

More Than a Group Chat: Women's Social Support Seeking Behaviour in Facebook Groups

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Abstract: This study examines how women seek and provide social support in a Facebook group exclusively designed for female members. The research aims to demonstrate that social support is a significant communication process not only during health-related issues and crisis situations but also as part of everyday life. A second aim is to highlight the role of social support in women's online interpersonal communication. Using content analysis, posts shared within the closed Facebook group were thematically analysed through the lens of social support theory. The findings indicate that the majority of posts in the group contain social support elements. Informational support was most frequently observed in posts related to daily life and health, while emotional support was most prevalent in discussions about relationships and religion. Esteem support, the third most common type, was primarily found in posts concerning relationships.

Keywords: Online Social Support, Social Media, Interpersonal Communication, Computer-Mediated Communication, Support-Seeking Behavior

1. Introduction

The rapid integration of digital technologies into human life has also had a significant impact on the dynamics of interpersonal communication. In the contemporary era, online platforms have evolved into environments characterised by profound levels of social interaction. The advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has led to a paradigm shift in the realm of interpersonal communication, rendering it independent of time and place. This development has given rise to novel opportunities for interpersonal exchange. Online social media are environments in which individuals articulate their sentiments and gain greater control over their social networks. In particular, online groups formed around characteristics such as gender, profession, age, and interests create a space of intimacy where individuals can interact with others who share similar experiences. Individuals can discuss common topics, debate common issues, and exchange information in such groups.

In this context, gender-based groups, which are the focus of this study, function as platforms for empathy-focused messaging and information sharing, and emotional solidarity. In such groups, members typically try to comprehend the feelings of others, cultivate empathy and engage in the exchange of personal experiences with the aim of providing mutual support. In this way, they seek solutions to their everyday problems. Consequently, the analysis of messages exchanged in online women's groups will provide a significant contribution to our understanding of interpersonal communication in the digital realm.

At this point, the conceptual framework of the research can be established using the concept of social support. The continuity of communication, privacy, and the temporal and spatial flexibility of online platforms provide a conducive environment for social support processes. Members of groups that accept individuals on the basis of certain common characteristics can establish a close, open, and continuous supportive communication network with each other.

Numerous facets of an individual's life are impacted by the significance of their social support system. Stress, emotional and psychological wellbeing, physical health, and life expectancy are all correlated with social support (Antonucci et al., 1997; Cutrona, 1996; Desens et al., 2019; House, 1981; House et

al., 1988; Schwarzer & Leppin, 1988; Umberson et al., 1996; Wright et al., 2003). A review of the literature indicates that studies on social support predominantly focus on contexts involving intense stress, such as specific illnesses or crisis situations. However, social support also plays a pivotal role in managing everyday challenges. The advent of online communication has intensified and expanded social support interactions. Nevertheless, there is limited research on how women cultivate solidarity and provide multidimensional support within closed social media groups. This study expands the concept of social support beyond health and crises, by exploring women's online support-seeking in areas such as daily life, marriage, romantic relationships, motherhood, religion, and home life. Through qualitative content analysis of a selected Facebook group, this research demonstrates that social support functions as an effective communicative practice not only in extraordinary circumstances but also in routine, everyday interactions, offering a fresh perspective on gendered digital spaces.

2. The Concept of Social Support

Human beings are inherently social, and their well-being is closely tied to the quality and availability of social relationships. Social support is intrinsically linked to the nature and quality of these social relationships. It is commonly understood in a broader sense, encompassing any process by which social relationships contribute to health and well-being (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 4).

Social support is a multifaceted concept that can be defined in various ways. The term encompasses a broad range of social interactions, including the provision of socioemotional, instrumental, and informational assistance (Thoits, 1985, p. 53). When faced with challenges or difficulties, individuals can alleviate stress and anxiety by seeking social support, thereby enabling them to overcome adversity (Liu & Hung, 2016). Shumaker and Brownell (1984) provided one of the most common definitions of social support: "an exchange of resources between two individuals that is perceived by the provider or recipient as intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient". According to Chang and Wu (2013), social support can be defined as the extent to which individuals perceive themselves to be cared for and supported by their colleagues, friends, or family. Caplan (1974) posits that social support networks are ongoing social groups that provide individuals with opportunities to receive feedback about themselves and confirmation of their expectations of others. These individuals are expected to provide knowledge and moral support, practical resources and assistance, and emotional support during difficult times (Wilcox & Vernberg, 2013). According to Cohen et al. (2000, p. 4), social support refers to the social resources that individuals believe are available to them or that they actually receive from non-professionals, whether through formal support groups or informal helping relationships. Although social support is defined in various ways, these definitions collectively refer to constructive engagement or supportive behaviours aimed at assisting individuals in need (Rook & Dooley, 1985).

To enhance understanding of how social support functions in diverse contexts, scholars have proposed various classifications. These distinctions provide insight into the nature and effectiveness of the support provided.

2.1. Types of social support

Numerous classifications have been proposed regarding the concept of social support, based on its purpose, content, and effect. This section presents the most widely accepted classifications on the concept of social support.

The concept of social support serves as an umbrella term encompassing various types and dimensions of supportive behaviours. First, the concepts of 'perceived social support' and 'enacted social support' should be distinguished from each other. Perceived social support refers to an individual's overall impression of whether their social network provides sufficient support, reflecting their self-assessment of its value (Sorias, 1988, 1990). For instance, the statement *'My friends are always there for me when I*

need them' illustrates perceived social support. The salient point here is not the actual receipt of support, but rather the recipient's belief that support is or will be available when needed.

In contrast to perceived support, which is the belief that help is available if needed, enacted social support refers to assistance actually provided during stressful events (Birditt et al., 2012, p. 729). Statements such as *'My friends supported me when I lost my mother'* or *'My family has always been there for me, especially when I was struggling financially'* represent forms of social support that transcend perceptions and are actually realised. Goldsmith (2004, p. 26) conceptualises enacted social support as a communication process. According to this perspective, enacted social support occurs in the context of conversation, where messages are exchanged and interpreted between partners. The effectiveness of this support is shaped by both individual perceptions and socially shared evaluations, which influence how support is received and whether it helps or hinders coping. Positive evaluations can enhance coping ability and well-being, whereas negative evaluations can intensify distress, highlighting the critical role of communication in determining the impact of enacted support (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 26).

A plethora of interpretations exist regarding the types of social support. Gottlieb (1978, p. 108) defined four types of social support as emotionally sustaining behaviour, problem-solving behaviour, indirect personal influence, and environmental action. Abdel-Halim (1982) proposed only two types of social support: emotional and instrumental. Walker et al. (1994) distinguish between emotional support, instrumental support, informational support and social companionship. House (1981) proposed one of the most widely utilised distinctions: emotional support, informational support, instrumental support, and appraisal support. This classification is widely considered the most comprehensive interpretation, encompassing most of the distinctions concerning the types of social support.

Clear distinctions between the types of social support are not always feasible in practice. For example, tangible support offered to someone may also constitute emotional support at the same time. In fact, all types of social support can arguably be considered forms of emotional support. For this reason, in empirical research on social support, researchers often adopt the most appropriate categorisation for their study. A review of the previous studies indicates that emotional, informational, tangible/instrumental and esteem support are the most widely accepted types of social support (see Table 1).

Table 1*Types of Social Support and Message Examples*

Type of Support	Definition	Message Examples
Emotional Support	Helping the person to feel emotionally comfortable, showing empathy, expressing support in a way that makes them feel stronger.	<i>'I'm always with you.'</i> <i>'I know how you feel, but you're not alone.'</i> <i>'I know you're going through a difficult time, and we'll get through it together.'</i> <i>'You have very good reasons for feeling this way. I don't judge you; I just understand.'</i> <i>'It may be hard now, but one day you will look back and see how strong you were.'</i>
Informational Support	Providing the recipient with the right information they need to overcome a challenge or solve a problem.	<i>'To help you make a more informed decision, you can take a look at this article.'</i> <i>'A friend of mine in a similar situation tried the following method and found it useful. I can give you the details if you like.'</i> <i>'Experts in this field generally recommend the following method...'</i> <i>'In order to benefit from tax deductions, you must ensure that you meet the following criteria.'</i> <i>'If you are preparing for this exam, one of the most effective methods of studying can be....'</i>
Tangible Support	Providing tools, concrete resources, material and physical assistance to help meet the physical, psychological or material needs of the individual.	<i>'If you want, I can help you move to another house.'</i> <i>'I know you are having financial difficulties at the moment; I can provide temporary support if you want.'</i> <i>'It's important for you to rest when you're ill. I can cook for you today.'</i> <i>'If your computer is broken, you can use mine for a while.'</i> <i>'I can take you to the lab for your blood tests.'</i>
Esteem Support	Delivering messages to increase the person's self-esteem, self-confidence and self-awareness, to make them feel better and to increase their emotional resilience.	<i>'You've worked hard, and you've really made great progress. Do you know that?'</i> <i>'Sometimes you question yourself, but remember, you are stronger than you have ever been.'</i> <i>'You must believe in yourself, because everyone knows how talented you are.'</i> <i>'You are an amazing mother! The love, patience, and sacrifice you show your children are truly admirable.'</i>

Emotional support constitutes a core component within the broader framework of social support. In 1972, medical scientist Vosburg defined emotional support as the care, encouragement, and love given by medical staff, family, and friends to patients throughout the course of their illness (Vosburg, 1972; cited in Pan & Ye, 2024). In the late 1990s, Western scholars began to explore the role of emotional support within educational contexts, initially exploring its role within the family in fostering children's

social cognition, before shifting their focus to its broader impact in familial contexts (Pan & Ye, 2024, p. 145). In contemporary academic discourse, the notion of emotional support has gained significant traction across a diverse array of disciplines, including, but not limited to, education, psychology, medicine, and communication sciences.

Emotional support refers to the verbal and nonverbal expressions of care, empathy, encouragement, and reassurance provided to individuals to help them manage stress, boost self-esteem, and navigate difficult situations. It can be offered by family members, friends, colleagues, or professionals and often includes active listening, validation of feelings, and the provision of comfort in times of distress. Hanson et al (1990) state that esteem support encompasses care, encouragement, and the promotion of confidence and trust. According to their study, emotional support was associated with improved health outcomes and decreased financial distress. Furthermore, emotional support has been shown to help individuals overcome psychological barriers, take preventive measures against adverse shocks, and cope more effectively with challenges when they arise (Ke, 2024, p. 25). It can be assumed that all behaviours of social support, irrespective of their type, include some form of emotional support. This is supported by the findings of Barling et al. (1988, p. 147), confirming that all types of social support are generally perceived as emotional support by the recipient. In addition, emotional support alone may have a significant impact when other forms of support are not feasible.

Informational support involves sharing knowledge that can help individuals improve their situations, whether through managing challenges or securing opportunities. A closely related concept is advice support, which tends to be more directive, because the support provider takes a more active role in guiding the recipient (Schwarzer & Leppin, 1988, p. 337). The provision of informational support is significant for the recipient, because it facilitates access to accurate information from a knowledgeable or experienced individual. This support not only equips individuals with relevant information but also enhances their emotional well-being. Barling et al. (1988, pp. 148–149) found that the combination of informational and emotional support was more effective in mitigating the negative effects of stress than emotional support alone or its combination with other types of support. In her research on individuals with HIV/AIDS, Veinot (2010, p. 12) also noted that from the perspective of the users, the provision of information and emotional support are interconnected experiences.

In the context of informational support, the source of support becomes even more important. Emotional support may be provided by friends, family, or others within the individual's immediate environment. However, as informational support involves the dissemination of accurate information and experience in problem-solving and decision-making processes, it is imperative that the source of support has either experienced or is currently experiencing the same situation. Consequently, individuals seeking informational social support may extend their search beyond their immediate social circle to include support groups and, in some cases, online communities as an integral part of their support network.

Tangible support encompasses both physical assistance and material aid in the form of goods or financial support (Schwarzer & Leppin, 1988, p. 337). Tangible support is most often provided by individuals within one's immediate environment, such as family members and friends, will provide tangible support. In addition, non-governmental organisations and charity can also serve as significant sources. The notion of tangible support has been extensively researched, particularly within the domain of health. For example, Crane (2009) demonstrated that the provision of tangible social support, in conjunction with informational and emotional support, was associated with enhanced medical treatment adherence. In another study (Glass et al., 2007), it is revealed that tangible social support protects against PTSD symptoms in urban women survivors of violence. It has also been found that tangible social support buffers the negative effects of financial stress on psychological well-being (Åslund et al., 2014). Tangible support can make everyday life easier for the recipient, reduce stress and anxiety, strengthen social ties, and play a vital role, particularly during crisis and emergency situations.

The other widely acknowledged type of social support is esteem support. Holmstrom and Burleson (2011, p. 326) defined esteem support as a type of social support that boosts individuals' self-perception by reinforcing their attributes, abilities, and achievements. Esteem support is designed to enhance self-esteem, foster self-confidence, and fortify positive self-perception. Situational factors, relationship dynamics, and the characteristics of the message itself shape the perceived effectiveness of esteem support (Holmstrom, 2012, p. 91). Esteem support contributes to individuals' emotional resilience and a heightened sense of self-worth. Being recognised for a problem they have faced or solved or a success they have achieved makes them feel emotionally stronger. Therefore, the main components of esteem support messages are motivating, praising, encouraging, and confidence-building statements. For example, when a student receives a low grade in an exam, the teacher's motivating words such as *'You are a smart student, I am sure you will get a better grade next time'* are examples of esteem support. Similarly, when a parent conveys their support to their spouse by saying, *'You were very supportive of our child when she was sick. You contributed a lot to her recovery'*, this can be seen as an esteem message that reinforces positive behaviour. Esteem support increases the recipient's sense of social acceptance, support, approval, and self-confidence.

Although these categories provide a valuable framework, it is important to acknowledge that real-life expressions of support frequently intersect and blur these boundaries. A single message of support can, in fact, embody a combination of emotional, informational, and esteem support, thereby underscoring the interconnected nature of such interactions.

3. Online Social Support

The increasing integration of internet technologies into everyday life, coupled with rising digital literacy has empowered individuals to forge novel connections with strangers and to extend their existing social networks into a new medium. The advent of the internet has facilitated the formation of online social environments, which encompass several forms, including chat channels, discussion forums, blogs, and social media platforms.

The impact of online communication on interpersonal relationships has long been studied in communication and behavioural sciences. Early discussions often emphasised its negative effects on face-to-face interaction. However, the evolution of internet features—especially social media—has enabled individuals to form new connections while sustaining existing relationships, shifting the discourse towards its integrative potential (Lai et al., 2013). Li et al.'s (2022, p. 19) study confirmed that the increased utilisation of the internet facilitates enhanced interaction with family members and friends and verified the role of the Internet in diminishing feelings of loneliness, which is a significant factor affecting well-being. Wellman et al. (2001) assert that individuals' engagement in online communication serves to augment, rather than supplant, their existing patterns of face-to-face and telephone communication.

Rodgers and Chen (2005) define an online forum as "a group of individuals with a common interest or a shared purpose, whose interactions are governed by policies in the form of rules, rituals, or protocols; who have ongoing and persistent interactions; who use electronic communication as the primary form of interaction to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness". The advent of internet technologies has transformed social support into a dynamic online phenomenon. The elimination of geographical boundaries, increased accessibility, and easier anonymity have made online social environments an optimal setting for social support processes. The favourable conditions created by this phenomenon facilitates communication between individuals seeking social support and those who wish to provide it.

Desens et al. (2019) assessed the social support provided in the online environment in accordance with Granovetter's (1973) 'weak-tie network' theory. The term 'strong ties' is used to describe individuals

with whom one has a close relationship, such as family members and friends. Social networks can also include 'weak ties', or individuals with whom one does not have a close interpersonal connection (Wright et al., 2010). In conventional circumstances, social support is commonly provided by family members, friends, and professionals such as general practitioners (GPs) or psychologists, in addition to small groups that convene on a regular basis to discuss a shared topic and provide social support (Tanis, 2008). Nevertheless, seeking assistance from strong ties is not always the most appropriate course of action. A weak-tie support network may be a more beneficial and productive option (Wright et al., 2003). As described by Desens et al. (2019), the principal advantages of weak-tie social support processes include access to diverse perspectives, anonymity and confidentiality, and accessibility and availability.

The search for online social support has been the subject of numerous empirical studies. In particular, a substantial body of research has focused on the pursuit of social support in the context of health issues in digital environments. For example, research has shown that the messages of individuals with cancer, type 1 diabetes, or irritable bowel syndrome, who receive or offer social support online, are primarily either "information-based" or "emotional" in nature (Coulson, 2005; Gooden & Winefield, 2007; Ravert et al., 2004). Moreover, the search for online social support has been widely explored in the social sciences. For example, in their study on migrants' search for online social support, Chen and Choi (2011) found that migrants seek intensive online social support in order to compensate for the lack of offline social connections, particularly during the initial stages of migration. Similarly, Desens et al. (2019) also examined the online social support processes of families of active-duty soldiers in the USA through online forums.

4. Method

For the quantitative content analysis, 746 posts were randomly selected from those shared by women in the Facebook group 'Women's Confessions'. The Social Support Behaviour Code, developed by Cutrona and Suhr (1992), was employed in the analysis. The proposed coding scheme is organised into five main categories and 25 sub-categories. The primary categories of social support behaviour are as follows (Suhr et al., 2004, p. 311):

- Emotional Support
- Informational Support
- Tangible Support
- Esteem Support
- Negative Behaviours

Cutrona and Suhr (1992) reported an average inter-rater reliability of 0.77 for the subcategories. Several studies (Cutrona, 1996; Cutrona, Suhr & MacFarlane, 1990; Cutrona, Hessling & Suhr, 1997) provide evidence for predictive validity. Cutrona, Suhr, and MacFarlane (1990) demonstrated construct validity through correlations between the total number of support behaviours coded and observer ratings of global interaction supportiveness ($r_s = .71$ to $.79$) and participant ratings of global supportiveness ($r = .32$ for the support-provider; $r = .20$ for the support-recipient).

This coding system has been used in many studies in the social sciences and medicine (Atwood et al., 2018; Braithwaite et al., 1999; Chen & Choi, 2011; Coulson et al., 2007). However, some studies have modified the categories based on their research aims. To illustrate, Bambina (2007) omitted the "tangible" support from the coding table, assuming that this form of support would be constrained in online environments due to the presumed geographic distance between participants. Nevertheless, the present study included tangible support in the analysis to measure its availability in the relevant group. In alignment with the objectives of this study, The Social Support Behaviour Code (Suhr et al., 2004, p. 311) was used as shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Revised Version of Social Support Behaviour Code*

Social Support Main Category	Subcategory	Definition
Informational Support	Suggestion and Advice	Providing recommendations, guidance, or proposed actions to solve a problem.
	Situation Appraisal	Offering evaluations or interpretations of a situation to clarify its meaning.
	Teaching	Sharing specific knowledge or instructions to help others understand or accomplish something.
Emotional Support	Relationships	Expressing closeness, solidarity, or social belonging (e.g., "We are with you").
	Confidentiality	Emphasising secrecy and discretion in what is shared (e.g., "This stays between us").
	Sympathy	Expressing sorrow or compassion for another's suffering (e.g., "I'm sorry this happened").
	Understanding and empathy	Demonstrating emotional insight and shared experience (e.g., "I understand, I've been there").
	Prayer	Offering prayers or religious well-wishes for the person.
	Expresses concern	Asking about the person's condition or offering to check in (e.g., "Let us know how you are").
Esteem Support	Compliment	Giving praise or recognition (e.g., "You are strong", "you did well").
	Validation	Affirming the person's feelings, actions, or decisions as legitimate.
	Relief of blame	Removing guilt or responsibility from the person (e.g., "This was not your fault").
Tangible Support	-	Offering physical assistance, services, money, or material resources.
Negative Behaviours	-	Dismissing, criticising, blaming, or derailing the discussion.

The posts analysed were collected from a Facebook group exclusively for women. As of May 1, 2025, the group had 54,357 members. Although numerous women-only groups exist on Facebook, the Women's Confessions group was selected because of its large membership and high level of activity. The posts analysed were randomly selected from those shared between June 1, 2024 and April 1, 2025. The analysis focused solely on the textual content of the posts, excluding the comments section. The group's founders and moderators were formally informed of the research and its objectives. The female researcher was granted temporary authorisation by the group administrators to act as a group moderator in order to enable retrospective access to all posts within the analysis period.

The coding sheet was converted into a digital format using Google Forms. To ensure consistency, each post was independently coded using a structured coding sheet. The codes were then exported to Microsoft Excel for frequency analysis and cross-tabulation. The objective of the analysis was threefold: first, to categorise the posts in the group according to specific types of posts; second, to group the posts according to their topics; and third, to analyse the posts containing social support content according to the type of social support. Within this framework, this article aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the most common types of posts in the Facebook group?

RQ2: What are the most frequently discussed topics in the Facebook group?

RQ3: What proportion of the posts in the Facebook group include elements of social support?

RQ4: What is the direction of support (support-seeking vs. support-providing) in social support-related posts in the Facebook group?

RQ5: What are the main categories of social support in the posts shared in the Facebook group?

RQ6: What are the subcategories of social support in the posts shared in the Facebook group?

RQ7: How are the most common types of social support in the Facebook group related to the topics of the posts?

Since the analysed group consists exclusively of women, the dissemination of data to a second coder of a different gender carries ethical risks that may compromise the confidentiality of the study participants, as individuals in such groups rely on a gender-based environment of trust and intimacy. To adhere to the ethical research principles, a new dataset comprising 10% of the total posts was randomly selected, excluding personal data such as name, city, profession, telephone number, address, etc. This dataset was coded by the second author with the permission of the group administrators for the inter-coder reliability analysis. Table 3 shows a substantial degree of consensus among the coders for all variables. The percentage agreement rates, as well as Scott's Pi, Cohen's Kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha values, are all above the .80 threshold, which is widely accepted in the field of content analysis. The highest agreement levels was observed for the variables 'post type' and 'presence of social support'. Furthermore, the acceptable reliability threshold was exceeded for other variables, demonstrating a high level of consistency and reliability in the coding process.

Table 3

Inter-Coder Reliability Analysis

Variable	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreement	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Post Type	95.9%	0.925	0.925	0.925	71	3	74	148
Post Topic	83.8%	0.826	0.826	0.827	62	12	74	148
Presence of Social Support	95.9%	0.846	0.846	0.847	71	3	74	148
Direction of Support	94.6%	0.788	0.788	0.789	70	4	74	148
Type of Support	83.8%	0.805	0.806	0.806	62	12	74	148

4. Findings

The 746 posts within the scope of the analysis were classified according to the *Post Type* variable (Table 4, Figure 1). Most of the group posts fall under the *Questions* category ($n = 464$; 62.2%), indicating that the primary function of the group is to request information or opinions. This is followed by posts in the *Experience or Emotion Sharing* category, accounting for 18.9% of the total ($n = 141$). Although

comprising a smaller proportion within the group, 7.1% of the posts were in the *Requests / Demands* category ($n = 53$), 5.5% in the *Narratives (Description of Daily Life)* category ($n = 41$), 3.2% in the *Announcements / Information Sharing* category ($n = 24$), and 3.1% in the *Other* category ($n = 23$). The findings indicate that the group is predominantly used for posing questions; however, the sharing of experiences and emotions also holds significant importance (RQ1).

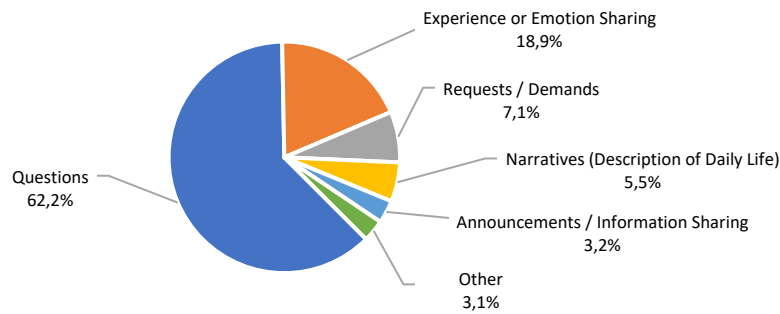
Table 4

Demographic Characteristics of Participating Students

Post Type	n	%
Question	464	62.2%
Experience or Emotion Sharing	141	18.9%
Requests / Demands	53	7.1%
Narratives (Description of Daily Life)	41	5.5%
Announcements / Information Sharing	24	3.2%
Other (humour, reaction, other general sharing, etc.)	23	3.1%
Total	746	100%

Figure 1

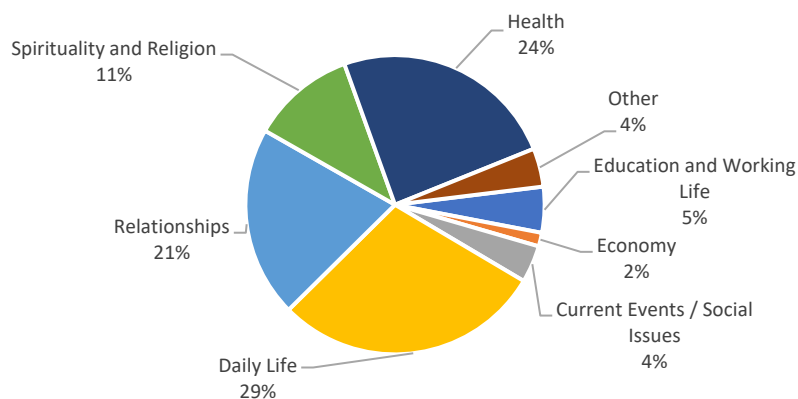
Distribution of Post Types



An analysis of the 746 posts in the Facebook group by topic (Table 5, Figure 2) reveals that the highest proportion falls under the *Daily Life* category, with 29% ($n = 216$). This is followed by a series of posts related to health ($n = 183$; 24.5%). The third category is *Relationships* ($n = 154$; 20.6%). Furthermore, 11.3% ($n = 84$) of the posts were categorised under *Spirituality and Religion*. The less common topics are external or systemic themes, such as *Education and Working Life* ($n = 37$; 5.0%), *Current Events / Social Issues* ($n = 30$; 4.0%), and *Economy* ($n = 11$; 1.5%), demonstrating that the group has a more individual and private life-oriented function. 4.2% of the content ($n = 31$) did not fall under any of these predefined categories (RQ2).

Table 5*Distribution of Post Topics*

Post Topic	n	%
Daily Life	216	29.0%
Health	183	24.5%
Relationships	154	20.6%
Spirituality and Religion	84	11.3%
Education and Working Life	37	5.0%
Current Events / Social Issues	30	4.0%
Economy	11	1.5%
Other	31	4.2%
Total	746	100%

Figure 2*Distribution of Post Topics*

The dominance of the *Daily Life* category indicates group members' engagement with posts about daily practices, domestic life, everyday encounters, shopping, self-care, clothing, housework and hobbies. Product recommendations and household chores are the most shared topics in the *Daily Life* category. In the *Health* category, *Physical Health* and *Infant or Child Health* stand out. Within the *Relationships* category, the most prominent topic is group members' posts about marriage. This is followed by a number of posts discussing kinship relationships. It is noteworthy that the *Daily Life*, *Health* and *Relationships* categories accounted for approximately three-quarters of the 746 posts, suggesting that the group is primarily used for discussions related to private matters (Table 6).

Table 6*Subcategories of Post Topics*

Main Category	Subcategory	n	%
Daily Life	Product Recommendations and Experience Sharing	58	26.7%
	Household Chores	50	23.0%
	Clothing, Personal Care, Appearance	38	17.5%
	Technical Issues (Appliances, Phones, etc.)	24	11.1%
	Government Affairs / Legal Matters	21	9.7%
	Hobbies	20	9.2%
	Finding a Home to Move, Rent or Buy	6	2.8%
	Total	217	100%
Health	Physical Health	94	51.6%
	Infant or Child Health	36	19.8%
	Pregnancy / Childbirth / Breastfeeding	21	11.5%
	Mental Health	18	9.9%
	Diet / Weight Loss / Weight Gain	9	4.9%
	Animal Health	4	2.2%
	Total	182	100%
Relationships	Marriage	52	33.8%
	Kinship Relationships	33	21.4%
	Romantic Relationships	23	14.9%
	Other Social Relationships	21	13.6%
	Relationships with Young and Adult Children	18	11.7%
	Friendships	7	4.5%
	Total	154	100%
Spirituality and Religion	Asking for Prayers / Praying	41	48.8%
	Questions and Inquiries Related to Faith	40	47.6%
	Dreams, Zodiac Signs, etc.	3	3.6%
	Total	84	100%
Education and Working Life	School/Education	17	45.9%
	Personal Development	7	18.9%
	Job Search	6	16.2%
	Problems at Work	5	13.5%
	Career or Entrepreneurship	2	5.4%
	Total	37	100%
Current Events / Social Issues	Various Topics on the Agenda	23	76.7%
	Earthquakes and Other Natural Disasters	6	20%
	Politics	1	3.3%
	Total	30	100%
Economy	Financial Advice	9	81.8%
	Financial Difficulties	2	18.2%
	Total	11	100%
Other	-	31	100%

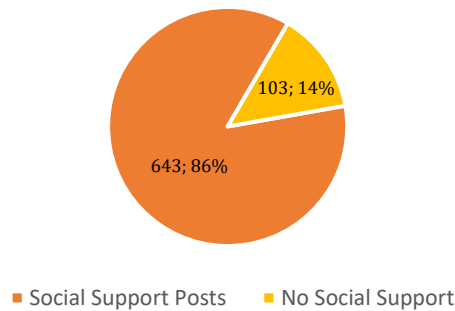
Another topic within the group, *Spirituality and Religion*, involves requests for religious prayers, inquiries into faith-based matters, and searches for spiritual support. A less frequent topic, the *Education and Work* category, includes posts pertaining to school and educational life, that are particularly notable. In the *Current Events/Social Issues* category, the subcategory *Various Topics on the Country's Agenda* is prominent. It is likely that the number of posts in the subcategory *Earthquakes and*

Other Natural Disasters would have been higher if a major earthquake had occurred in Türkiye during the analysis period. The *Economy* category includes 11 posts on financial advice and difficulties.

The analysis of the posts for the presence of social support revealed that 86% (n = 643) of the posts contained a search for an offering of such support, while the remaining 14% (n = 103) did not include any form of social support (Figure 3). This finding indicates that the group is used as a space for social support on a widespread scale (RQ3).

Figure 3

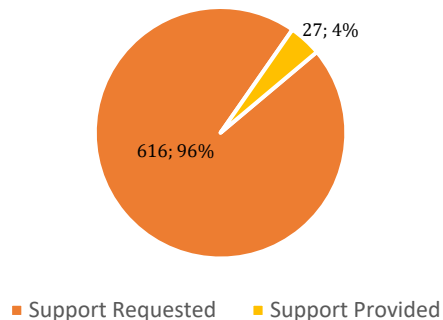
Social Support Presence Rate of Group Posts



According to the analysis of the direction of support, 96% (n = 616) of these posts involve a request for support, while only 4% (n = 27) involve the provision of support. This finding clearly demonstrates that the primary motivation for posting in the group is to seek solutions and support by disclosing personal problems (RQ4). Conversely, the posts explicitly intended to provide support are fewer. Within the group, support is predominantly offered through comments in response to posts (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Direction of the Social Support Posts



The 643 social support posts in the group were analysed according to the main categories of social support (Table 7, Figure 5). The most prevalent social support post was *Informational Support* category, accounting for 67.5% (n = 436) of all social support posts. This indicates that motivations such as the exchange of information, and the requesting/offering of advice or situational appraisal play a significant role among group members. The next most common category, *Emotional Support*, constitutes 24.3% (n = 157) of the posts. These posts typically involve the disclosure of difficult life experiences, along with expressions of empathy, sympathy, and a desire for emotional connection. This finding suggests that group members utilise the platform not only for dissemination of information but also as a psychological support network for emotional solidarity (RQ5).

Table 7*Main Categories of Social Support*

Main Social Support Category	n	%
Informational Support	436	67.5%
Emotional Support	157	24.3%
Esteem Support	44	6.8%
Tangible Support	4	0.6%
Negative Behaviours	2	0.3%
Total	643	100%

The *Esteem Support* category appears less frequent, accounting for 6.8% ($n = 44$), and is generally associated with the expectation of approval for personal decisions or emotional expressions, appreciation, and encouraging messages. As anticipated, *Tangible Support* is notably infrequent, comprising only 0.6% ($n = 4$). Finally, the *Negative Behaviours* category—which includes criticism, complaint, disapproval, and opposition towards the group or individuals—represents 0.3% ($n = 2$) of all posts. The findings indicate that the group predominantly functions within the domain of emotional and cognitive solidarity, while requests for physical or material assistance, or posts containing conflictual/exclusionary content are rare.

Figure 5*Main Categories of Social Support*

Social support posts were also analysed in terms of subcategories within each social support category (RQ6). The analysis indicates that the *Suggestion and Advice* subcategory ($n = 230$; 52.8%) exhibits the highest frequency, both within the *Informational Support* category and across all social support subcategories. This suggests that group members tend to rely on suggestions and advice when searching for information. The *Teaching* subcategory ($n = 122$; 28%) ranks second in the *Informational Support* category and holds the second position among all social support subcategories. This subcategory reflects group members' need for clear and instructive information about how to do something or solve a particular issue. It is also noteworthy that *Situational Appraisal* ($n = 84$; 19.3%) ranks third within the *Informational Support* category. In times of uncertainty or emotional distress, individuals may seek external perspectives to better understand their experiences. This finding underscores the notion that, in addition to desiring information, group members also seek to comprehend their situations and assess them from others' perspectives (Table 8, Figure 6).

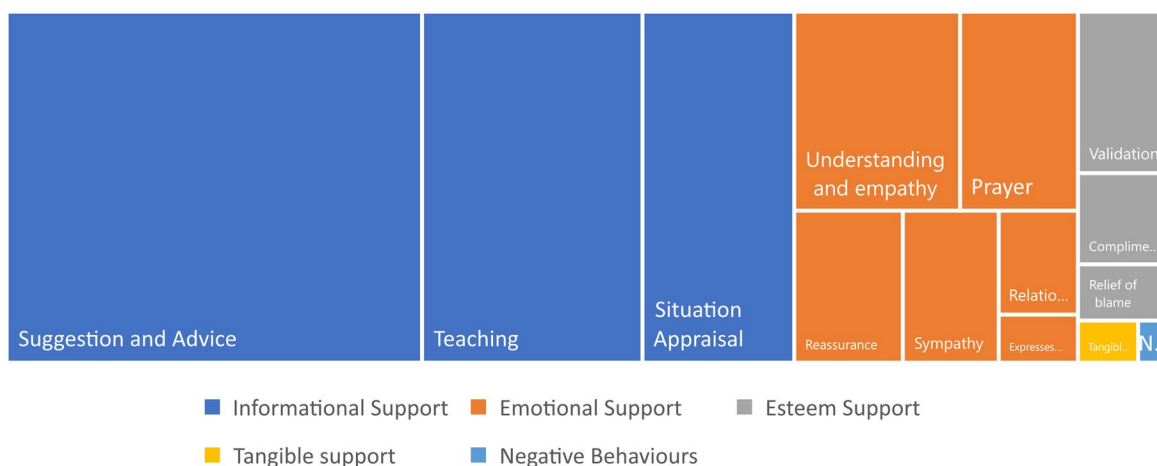
Table 8*Social Support Subcategories*

Main Category	Subcategory	Post Examples	n	%
Informational Support	Suggestion and Advice	<i>"Hey guys, my 16-year-old daughter has got a lot of pimples on her face now. I took her to the doctor, and we tried some expensive creams, but they didn't help. What are your recommendations?"</i>	230	52.8%
	Teaching	<i>"The evening call to prayer is read faster than the others. Why is that? Does it have a special meaning?"</i>	122	28.0%
	Situation Appraisal	<i>"My motivation has been zero for the past three weeks. I can't do any housework. I wash the clothes, but I can't fold them for days. I can't play with the kids. My husband is very supportive, but I just can't get back to myself. Could this be depression?"</i>	84	19.3%
	Total		436	100%
Emotional Support	Understanding and empathy	<i>"I had to end my four-year relationship because I felt like I wasn't being loved anymore. He was irresponsible and even insulted me recently. We haven't spoken in a month, and I don't regret it. But doesn't he miss me at all? I don't get it. Did all the great times we had together mean nothing to him? I'm feeling down thinking about it. He treats me like I'm nothing. It's tough. I'm not able to handle it. I feel used and then thrown away when I was no longer needed."</i>	52	33.1%
	Prayer	<i>"Hey girls, yesterday I mentioned that my husband isn't working – he's just staying at home, which means we're living off my mother-in-law. I read all your comments one by one. Some of them were harsh, but true. Trust me, I'm not mad at you because you're right. And girls, I did it! I left him. He is coming to collect his things soon. It's all over. I'm just looking for a job. Please keep me in your prayers as I try to get back on my feet."</i>	37	23.6%
	Reassurance	<i>"Sometimes life is so exhausting, I wonder if I'll ever have a day without worries. It feels like life's getting more and more challenging, and it's really getting me down"</i>	26	16.6%
	Sympathy	<i>"My uncle has passed away, I'm so sorry."</i>	23	14.6%
	Relationships	<i>"Today is my birthday. Even the people I love the most forgot my birthday. I always support my friends and family and stand by them. I was a little sad and cried last night. I said that things like that happen sometimes and decided to let it go."</i>	13	8.3%
	Expresses concern	<i>"There was an earthquake nearby, I felt it. Are you all okay, my friends?"</i>	6	3.8%
	Confidentiality	-	-	-
	Total		157	100%

Tablo 8 (Continued)

Esteem Support	Validation	<i>"Girls, I'm trying to get my driving licence. My test went well, and the driving lesson was great. The instructor explained everything perfectly. But last Sunday I had a female instructor. She was very angry and aggressive. She scolded me constantly. It was my first time behind the wheel. She implied that I couldn't change gear in traffic because I was clumsy. She even grabbed my hand and forced it onto the gear stick. I came home crying from stress. She made me so nervous during the whole lesson. I'm thinking of reporting this to her employer. Do you think I'm right? It felt like she was trying to erase everything I had learned. AFTER ALL, SHE'S THE TEACHER AND I'M THE STUDENT!!"</i>	23	52.3%
	Compliment	<i>"May my hands and my efforts be blessed; I have made some village tarhana!"</i>	13	29.5%
	Relief of blame	<i>"Am I a bad person? What does a bad person look like? Can you explain? My husband keeps telling me I am a bad person and talks badly about me to everyone. I am tired of this. I feel awful about myself."</i>	8	18.2%
	Total		44	100%
Tangible Support	No Sub-category	<i>"My mother, who is a cancer patient at Ankara Keciören Etlik City Hospital, urgently needs B-negative platelet blood. If anyone is available, does not take medication and has the same blood type, please contact me immediately."</i>	4	100%
Negative Behaviours	No Sub-category	<i>"Friends, I'm not referring to everyone, but why are women so hostile to other women? Every post is met with judgemental comments. When a woman shares that she's been cheated on, some blame her as if it is her fault. When I said I'd been harassed, others attacked me without even reading what I wrote properly. As long as we women treat each other this way, the bad ones will always win."</i>	2	100%

The *Understanding and Empathy* (n = 52; 33.1%) subcategory has the highest frequency in the *Emotional Support* category. This high rate suggests that the women in the group endeavour to understand each other's experiences and alleviate their emotional burden by sharing similar stories. The data also show that the provision of *Prayer* within the group (n = 37; 23.6%) reflects its function as a space for spiritual and faith-based solidarity. Individuals who request prayer from group members or pray for them during psychologically challenging times aim to contribute to each other's emotional regulation. The *Reassurance* subcategory (n = 26; 16.6%) reflects members' need for reassurance and their tendency to maintain hope in situations of uncertainty, anxiety or fear. The *Sympathy* subcategory (n = 23; 14.6%) indicates the role of emotional bonding and social cohesion in helping members collectively bear distressing experiences. The *Relationships* subcategory (n = 13; 8.3%) may provide emotional support for individuals coping with exclusion or loneliness. The *Express Concern* subcategory (n = 6; 3.8%), the least represented in the *Emotional Support* category, indicates that the search for a sense of being cared for by others is limited. The absence of posts in the *Confidentiality* category indicates that privacy concerns are not prominent among group members.

Figure 6*Distribution of Posts According to Social Support Subcategories*

The highest rate of the three subcategories of *Esteem Support* category is *Validation* ($n=23$; 52.3%). This finding suggests that individuals who are uncertain about their situation or affected by social pressures seek psychological relief through affirming statements such as '*You are right, you did the right thing*'. This quest for validation also reflects an effort to enhance self-esteem. The second subcategory, *Compliments* ($n = 13$; 29.5%), demonstrates that group members attempt to boost their self-esteem through positive and appreciative expressions. However, *Compliments* category ranks lower than *Validation*, indicating that the search for affirmative support is more prominent. Although the *Relief of Blame* ($n = 8$; 18.2%) subcategory is underrepresented, its role within *Esteem Support* remains significant. The tendency for individuals to attribute blame to themselves —particularly in the context of traumatic or socially stigmatised issues (e.g. violence, divorce, motherhood)— makes the pursuit of relief from blame within the group especially meaningful. Discourses of this kind may offer both comfort and psychological relief, thereby fostering a sense of self-worth.

At this stage of the analysis, the relationship between different types of social support and post topics reveals significant findings. As illustrated in Figure 2, the topics of *Daily Life*, *Health*, and *Relationships* were the most prevalent in the analysed posts. It is evident that these three topics account for approximately three-quarters of all posts. The analysis of the types of support associated with these posts aims to identify the issues that individuals most commonly seek social support for (Table 9) (RQ7).

Table 9*Relationship between Post Topics and Types of Social Support*

	Informational Support		Emotional Support		Esteem Support		Tangible support		Negative Behaviours		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Daily Life	171	93.4%	2	1.1%	8	4.4%	2	1.1%	-	-	183	28,5%
Health	141	78.8%	34	19.0%	2	1.1%	2	1.1%	-	-	179	27,8%
Relationships	51	37.0%	63	45.7%	24	17.4%	-	-	-	-	138	21,5%
Spirituality and Religion	31	40.8%	43	56.6%	2	2.6%	-	-	-	-	76	11,8%

Tablo 9 (Continued)

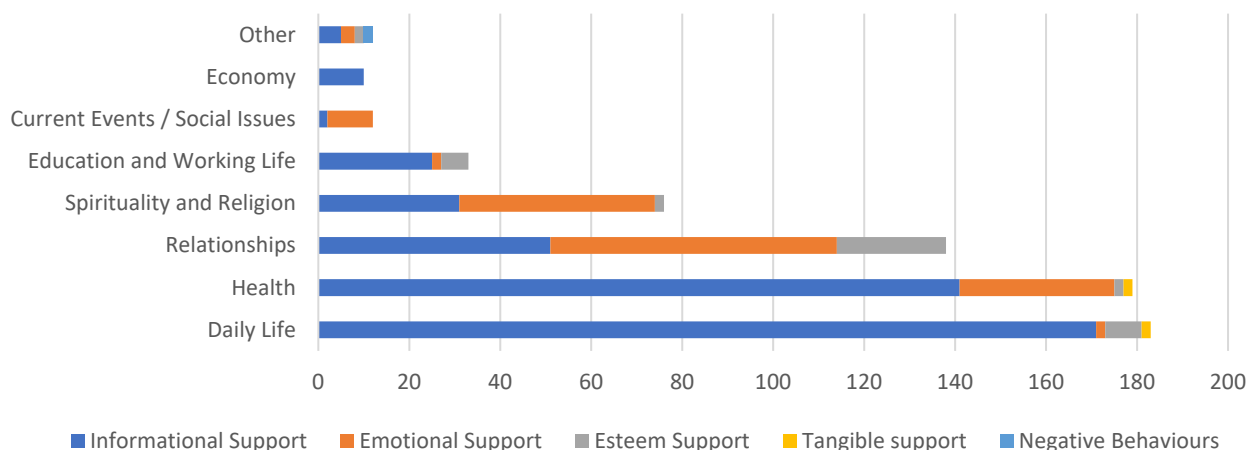
Education and Working Life	25	75.8%	2	6.1%	6	18.2%	-	-	-	-	33	5,1%
Current Events / Social Issues	2	16.7%	10	83.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	1,9%
Economy	10	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	1,6%
Other	5	41.7%	3	25.0%	2	16.7%	-	-	2	16.7%	12	1,9%

As demonstrated in the table, most informational support posts focused on daily life and health, implying that individuals most frequently seek information, advice, suggestions, and guidance on these topics. In contrast, the search for *Emotional Support*, *Esteem Support* and *Tangible Support* is less common within Daily Life category.

Emotional Support was predominantly sought in the *Relationships*, *Spirituality and Religion*, and *Health* categories. In other words, women anticipate empathy, understanding, and moral support in the context of relationship difficulties in response to emotionally intense relationship difficulties. These are followed by *Spirituality and Religion* and *Health*. This finding highlights the importance of both faith and well-being in how group members cope emotionally.

Figure 7

Relationship Between Post Topics and Types of Social Support



Esteem Support was also common in *Relationships* category (Figure 7). In other words, women were seeking not only empathy and understanding, but also validation and support for self-esteem in posts related to relationships. *Tangible Support* posts, which are relatively few, were found only in *Daily Life* and *Health* categories. *Negative Behaviour* posts were coded as *Other* and typically involved criticism directed at other group members.

Figure 8 shows the types of social support sought within each *Daily Life* subcategory. *Informational Support* was primarily observed in the form of recommendations in the subcategories of *Product Information*, *Clothing*, *Care*, *Appearance* and *Household Chores*. It also appeared as instructive information (*Teaching Support*) in subcategories of *Government Affairs/Legal Matters*, *Household Chores*, and *Technical Issues*. These findings indicate that the group serves as a rich environment for exchanging information on consumer decisions, domestic responsibilities, and technical issues.

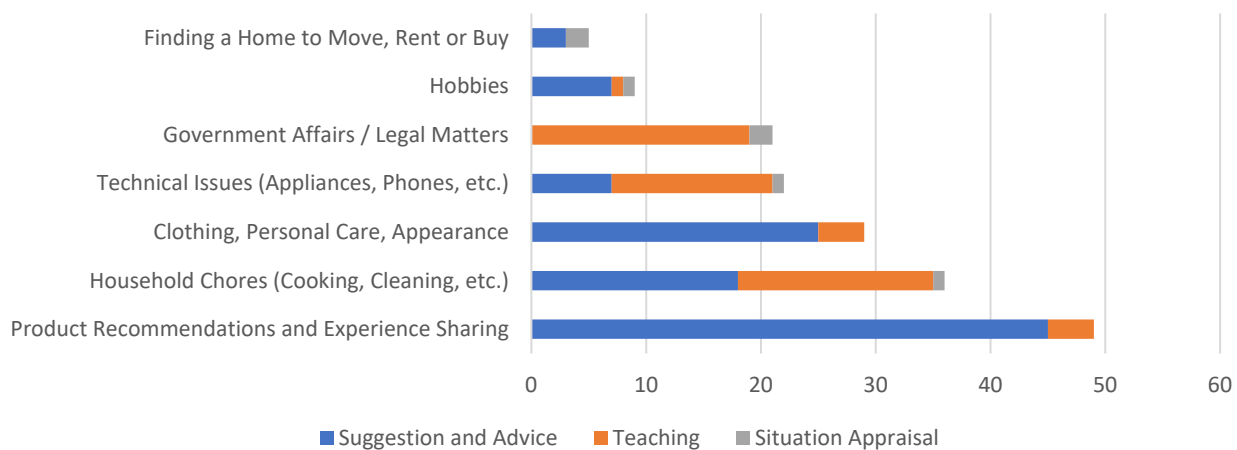
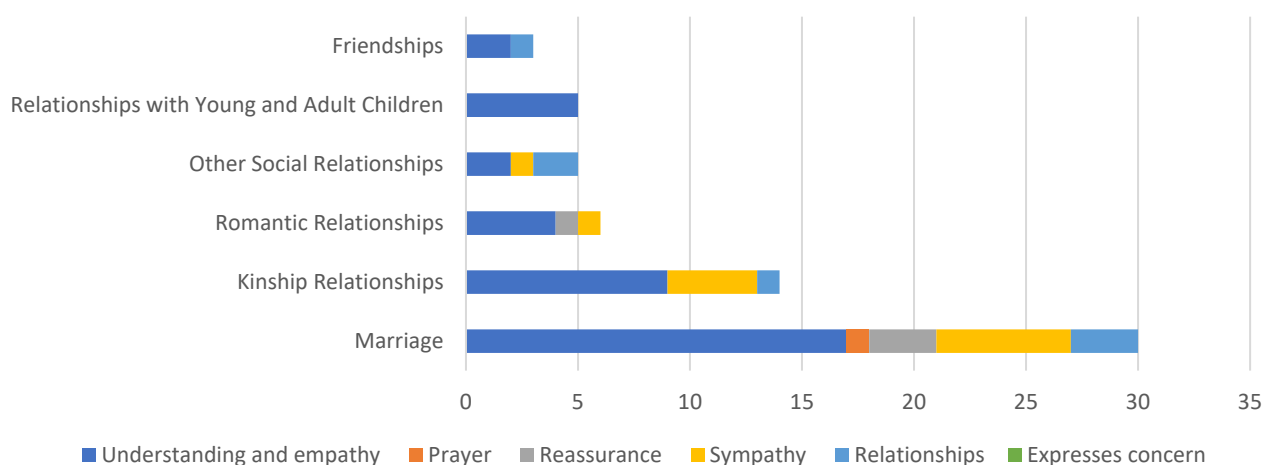
Figure 8*Relationship Between Daily Life Topic and Information Support*

Figure 9 illustrates the relationship of *Emotional Support* posts to the topic of *Relationships*. In terms of *Understanding and Empathy*, *Emotional Support* posts appear to be most commonly associated with *Marriage*, *Kinship Relationships* and *Relationships with Young and Adult Children*. *Marriage* emerges as the most prominent topic within all *Emotional Support* posts. In other words, marriage and kinship ties represent a key area of stress and support within the social and emotional experiences of women.

Figure 9*Relationship Between Relationships Topic and Emotional Support*

5. Conclusions

This study explored the behaviours of women in seeking and providing social support in a closed Facebook group that accepts members based on gender. A qualitative content analysis method was employed to identify the key findings and to reveal the multidimensional structure of online social support in women's everyday lives. The posts were initially analysed thematically. Discussions in the group primarily focused on daily life, health, and relationships. These categories accounted for about three-quarters of all posts, revealing a strong orientation towards individual life challenges in the group. These were followed by themes such as religion, education, current issues and economy.

The analysis of social support posts indicated that the primary motivation for members to share in the group was to obtain *Informational Support*. The primary search for informational support was for *Advice and Suggestions*, followed by instructive information. *Informational Support* was particularly requested

in relation to the *Daily Life* and *Health* topics. This finding highlights that online communities function as a significant source of information for women in the group and offer a platform to address their everyday challenges.

Emotional Support posts in the group approximately constitute one-quarter of all social support posts. The focus of these posts is on seeking *Understanding and Empathy*, *Prayer* and *Reassurance*. This suggests that the women in the group expect their experiences to be recognised and emotionally validated. The most prominent themes in *Emotional Support* are relationships and religion. Posts related to relationships centre on marriage, kinship ties, children, and romantic relationships. These findings demonstrate that women value the support of their fellow group members in coping with emotional challenges in these areas and in feeling a sense of community. In addition, religion-related posts serve as important communicative practices, offering spiritual solidarity and faith-based support during difficult life situations.

Esteem Support also plays a role in the group, although it is less frequently observed. These posts reflect women's need for validation, self-esteem, and relief from feelings of guilt regarding their personal decisions and experiences. This form of support was most commonly sought in *Relationships* category.

As expected, *Tangible Support* is extremely rare in this online community. This finding clearly illustrates that digital communities primarily address informational, emotional, and esteem-related needs rather than physical and material ones. Åslund et al. (2014) determined that tangible support exerts a significant and positive influence on the psychological well-being of individuals experiencing financial stress. In the present study, however, the presence of tangible support in the digital environment is, as expected, notably limited. This limitation is probably due to concerns over mutual trust and the logistical constraints intrinsic to online platforms. This finding suggests that digital social environments are more suitable platforms for emotional and informational support, rather than tangible assistance. Similarly, the rarity of *Negative Behaviour* posts suggest that the group offers a predominantly positive and supportive communication environment.

A content analysis of social support posts reveals that the theme of "Daily Life" is prominent. Whilst the extant literature on social support has predominantly focused on extraordinary crisis situations and the health domain, this study demonstrates that everyday life problems also constitute a major area in which individuals seek informational and emotional support. A similar finding was reported by Dubow et al. (1989), who observed that children, when coping with various challenges in daily life, mainly relied on emotional and informational support.

The second most prevalent thematic category is health-related support seeking, particularly in relation to physical health and child health. This finding is consistent with the broader literature that emphasises the significance of social support in the health domain. For instance, Coulson (2005) revealed that messages in an online support group for people with irritable bowel syndrome primarily focused on providing information, particularly regarding symptom interpretation, illness management and communication with healthcare professionals. In a similar vein, Mohd Roffeei et al. (2015) found that parents of children with autism predominantly sought informational and emotional support on Facebook. In our study, 78.8% of posts categorised under the 'Health' theme involved informational support and 19% involved emotional support, indicating a strong parallel with existing research that highlights the importance of knowledge-sharing and emotional affirmation in health-related support exchanges.

The third most common theme is 'relationships', with 'marriage' occupying a prominent place within this category. Dehle et al. (2001) demonstrated that perceived spousal support adequacy directly impacts marital quality. However, the present study shows that, when seeking support related to marital issues, women also turn to anonymous online groups for emotional support rather than to their spouses.

This suggests that, when spousal support is inadequate or unavailable, women seek support from alternative sources within digital environments.

These findings demonstrate that online communities constitute a significant environment for communication and solidarity, providing women with both practical information and support for their emotional and social needs. In this regard, such groups function as an effective form of social support. Women have adopted these practices across a wide range of areas—from daily life problems to marriage, from kinship relationships to childcare, from physical health to religious inquiries. This closed social media group, therefore, provided a diverse, continuous, and intensive communication environment that traditional social support networks may not be able to offer.

When it comes to seeking social support, people may be reluctant to disclose personal or sensitive issues. This hesitation may stem from privacy concerns and cultural norms, which influence individuals to varying degrees. For instance, Taylor et al. (2004) discovered that individuals of Asian descent were more reluctant to seek social support due to cultural expectations, and were less inclined to request emotional or informational support compared to European Americans. However, the anonymity and psychological distance offered by online environments enable women to express their support needs more freely and intensely. This facilitates more open and frequent engagement in supportive exchanges.

This study reveals that beyond individual support-seeking, gender-based micro-communities are emerging in digital environments. The Facebook group analysed functions not only as a space for individual help or emotional sharing but also as a platform for communication where women establish common meanings and share social norms. In particular, the intensity of narratives that are based on information, advice, validation, and empathy shows that women are co-constructing shared understandings of their roles in everyday life. This demonstrates that closed digital groups can transform into spaces for socialisation and identity negotiation beyond individual narratives. In situations in which traditional support networks are limited, such digital communities offer alternative and functional communication structures for women. Future qualitative interviews with female participants could yield deeper insights into their motivations for joining such groups. Studies incorporating comment sections could provide a more comprehensive, two-way analysis of social support dynamics. Moreover, ascertaining the extent to which cultural norms in Türkiye influence the search for social support online will contribute significantly to the existing literature on the subject.

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