemographic information. The questionnaire was designed in a 5 Likert scale format, including the options "strongly agree, somewhat agree, undecided, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree".

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the research were collected by uploading the entire questionnaire to Google Forms. The data collection process for the research covers the period from October 5, 2020, to June 4, 2021.

The analysis of research data was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 22.0 (SPSS 22.0) statistical package. Initially, data entry was performed, and to determine the distribution of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Skewness-Kurtosis tests were applied. As a result of these tests, it was observed that the data set did not follow a normal distribution ($p < 0.05$). Due to the non-normal distribution of the data set, non-parametric analyses were used for inferential statistics. Thus, the data analysis employed the Chi-square, Mann-Whitney U, and Kruskal-Wallis H tests.

Ethics

The ethical approval of the study was obtained with the approval of the Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences Research of Karabük University dated December 24, 2020, and numbered 2020/13-31.

FINDINGS

In the findings, students' socio-demographic information, computer and internet access status, the relationship between access to computer, internet and the belief that course success will decrease, experiences, attitudes and perceptions towards distance education, the relationship between grade levels and anxiety about negative outcomes, student grades and feelings of isolation, student workspace ownership and home issues, and the impact of family income on distance education on household/family relationships are provided.

Table 1. Sociodemographic

Variables	Characteristics	n	%
Age group	20 years old and below	309	40,9
	21 years old and above	447	59,1
Sex	Female	675	89,3
	Male	81	10,7
Grade levels	1st grade	156	20,6
	2nd grade	173	22,9
	3rd grade	173	22,9
	4th grade	254	33,6
Living place	Metropolis	359	47,5
	City	137	18,1
	District	175	23,2
	Village	85	11,2
Grade point average	1,00-1,50	11	1,5
	1,51-2,00	16	2,0
	2,01-2,50	73	9,7
	2,51-3,00	248	32,8
	3,01-3,50	327	43,3
	3,51-4,00	81	10,7
Living with	Family	724	95,8
	Spouse	6	0,8
	Relative	2	0,3
	Friend/Friends	15	2,0
	Other	9	1,1
Having a study room in the living place	Yes	542	71,7
	No	214	28,3
Monthly income status	Low	80	10,6
	Middle	555	73,4
	High	121	16,0

The information showing the distribution of BSW students participating in the research according to some sociodemographic factors is presented in Table 1. In this study, the majority of BSW students participating in the research were in the age group of 21 years and above (59,1%), followed by those aged 20 years and below (40,9%). Among the participants in the sample, 89,3% were females and 10,7% were males. The higher proportion and number of female participants in the research result from the fact that the majority of BSW students receiving social work education in Turkey are female. The participants, 20,6% of participants of first-grade students, 22,9% of second-grade students, 22,9% of third-grade students, and 33,6% of fourth-grade students. The majority of BSW students indicated that they reside in a metropolis (47.5%), while some participants mentioned living in a city (23.2%), district (18.1%), and village (11.2%). Regarding the BSW students' grade point averages, the majority (43.3%) fell within the range of 3.01-3.50, followed by those with an average between 2.51-3.00 (32.8%). The vast majority of BSW students reported living with their families (95.8%), followed by those living with friend/friends (2%) and other arrangements (1.1%). Additionally, 71.7% of participants stated that they have a study room in their living area. Furthermore, 73.4% of the participating BSW students described their monthly income status as middle.

Table 2. Computer access status

Variables	1st Grade		2nd Grade		3rd Grade		4th Grade		Total	
	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%
I have a computer with sufficient hardware that I can use anytime I want.	66	42,3	89	51,4	106	61,3	147	57,9	408	54
I have a computer with sufficient hardware, but I can't always use it.	23	14,7	26	15,0	25	14,5	39	15,4	113	14,9
I have a computer, but it doesn't have sufficient hardware.	27	17,3	33	19,1	29	16,8	49	19,3	138	18,3
I don't have a computer that I can use in any way.	40	25,6	25	14,5	13	7,5	19	7,5	97	12,8
Total	156	100	173	100	173	100	254	100	756	100

The examination of computer access status of BSW students participating in the research according to their grade levels is presented in Table 2. Accordingly, 61.3% of third-grade students, 57.9% of fourth-grade students, 51.4% of second-grade students, and 42.3% of first-grade students stated that they have sufficient hardware and a computer they can use anytime. In total, the majority of BSW students (54%) have access to a computer with sufficient hardware, while 12.8% stated that they do not have access to any usable computer at all.

Table 3. The relationship between access to computer and the thought that course success will decrease

Computer access status	I thought my academic performance would decrease with distance learning.											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I have a computer with sufficient hardware that I can use anytime I want.	146	35,8	93	22,8	51	12,5	42	10,3	76	18,6	408	100
I have a computer with sufficient hardware, but I can't always use it.	48	42,5	25	22,1	11	9,7	10	8,8	19	16,8	113	100
I have a computer, but it doesn't have sufficient hardware.	68	49,3	15	18,1	5	3,6	17	12,3	23	16,7	138	100
I don't have a computer that I can use in any way.	63	64,5	12	12,4	9	9,3	2	2,1	16,7	11,3	97	100

Total	325	43,0	155	20,5	76	10,1	71	9,4	11	17,1	756	100
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p=0,00

The relationship between students' computer access status and their belief that academic achievement will decrease is presented in Table 3. In the creation of Table 3, a Chi-square test yielded $p=0.00$. It was found that there is a significant relationship between BSW students' computer access status and their belief that academic achievement will decrease in distance education. While 35% of BSW students who have access to a computer with sufficient hardware they can use anytime indicated that they believe their academic achievement will decrease, it was observed that the proportion of participants who think their academic achievement will decrease increases as computer access decreases.

Table 4. Internet access status

Variables	1st Grade		2nd Grade		3rd Grade		4th Grade		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I have a reliable internet connection that works smoothly, and I can use it whenever I want.	66	42,3	91	52,6	108	62,4	145	57,5	411	54,4
I have a reliable internet connection that works smoothly, but I can't always use it.	11	7,1	16	9,2	13	7,5	19	7,5	59	7,8
I have internet, but I frequently experience connection issues.	71	45,5	59	34,1	50	28,9	80	31,5	260	34,4
I don't have an internet connection that I can use in any way.	8	5,1	7	4,0	2	1,2	9	3,5	26	3,4
Total	156	100	173	100	173	100	254	100	756	100

p=0,00

Information regarding BSW students' internet access status is presented in Table 4. Accordingly, 45.5% of first-year BSW students stated that they have access to the internet but frequently experience connectivity issues. In contrast, most of the second-year BSW students (52.6%), third-year BSW students (62.4%), and fourth-year BSW students (57.5%) reported having a reliable internet connection that works smoothly and can be used anytime.

Table 5. The relationship between internet access and the thought that course success will decrease

I thought my academic performance would decrease with distance learning.

Internet access status	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I have a reliable internet connection that works smoothly, and I can use it whenever I want.	144	35	99	24,1	46	11,2	35	8,5	87	21,2	411	100
I have a reliable internet connection that works smoothly, but I can't always use it.	28	47,5	8	13,6	5	8,5	9	15,3	9	15,3	59	100
I have internet, but I frequently experience connection issues.	136	52,3	45	17,3	25	9,6	25	9,6	29	11,2	260	100
I don't have an internet connection that I can use in any way.	17	65,4	3	11,5	0	0	2	7,7	4	15,4	26	100

Total	325	43	155	20,5	76	10,1	71	9,4	129	17,1	756	100
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p=0,00

The relationship between participants' internet access status and their belief that academic achievement will decrease is depicted in Table 5. The Chi-square test resulted in $p=0.00$. Accordingly, there is a significant relationship between BSW students' internet access status and their belief that academic achievement will decrease in distance education. 65.4% of students who do not have access to any usable internet connection stated that they believe their academic achievement will decrease in distance education; similarly, 52.3% of BSW students who frequently experience connectivity issues also expressed that they believe their academic achievement will decrease.

Table 6. Attitudes and perceptions towards distance education

Variables	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I have trouble staying focused while listening to distance lectures.	556	73,5	122	16,1	21	2,8	23	3,0	34	4,5
Learning through distance education was more efficient compared to learning through face-to-face education.	35	4,6	31	4,1	52	6,9	79	10,4	559	73,9
Synchronous (real-time) exams conducted in distance education are sufficient for measuring knowledge.	46	6,1	76	10,1	92	12,2	100	13,2	442	58,5
The distance education model directs towards individual work, reducing teamwork activities.	446	59,0	116	15,3	80	10,6	34	4,5	80	10,6
The negative occurrences (such as power outages, etc.) that happen beyond my control during the distance education process make me anxious.	574	75,9	113	14,9	30	4,0	11	1,5	28	3,7
I think distance education cannot create the social environments (friendships, cultural activities, etc.) provided by face-to-face education.	637	84,3	60	7,9	25	3,3	10	1,3	24	3,2

The frequencies of BSW students' opinions regarding distance education are presented in Table 6. The majority of students (73.9%) indicated that the distance education process is less efficient compared to face-to-face learning. Participants in the study expressed concerns (75.9%) due to infrastructure issues that occurred beyond their control and reported difficulties in focusing while listening to classes through distance education (73.5%). 59% of the participants stated that the distance education model directs them towards individual study and reduces teamwork, while 58.5% mentioned that synchronous exams conducted in distance education are not sufficient in measuring knowledge. Additionally, 84.3% of the BSW students expressed their belief that distance education cannot create environments such as friendships gained through face-to-face education.

Table 7. Experiences in distance social work education

Variables	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I need face-to-face communication for social work education.	599	79,2	89	11,8	37	4,9	13	1,7	18	2,4
I tend to forget a topic quickly that I learned in distance social work education.	361	47,8	189	25,0	77	10,2	56	7,4	73	9,7
The experiences I have during distance social work education make me feel stressed, tired, exhausted, and fatigued.	457	60,4	158	20,9	48	6,3	38	5,0	55	7,3
Attending seminars and conferences by different academicians in the field of social work during the pandemic has been beneficial for me.	308	40,7	171	22,6	116	15,3	29	3,8	132	17,5
I can quickly access the content of social work courses.	329	43,5	232	30,7	75	9,9	46	6,1	74	9,8
I thought the distance education process would be insufficient for the field of social work.	542	71,7	112	14,8	42	5,6	22	2,9	38	5,0

Table 7 has been created to convey the thoughts of BSW students regarding distance social work education. 79.2% of BSW students expressed the need for face-to-face communication for social work education; 60.4% stated that they felt tired, stressed, and exhausted during the process of distance social work education; 47.8% mentioned that they quickly forget the subjects they learned. However, some BSW students reported that they were able to access social work course content quickly (43.5%) and participated in seminars/conferences by different academicians in the field of social work, believing that these conferences contributed to their education (40.7%).

Table 8. The relationship between grade levels and anxiety about negative outcomes

	Grade level	n	Mean	sd	KW	p
The negative occurrences (such as power outages, etc.) that happen beyond my control during the distance education process make me anxious.	1st grade	156	344,58	3	12,095	,007
	2nd grade	173	374,10			
	3rd grade	173	379,08			
	4th grade	254	401,93			

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test for the variable "I am anxious about the negative occurrences (power outage, etc.) that occur outside of my control during the distance education process" scores obtained by the BSW students participating in the study, according to their classes, are presented in Table 8. Accordingly, there is a significant difference between the class levels and

the anxiety of BSW students about negative occurrences (such as a power outage). When looking at the mean ranks by class level, it is observed that 4th-year BSW students have the highest anxiety score (401.93) while 1st-year BSW students have the lowest anxiety score (344.58).

Table 9. The relationship between student grades and feeling isolated

	Grade point average	n	Mean	sd	KW	p
Being separated from my friends during the distance education process makes me feel lonely.	1,00-2,00	27	471,09	4	9,911	,042
	2,01-2,50	73	410,34			
	2,51-3,00	248	364,99			
	3,01,3,50	327	380,29			

The Kruskal-Wallis test results for the variable "Feeling lonely due to being separated from friends during the distance education process based on students' grade point averages" scores obtained by the BSW students participating in the study are presented in Table 9. There is a significant difference between BSW students' grade point averages and feelings lonely due to being separated from friends during the distance education process. Considering the mean ranks of the groups, students with grade point averages ranging from 1.00 to 2.00 (471.09) obtained the highest score, while BSW students with grade point averages ranging from 3.51 to 4.00 (353.07) obtained the lowest score.

Table 10. Relationship between student workspace ownership and home

Variables	The distance social work education process causes issues within my home											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Having a study room in the living place												
Yes	160	29,5	106	19,6	45	8,3	46	8,5	185	34,1	542	100
No	103	48,1	50	23,4	15	7	11	5,1	35	16,4	214	100
Total	263	34,8	156	20,6	60	7,9	57	7,5	220	29,1	756	100

p=0,00

Table 10 was created to examine the relationship between BSW students' ownership of a dedicated study space and the occurrence of problems in household/family relationships during the distance social work education process. The Chi-square test result for Table 10 was found to be p=0.00. Accordingly, a significant relationship was found between BSW students' ownership of a dedicated study space and the incidence of problems in household/family relationships during the distance social work education process. According to the results, 48.1% of BSW students who did not have a dedicated study space reported experiencing problems in household/family relationships during the distance social work education process.

Table 11. Family income and distance education impact on household/family relationships

Monthly income level	Distance social work education process causes issues within my household/family relationships											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	42	52,5	17	21,3	6	7,5	2	2,5	13	16,2	80	100
Middle	194	35,0	120	21,6	48	8,6	46	8,3	147	26,5	555	100
High	27	22,3	19	15,7	6	5,0	9	7,4	60	49,6	121	100
Total	263	34,8	156	20,6	60	7,9	57	7,6	220	29,1	756	100

p=0,00

The findings regarding the relationship between the monthly income of the family and the occurrence of problems in household/family relationships during the distance social work education process in the Covid-19 are presented in Table 11. The Chi-square test resulted in $p=0.00$. Accordingly, there is a significant relationship between BSW students' monthly income status and their perceptions of experiencing problems in household/family relationships during the distance social work education in the Covid-19 process. Among BSW students who described their economic situation as low, 52.5% indicated that the distance social work education process led to problems in household/family relationships, while among those describing their economic situation as middle, 35% reported experiencing such problems. In contrast, among BSW students who described their economic situation as high, 49.6% stated that the distance social work education process did not lead to problems in household/family relationships.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the conducted research, BSW students stated that they have access to a computer with sufficient hardware or mentioned that they do not have access to any usable computer. According to the data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (2020), the rate of portable computers such as laptops, tablets, notebooks in households is determined to be 45.1%. There was found to be a statistically significant relationship between students' computer access status and their belief that their academic performance would decrease in distance education, with the belief increasing as computer access becomes restricted. It is considered that the sudden transition to distance education, as required by the conditions of the period, has been substantial. Indeed, McFadden et. al. (2020) and Díaz-Jiménez, et. al. (2020), express that the changes experienced during the Covid-19 process have affected not only university academic and administrative staff but also students. These findings suggest that the challenges students face due to inadequate technological infrastructure in public health crises overlap with similar barriers in low-resource regions and have been found to face greater challenges in accessing education due to technological deprivation and psychosocial stress (Menon & Motala, 2022; UNICEF, 2022 March). During the distance learning process, students may experience anxiety about accessing classes, exams, and conducting research due to the lack of adequate hardware or not having a computer, leading them to believe that their academic performance would decrease. Consistent with the findings of this study, research by Ajmal & Ahmad (2019) and Lischer et. al. (2021) also found that students experienced anxiety and difficulties during distance learning due to various reasons, such as insufficient time allocated for assignments and a lack of feedback. Nonetheless, despite participants voicing anxiety stemming from limited access to technological resources and infrastructure during distance education, it remains crucial to acknowledge the profound impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has thrust

societies into unprecedented circumstances and has far-reaching implications for public health across micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Also, some research has stated that the abrupt upheaval in students' routines has resulted in a notable surge in mental health challenges, encompassing phenomena such as emotional detachment, depressive symptoms, and heightened anxiety levels and significant disruptions to daily routines (Cao et. al., 2020; Cohen et. al., 2020; Liu et. al., 2020; Meo et. al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et. al., 2020; Taylor et. al., 2020; Scheffert et. al., 2021). Additionally, the finding from the research conducted by Lischer et al. (2021), which indicates that students' workloads increased to a certain extent during the pandemic, is also considered to be significant. When considering the context of BSW students, it becomes apparent that these shifts may engender a reciprocal relationship between pandemic-related anxiety and the challenges of distance learning, underscoring the multidimensional nature of anxiety experienced during this period. While different studies show that students have either positive (Mathew & Chung, 2020; Avsheniuk et. al., 2021) or negative (Bozavlı, 2021; Yurdal et. al., 2021; Groton & Spadola, 2020) attitudes towards distance learning, it is believed that facilitating and widespread access to electronic devices such as computers and tablets, as well as providing privileges regarding ownership, could be effective in addressing uncertainties and difficulties.

The majority of BSW students participating in the research indicated that they have a reliable internet connection that they can use anytime, while some mentioned that they do not have internet access. According to the data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (2020), the rate of individuals using the internet is 79%, and the rate of accessing the internet from home is 90.7%. This situation is thought to affect students' educational life primarily, especially the distance learning process. Indeed, in this study, a significant relationship was found between students' internet access status and their belief that their academic performance would decrease in distance education. Since distance education is entirely dependent on internet access, students without access may be restricted in their ability to access education. Students experiencing frequent connection problems with internet access may encounter connection issues during live classes, which can make it difficult for them to follow lessons. The findings of a survey conducted by the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (2020) support the finding of this research on internet access, indicating that 3 out of 10 students face problems accessing the internet, and some students do not have internet infrastructure in their area or have insufficient internet access speed to access the university's distance education system. Similarly, another study conducted in Vietnam by Dinh & Nguyen (2020) and Garbe et. al., (2020) found that BSW students experienced difficulties during distance education in terms of internet access issues, connection interruptions, and low-quality audio and video. A study conducted by Sari & Nayir (2020) indicates that this situation is also described as a difficulty by educators, as it leads to an inability to reach students who lack internet access. Based on the findings regarding the internet access and computer ownership status of the students participating in the research, the enactment of the "Decision on Providing Technological Devices and Internet Support to Higher Education Students" on October 25, 2023, in Turkey is considered a positive development. With this development, it is anticipated that students benefiting from the support within the scope of the decision may experience relatively less hardship in terms of technological devices (computers and mobile phone devices) and internet access.

The BSW students indicated that the distance learning process is less effective compared to face-to-face education. Additionally, participants believe that the distance learning model directs individuals towards individual study, reducing teamwork, and consider synchronous exams in distance learning inadequate for measuring knowledge. Rowbotham (2020) also stated that there has been a decline in students' contentment with their educational experience within the realm of distance learning. In another study, Dinh & Nguyen (2020) found that BSW students' level of satisfaction with face-to-face education was significantly higher than that of distance education in the pandemic period. Additionally, parallelly, the study with BSW students who are in 4th grade, Uysal et. al.,

(2021) was conducted and found that dissatisfaction was expressed that distance education was less efficient than face-to-face education. However, in our study, some students mentioned being able to quickly access social work course content and participating in online academic conferences, symposiums in the field of social work, believing that these conferences or symposiums contributed to their knowledge. Indeed, other studies also indicate that the ability to access more resources and rewatch online class recordings is beneficial in distance education (Lin & Gao, 2020; Lமானාஸ்காஸ் & Makarskaitė-Petkevičienė, 2021; Todri et al., 2021; Aldossary, 2021). This situation demonstrates, as noted by Mason et. al. (2010) and Bracons & de León Romero (2021), that distance social work education has both advantages and disadvantages. Thus, it can be argued that face-to-face education is generally perceived as more effective and satisfying, especially for promoting teamwork and reliable assessment, while distance education offers unique advantages such as flexible access to resources, enrolled courses, and participation in online academic activities. However, these advantages may not fully compensate for challenges such as reduced student satisfaction and limitations in collaborative learning. Therefore, a balanced approach that integrates the strengths of both methods can enhance the overall educational experience for BSW students by addressing the various needs and preferences expressed in the literature.

The majority of BSW students expressed their belief that distance education cannot create environments such as the friendships fostered by face-to-face education. Similarly, a large portion of students indicated their need for face-to-face communication in social work education, feeling tired, stressed, and fatigued during distance social work education, and quickly forgetting what they learned on the topic. When examining the highest levels of anxiety experienced by BSW students during the distance education process based on their class levels, it is observed that fourth-year students exhibit the highest levels of anxiety, while first-year students have the lowest levels of anxiety. When anxiety related to academic achievement is examined on a class basis, it is predicted that fourth-year students may experience anxiety due to being in their final academic year and not wanting their overall averages to be affected, as well as facing difficulties in adapting to a different system from what they are accustomed to. It is also considered that first-year students may have lower levels of anxiety due to their lack of sufficient experience with the system, as well as the belief that they can improve their academic performance in future periods in case of possible failure. According to Díaz-Jiménez, et. al. (2020) and Kmietowicz (2020), anxiety levels among BSW students escalated notably amidst the Covid-19 pandemic with identified contributing factors such as students' anxiety regarding their academic and financial circumstances, the uncertainty, lack of interpersonal communication as well as residing in urban areas during the academic term. Carleton (2016) suggests that individuals facing an unseen threat of a virus during the pandemic experience intense fear and anxiety due to the uncertainty of how the situation unfolds. Parallely, in studies conducted in different countries, it was found that students showed high anxiety, uncertainty, and depressive symptoms during the pandemic process (Marques et. al., 2021; Savage et. al., 2020; Şahin et. al., 2022; Tao et. al., 2021). A significant difference was found between BSW students' grade point averages and feelings lonely due to being separated from their friends during the distance education process. Students who felt lonely during the distance education process were predominantly those with grade point averages ranging from 1.00 to 2.00, while those with grade point averages ranging from 3.51 to 4.00 were least likely to feel lonely. Feeling lonely and socially isolated during the Covid-19 pandemic may result from being away from social support mechanisms such as friends and the school environment. In the literature review, no studies were found that directly focused on the grade point averages and staying away from the social environment, but Papouli, et al. (2020) stated that social work students participated in distance therapy sessions to reduce the stress and discomfort caused by social distance and isolation; Szkody & McKinney (2019) and Szkody et. al. (2021) stated that increased social support was associated with psychological health and that social supports can prevent individuals from psychological problems during the Covid-19 period. Snoubar (2022), on the other hand, brought a more

comprehensive perspective to the situation and stated that this situation experienced during the Covid-19 period should be addressed at the social policy level. In the other hands, the lack of face-to-face interaction, limited teamwork, and isolation can hinder key social work skills like empathy, collaboration, and cultural sensitivity, typically developed through in-person practicums (Reamer, 2022, 2023). Prolonged exposure to such stressors may cause emotional burnout and reduced professional confidence (Apgar & Cadmus, 2022). These challenges may impact BSW students' professional identity, highlighting the need for support strategies like virtual mentorship or hybrid learning. Briefly, the findings in the current study, supported by studies across various contexts suggest a critical need for targeted interventions, such as enhanced mental health support and hybrid learning models, to mitigate anxiety and foster a sense of community and engagement in distance social work education.

A significant relationship was observed between BSW students having their own study space and experiencing problems within their homes during the distance social work education process. According to the findings, BSW students who did not have a dedicated study space reported experiencing problems within their homes or family relationships during the distance social work education process. The lack of a designated study space for students to spend time and unwind as they wish during the distance education process may lead to stress and tension, potentially resulting in problems within family relationships. Indeed, if it was thought about education process, in the study conducted by Rudenstine et. al. (2021), it emphasized that there may be difficulties in participating in the distance education process in the home environment, preparing for the lessons and accessing appropriate environments that can maintain the necessary attention and focus during class participation. Moreover, the inability of students to retreat to their own space after experiencing issues may escalate existing problems to the level of conflict. The findings show that there is a significant relationship between BSW students' monthly income status and their perceptions of experiencing problems within their homes or family relationships during the distance social work education process. Some BSW students who described their economic situation as low reported experiencing problems within their homes or family relationships during the distance social work education process. Additionally, among those who described their economic situation as middle, similar issues were reported. In contrast, some BSW students who described their economic situation as high stated that they did not experience problems within their homes or family relationships during the distance social work education process in Covid-19 pandemic. It may be thought that students who characterize their family's economic situation as low may experience increased stressors within the family due to pandemic-related unemployment and further impoverishment, leading to increased family tensions and disputes. Different research which more comprehensive than this study supported these findings like Kristenson, et. al. (2004) noted that the inability to work, job loss, or negative experiences during employment can increase stress levels and be disruptive to mental health; Şentürk & Bozkurt (2021) founded that domestic problems can increased in poor families during the pandemic period while families that have middle and high economic status close to each other. Knight et. al. (2021), Hagedorn et. al. (2022) and Khlaif et. al. (2021) found that during a crisis such as Covid-19, some students have to study in an environment shared with families because they don't have their rooms and these conditions negatively affect their learning abilities and hinder success. Considering that the problems may be intersectional, it can be thought that the macro-level effects of the pandemic may affect in a large the family and educational lives of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is believed that the continuation of social work education entirely through distance means may have negative effects on students' individual and professional identities in the long term. For distance social work education to be effectively implemented, it is considered crucial to ensure

equal opportunities among students and provide necessary technological infrastructure, as well as facilitate access to course materials. In this regard, it is recommended that universities work towards developing a user-friendly and customizable interface for their distance education systems. Additionally, in regions with limited internet and computer access, local governments could provide facilities such as individual rooms in public libraries with suitable conditions for distance learning, including soundproofing, to enable students to benefit. To address the socialization needs of students who are isolated from their peer groups during distance education, it is suggested that opportunities for active participation and discussion be provided in classes, with instructors being attentive to this aspect. Furthermore, curricula should incorporate courses related to resolving family-related issues that may arise during distance education periods, aiming to contribute to students' personal development. Moreover, to facilitate the resolution of family problems during distance education, access to mental health professionals who can provide psychosocial support to individuals and families should be made more accessible. In summary, efforts should be made to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of distance social work education, ensuring that students have equal opportunities, technological resources, and support systems in place to address potential challenges and promote their overall well-being and development.

LIMITATIONS

This research was conducted with BSW students in Covid-19 pandemic process. The limitations of this research are that the research the 756 participants have educated some university social work department in Turkey. Additionally, the sample is consisting of majority women students. This situation prevented the research findings from being analysed according to the gender variable.

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