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After Seeing the Ghost: Ghosting, Coping Processes and Impact on Future Romantic Relationships among Young Adults in Türkiye

Hayaleti Gördükten Sonra: Türkiye'deki Genç Yetişkinlerde Ghostlanma, Başa Çıkma Süreçleri ve Gelecekteki Romantik İlişkilerine Etkisi

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand, explain and explore the ghosting experiences of young adults in Türkiye, their coping processes with ghosting and the impact of ghosting on their future romantic relationships.The study is a qualitative field study with a phenomenological design. The study group is young adults who have experienced ghosting in Türkiye. The study was conducted on a purposeful sample group of 30 people, 15 men and 15 women. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide consisting of 61 open-ended questions, through participant observation and in-depth interviews. The interview data were coded using MAXQDA and Excel programs. A total of 1115 codes were performed, 518 for the 3 themes that constitute the purpose of the study and 597 for the cross-analysis of the second theme. These codes were analyzed under 32 sub-themes. The study was initiated after the approval of the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University. The prominent results of the study according to the themes are as follows: Theme 1: The ghosting phenomenon is in its early stages in Türkiye. Ghosting is becoming widespread and is expected to spread further. Ghosting is generally accepted as an unwanted but non-negligible risk factor of romantic relationships, "like cheating". Ghosting has an algorithm. Theme 2: It is observed that the processes of young adults in Türkiye to cope with ghosting are parallel to the literature. Theme 3: Ghosting has devastating consequences on future romantic relationships and also seriously negatively affects the social relationships of young adults. Young adults (especially women) experience ghosting anxiety, which they have difficulty managing in their subsequent romantic relationships. Young adults believe that they can cope with the negative effects of the experience by becoming selfish and building walls around themselves. Ghosting significantly increases the age of marriage. However, it does not have a significant effect on the age of having children.

Keywords: *Social change, Young people, Ghosting, Coping process, Türkiye*

ÖZ

Bu araştırma, Türkiye'de genç yetişkinlerin ghostlanma deneyimleri, ghostlanma ile başa çıkma süreçleri ve ghostlanmanın gelecekteki romantik ilişkilerine etkisini anlamak, açıklamak ve keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma fenomenolojik desenli nitel bir alan çalışmasıdır. Çalışma alanı Türkiye'de ghostlanma deneyimi yaşamış genç yetişkinlerdir. Çalışma 15 erkek ve 15 kadın olmak üzere 30 kişilik amaçlı örneklem grubu üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler 61 açık uçlu sorudan oluşan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme kılavuzu üzerinden katılımcı gözlem ve derinlemesine görüşmeyle toplanmıştır. Görüşme verileri MAXQDA ve Excel programları kullanılarak kodlanmıştır. Çalışmanın amacını teşkil eden 3 tema için 518 ayrıca ikinci temanın çapraz analizleri için 597 olmak üzere toplamda 1115 kodlama gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu kodlar 32 alt tema altında analiz edilmiştir.

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Araştırma, Bandırma Onyedi Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşerî Bilimler Etik Kurulu'nun onayının ardından başlamıştır. Çalışmanın temalarına göre öne çıkan sonuçları şunlardır: Tema 1: Türkiye'de ghostlanma fenomeni başlangıç aşamasındadır. Ghostlanma yaygınlaşmakta olup daha da yayılması beklenmektedir. Ghostlanma "aldatmak gibi" romantik ilişkilerin istenmeyen fakat ihmal edilemeyecek bir risk faktörü olarak genel kabul görmektedir. Ghostlanmanın bir algoritması bulunmaktadır. Tema 2: Türkiye'deki genç yetişkinlerin ghostlanma ile başa çıkma süreçlerinin literatürle paralellik arz ettiği görülmektedir. Tema 3: Ghostlanma gelecekteki romantik ilişkiler üzerinde yıkıcı sonuçlar doğurmanın yanında genç yetişkinlerin sosyal ilişkilerini de ciddi oranda olumsuz etkilemektedir. Genç yetişkinler (özellikle kadınlar) sonraki romantik ilişkilerinde yönetmekte zorlandıkları ghostlanma kaygısı yaşamaktadırlar. Genç yetişkinler bencilleşerek ve etraflarına duvar örerek deneyimin olumsuz etkileriyle başa çıkabileceklerine inanmaktadırlar. Ghostlanma evlilik yaşını anlamlı bir biçimde ileri yaşlara taşımaktadır. Fakat çocuk sahipliği yaşı üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisi bulunmamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sosyal değişim, gençler, Ghostlanma, Başa çıkma süreci, Türkiye*

Introduction

When we look at the world population, it is seen that it increased from 3.2 billion in 1960 (Türkiye: 28.33 million) to 8.2 billion people (Türkiye: 87.6 million) in 2022 (Our World in Data, 2024a). While 33.60% of the total population lived in cities (Türkiye: 67.94%) in 1960, this rate increased to 56.90% (Türkiye: 77.2%) in 2022 (Our World in Data, 2024b). In parallel with this data, it is seen that the average life expectancy increased from 50.9 in 1960 (Türkiye: 50.7) to 72 in 2022 (Türkiye: 78.5) (World Bank, n.d.a.). In parallel with this data, it is seen that the interaction between people whose number and life expectancy increases also increases. It is seen that 68% (5.44 billion) of the world population in 2023 have individual mobile phones (Unique mobile phone users), 64.4% (5.16 billion) can use the internet and 59.4% (4.76 billion) are active social media users. People around the world spend an average of 6 hours and 37 minutes using media and devices in their daily lives. 3 hours and 23 minutes of this time is spent watching broadcast and streaming and 2 hours and 31 minutes is spent on social media. It is seen that 95.4% (81.68 million) of the population in Türkiye have individual mobile phones (Unique mobile phone users), 83.4% (71.38 million) can use the internet and 73.1% (62.55 million) are active social media users. It is seen that people in Türkiye spend an average of 7 hours and 24 minutes using media and devices in their daily lives. Of this time, 3 hours and 47 minutes are spent watching broadcasts and 2 hours and 54 minutes are spent on social media (Wearesocial, 2023).

This intense interaction is seen to have a negative impact on the ability to establish deep relationships. The speed that developing communication technologies bring to relationships makes it difficult to establish intimacy between people. In this case, avoidance behavior is likely to occur suddenly in accelerated romantic interactions. Today, non-marital romantic relationships among young adults are considered to be important in shaping their subsequent experiences together (Fincham & Cui, 2010). For example, when looking at the age and rates of marriage as a form of deep relationship, it is seen that the age of marriage has increased in parallel with the decreasing marriage rates in many countries (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2024). In general, as people start to marry at a later age, a tendency for first marriage

(middle-age marriage) begins to be seen between the ages of 40-59 (World Population Review, 2024). This situation also affects the tendency to have children. For example, while women who marry at the age of 21 have an average of 3.1 births, it is seen that women who marry at the age of 25 have 2.4 births (Halim & Rivera, 2020). If we take Japan as an example, the country's low birth rate (1.29 births per woman) creates a deep dilemma, creating an aging society that cannot sustain itself (Chapple, 2004). A society that cannot sustain itself faces vital problems in education (Yonezawa, 2019), production (Kobayashi, et. al. 2020), health (Iijima, et. al. 2021), international relations (Tsuya, 2014), etc. The Japanese example is important in terms of showing how a romantic relationship between two young people can have a butterfly effect on the future of society.

Interaction is also rapidly increasing in Türkiye. In parallel, the marriage age and divorce rates have been steadily increasing for decades. While the marriage age was 26 for men and 22.7 for women in 2001, it will be 25.7 for women and 28.3 for men as of 2023. In contrast, the number of marriages and the crude marriage rate are on a downward trend, from 8.35 in 2001 to 6.63 per thousand as of 2023. The number of divorces and the crude divorce rate are increasing. It is seen that the crude divorce rate increased from 1.41 in 2001 to 2.1 in 2013 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023a). When the fertility rate is examined, it is seen that while it was 2.38 children in 2001, it was 1.51 children in 2023 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023b).

The relationship crisis experienced between two young adults is a butterfly effect that has the potential to turn into a storm in the social sphere. When examined in the light of numerical data, it is seen that crises experienced in romantic relationships create irreparable costs not only for the parties but also for society. Therefore, the subject of the study is the instrumentalization of intensified interpersonal interactions and the costs this situation creates on an individual and social scale. Romantic relationships between couples are among the contexts where the effects of the instrumentalization of communication can be seen the most. Romantic relationships have a central place in the lives of young people (Furman & Collins, 2008). In fact, the consequences of ending a romantic relationship can be compared to the experience of mourning after a death (Horowitz et al., 2003). Therefore, the problem of the study is the effects and costs of romantic relationship crises experienced during young adulthood, when instrumentalized personal interactions are experienced most intensely and have permanent consequences. The aim of the study is to understand, explain and explore the ghosting experiences of young adults in Türkiye, their coping processes with ghosting and the effects of ghosting on their future romantic relationships.

Method

The article study focuses on the ghosting experience. People are reluctant to share their experiences regarding their romantic relationships. Therefore, the qualitative method was preferred in the study. Since the aim of the study was to describe, explore and understand the

participants' feelings and experiences regarding ghosting, a phenomenological research design was used (Süleymanoğlu Kürüm, 2021). In addition, it was a narrative design since the participants were expected to express their subjective experiences in a sincere, open-ended and free-associative manner through the interview guide (Creswell, 2017).

The aim of the study is to analyze what the ghosting experience of young adults is, how they cope with ghosting (overcoming and reactions), and how ghosting affects their future romantic relationships.

The study focuses on the answers to the following questions.

Turkish young people who experience ghosting:

i) What are their thoughts on the phenomenon of ghosting/ghosting in Türkiye?

ii) How do the stages they experienced after ghosting correspond to the stages expressed in the study by Pancani et al. (2022) (i. surprise and confusion. ii. anger, sadness, and guilt. iii. attempts of relational repair. iv. acceptance)?

iii) How do the reactions after ghosting correspond to the responses expressed in the study by McKiernan et al. (2018) (i. availing of emotional support. ii. self-expression. iii. distraction. iv. indulgence in substance use. v. changes in eating behaviors. vi.sleep disorder)?

iv) What is the effect of the ghosting experienced by the participants on their future romantic relationships?

The research area is Bandırma district. Since the phenomenological narrative study was conducted, the sample was a purposeful sample. The sample size was reached using the snowball method (Kozak, 2018) The qualifications sought in purposeful sampling are as follows:

i) The participant is expected to accept that they are in a romantic relationship. Therefore, participants must state that they are attached to their partner with whom they have experienced ghosting at least at a level of 4 or 5 (in the range of 1-5).

ii) In accordance with the definition of the concept of ghosting, the romantic relationship is intended to have started via digital media tools and continue mainly through these channels.

iii) Since the study focuses on the process of coping with emotional crises experienced after ghosting, it is aimed to have participants accept that they have experienced emotional

breakdown after ghosting. Therefore, participants are expected to experience at least a level of 4 or 5 breakdown after the ghosting experience (in the range of 1-5).

iv) The study focuses on young adults. Young adults are generally defined as ages 18-22 or 18-25 (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2018). Participants in the study must be between the ages of 18-25.

The data collection method of the study is in-depth interview and participant observation conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The observation guide and themes to be coded were created based on the results of the field studies conducted by Pancani et al. (2022), and the sub-themes were created based on the results of the field studies conducted by McKiernan et al. (2018). Interview guide: Participant information (7 questions). The phenomenon of ghosting in Türkiye (7 questions). It consists of a total of 61 open-ended questions: Stage 1 and reactions (9 questions), Stage 2 and reactions (10 questions), Stage 3 and reactions (9 questions), Stage 4 and reactions (7 questions), The effect of ghosting experience on future romantic relationships (12 questions). New themes and sub-themes that emerged during the field study were added to the analysis.

Table 1. Sample Information

Order	Gender	Age	Education Status	Staying with Parents	Relationship (Month)	Ghost Information
1	W 1	21	undergraduate	yes	1	before experience
2	W 2	20	high school	yes	2	after experience
3	W 3	21	associate degree	yes	3	before experience
4	W 4	19	associate degree	no	8	before experience
5	W 5	19	lisans	no	6	after experience
6	W 6	18	high school	yes	3	before experience
7	W 7	18	high school	yes	3	after experience
8	W 8	22	associate degree	no	4	before experience
9	W 9	19	high school	yes	9	before experience
10	W 10	20	high school	yes	6	after experience
11	W 11	19	high school	yes	28	after experience
12	W 12	20	undergraduate	yes	2	after experience
13	W 13	21	undergraduate	yes	1	after experience
14	W 14	19	undergraduate	yes	2	before experience
15	W 15	23	undergraduate	yes	6	after experience
16	M 1	22	high school	yes	2	after experience
17	M 2	21	high school	yes	24	after experience
18	M 3	24	undergraduate	yes	40	after experience
19	M 4	23	undergraduate	yes	5	after experience
20	M 5	21	undergraduate	yes	6	after experience
21	M 6	23	undergraduate	yes	48	after experience
22	M 7	19	high school	yes	5	before experience
23	M 8	24	undergraduate	no	3	after experience
24	M 9	22	undergraduate	no	1	after experience
25	M 10	22	undergraduate	no	12	before experience
26	M 11	20	undergraduate	yes	12	before experience
27	M 12	23	undergraduate	no	18	before experience
28	M 13	25	high school	no	18	before experience
29	M 14	23	undergraduate	no	3	before experience

30	M 15	21	undergraduate	no	18	before experience

Interviews were conducted with 15 male and 15 female participants in places where they felt comfortable. The data was recorded and then transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA and Excel programs. The MAXQDA program was used in two ways. The first was used to find general themes, subthemes and codes (Table 2).

Table 2. MAXQDA First Analysis Data

Theme	**Subtheme**	**Code Frequency**
Ghosting Experience in Türkiye	Women	108
	Erkek	119
The Process of Coping with Ghosting (Stages and Responses)	Women	71
	Men	74
The Impact of Ghosting on Future Relationships	Women	75
	Men	71
Total		518

The latter was used for cross-analysis (Table 3) of stages and reactions in the process of coping with the ghosting experience.

Table 3. MAXQDA Second Analysis Data

Theme	**Subtheme**	**Code Frequency**		
		Women	Men	Total
Stages	1. Surprise and confusion	56	53	109
	2. Anger, sadness, and guilt	50	48	98
	3. Attempts of relational repair	30	29	59
	4. Acceptance	13	17	30
Coping Responses	1.Self-expression / availing of emotional support	41	35	76
	2. Distraction	15	26	41
	3. İndulgence in substance use	30	30	60
	4. Changes in eating behaviors	28	23	51
	5. Sleep disorder	37	36	73
Total		300	297	597

Relıability and Ethics of The Research

The study was initiated after the "appropriate" decision of the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University, Republic of Türkiye, dated

25/12/2024 and numbered 12. Preliminary interviews were conducted in order to find purposeful examples. Data collection began after a healthy environment of trust was established with the participants. In-depth interviews and observations were conducted in places where the participants felt comfortable and safe. The interviews started in January 2025 and ended in March 2025. Excerpts from the interviews conducted with the participants were presented in the study.

Findings

Theme 1: Ghosting Experience in Türkiye

The answers given by the participants to the questions about their ghosting experiences in Türkiye are seen to be grouped under 8 different subthemes.

i. Initiator of the relationship: All female participants stated that the relationship was initiated by the man; 12 of the male participants stated that the relationship was initiated by the man and 3 of them stated that the relationship was initiated by the woman. Thus, it is seen that romantic relationships are mostly initiated by men.

ii. Digital environment where the relationship starts: 12 of the women start romantic relationships via Instagram, 1 via WhatsApp, and 1 via the X application; 10 of the men start romantic relationships via Instagram and 5 via the WhatsApp application. Thus, it is understood that romantic relationships mostly start and develop via the Instagram application.

iii. Is ghosting widespread or does it spread? All of the participants quickly and decisively answer yes to this question. Ghosting is in the spreading phase in Türkiye and is expected to spread further. According to the participants, ghosting is now considered to be one of the unwanted but always possible risks of romantic relationships, such as being cheated on.

iv. Do women or men ghost more? 8 of the female participants think that men and 1 of the female participants think that women ghost equally on both sides. On the other hand, 11 of the male participants think that women ghost equally on both sides, 2 of the male participants think that men ghost equally on both sides. In this context, it is seen that men think that women are more prone to ghosting, while women think that men are more prone to ghosting.

v. What is your perspective on a close friend who ghosts someone else? 8 of the female participants stated that they would clearly state to their friends that what they did was not right, but that this would not affect their friendship. 4 participants stated that they would not continue their close friendship with a person who ghosted someone else. 7 of the male participants stated

that they would warn their friend, but that their friendship would not be affected. 5 participants stated that they would not be close friends with a ghosting person. All of the participants were ghosted and were deeply affected by this situation. On the other hand, it was observed that most of the participants tended to protect their close friends. The reason for this is related to the data in the second theme. The presence of close friends is very important for young people. They overcome all the problematic contexts they experience by relying on their friends. For this reason, it is understood that they tend not to spoil their relationships even if their friends do the ghosting action, which they describe as "ruthless".

vi. Can ghosting be compared to divorce? 2 of the female participants and 2 of the male participants think that the ghosting experience is more severe than divorce. Even if they have not experienced divorce yet, according to the participants, divorce is a process and during the process, partners drift apart and separate. Ghosting, on the other hand, is when you are flying in the clouds with happiness and your most trusted partner suddenly leaves you in the void and walks away without even looking back. For this reason, they think that the ghosting experience is more severe than divorce.

vii. Does ghosting increase the attractiveness of the partner? According to 8 of the female participants and 5 of the male participants, ghosting increases the attractiveness of the partners. In the interviews conducted with women in particular, it is observed that the participants tend to be overly attached to the men who ghosted them. The female participants state that if the men who ghosted them came back to them during the relationship recovery phase, their attachment will increase. The participants state that this effect is gradually discovered by men and women and is used as a strategy in romantic relationships. For this reason, the participants state that they and their partners tried to increase their partner's attachment by breaking off the relationship several times before the actual ghosting occurred.

viii. Why has ghosting increased? Women and men give parallel answers to this question in a similar order. It is seen that all participants almost agree on the answer to this question.

According to the participants, Türkiye is going through a period in which the meaning attributed to romantic relationships is changing. The participants state that the purpose of romantic relationships when their mothers and fathers met was to get married. However, today, the purpose of romantic relationships is to have fun. Both parties are aware that the probability of the relationship not ending in marriage is much higher.

According to both male and female participants; men's understanding of having fun varies. For men, having fun is "achieving sexuality". Women's understanding of having fun is "achieving attention". The men interviewed clearly state that they give attention to women and expect sexuality, while the women interviewed clearly state that they give sexuality to men and expect attention. According to the participants, the basic dynamic of romantic relationships is based on this give-and-take balance. According to the participants, this is a delicate balance. If sexuality or attention is exhausted, the romantic relationship is likely to end. For this reason, the participants state that both men and women are well aware of this and that they often continue their romantic relationships strategically.

The short-term nature of the relationship increases the tendency of couples to play roles against each other "to have fun". If one of the parties cannot meet the expectations of the other, it means being accused of "being boring".

The applications offered by digital interaction networks are full of partner alternatives. Therefore, according to the participants, men immediately ghost their partners who they think are not worth the effort and time they spend to reach the sexuality they expect, while women ghost their partners who they think are not worth the effort and time they spend to reach the attention they expect. The participants state that “being idle” is a great fear for young people. Therefore, the participants state that young people “work in reserve”. This tendency does not have a name among the participants. However, the participants mention the strategy conceptualized as “keeping in orbit” in the literature. This means the following. Since young people constantly feel the possibility of separation, they keep potential partner candidates in their orbit in addition to the partners they have a romantic relationship with, even if they have fun.

Therefore, romantic relationships are perceived as a source of prestige that shows that they are desired for young people and as a free time activity. Young people can do activities that will fill all their free time with their romantic partners. In the event of separation, they feel worthless because they do not reach sexuality and attention and they fill their free time with anxiety. For this reason, even if the participants do not feel any romantic feelings at all, they state that they establish relationships in order to have a “fun time” until they find someone they will feel romantic feelings for. M13 expresses this situation by saying: “(laughing) Teacher, everyone has become a ghostrider now. Nobody can stand wasting time.” In the interviews conducted with the participants, it is seen that the tendency to “have a fun time” and “not be boring” has become a fetish. For this reason, it is understood that young people tend to prove that they are

the person their partners expect them to be instead of telling their partners who they are in their romantic relationships. It is seen that the parties do not hesitate to play a role while doing this. Because nobody wants to "be boring." Participants state that role-playing spoils the fun of the relationship and that they are tired of this situation. However, they are worried that their partners will lose them to other alternatives if they act otherwise. This situation hinders the open communication of the partners and causes the other party not to understand the relationship that is damaged or even about to break up. As a result, the party that cannot reach their expectations and/or is tired may end the relationship suddenly, i.e. ghot, instead of taking on the "boring role of the breakup conversation".

Theme 2: Coping with the Ghosting Experience (Stages and Responses)

Ghosted women coping with the experience (stages and responses)

Seven of the female participants (Table 1) stated that they realized that their experience was ghosting after the breakup, after sharing their experiences with their friends or doing research on the internet. In fact, W 5 stated that she realized that she was ghosted approximately ten days later, and W11 approximately one month later. This situation shows that the experience of ghosting is a very new social phenomenon among young women in Türkiye. When we look at the processes of women coping with ghosting experiences, it is understood that self-expression is considered equivalent to availing of emotional support. In the interviews, it is seen that the people women express themselves and benefit from emotional support are their close friends. In the first, second and third stages, female participants expect and receive a lot from their close friends. In the fourth stage, it is seen that the need for self-expression and availing of emotional support partially decreases.

It is observed that female participants experience distraction, especially with the support of close friends, in the first stage of ghosting. Participants mostly try to focus their attention elsewhere by socializing with friends, listening to music, shopping, traveling, doing hair and make-up. Participants who used to do sports or painting in the past turn to their hobbies. However, it is understood that they are not successful in distraction in the ongoing process.

It is understood that there is an increase in alcohol and cigarette use in female participants during the ghosting process. It is understood that the participants continue to increase their indulgence in substance use from the first stage to the second stage, but decrease it in the following stages. It is observed that alcohol and cigarette use peaks in female participants in the second stage.

It is observed that female participants experience eating and drinking disorders in the first three stages of the ghosting process. Many female participants state that they experience significant weight loss during this process. However, it is observed that their eating and drinking disorders become regular with the third stage.

It is observed that the most intense reaction of female participants in the first two stages of the ghosting process is sleep disorder. It is understood that sleep disorder tends to decrease with the third stage.

Table 4. Stage and Response Crosstab Showing Post-Ghosting Process of Female Participants

In the interviews conducted with female participants, especially in the second stage, when they were asked in an open-ended manner what emotions they experienced in order, the first emotion was guilt, the second emotion was sadness, the third emotion was sadness, and the fourth emotion was injustice.

Table 5. Ranking of Emotions Felt by Female Participants in the Second Stage

W 1	guilt	sadness	anger	injustice
W 2	guilt	anger	sadness	
W 3	guilt	anger	sadness	
W 4	guilt	sadness	anger	injustice
W 5	anger	sadness	guilt	
W 6	injustice	guilt	anger	sadness
W 7	guilt	anger	sadness	
W 8	anger	injustice	sadness	guilt
W 9	anger	guilt	sadness	injustice
W 10	loss	sadness	anger	guilt
W 11	injustice	anger	sadness	
W 12	injustice	sadness	anger	
W 13	guilt	anger	loss	sadness
W 14	anger	sadness	guilt	
W 15	guilt	sadness	loss	anger

Ghosted men's coping process (stages and reactions):

8 of the male participants (Table 1) stated that they realized that their experience was ghosting after the breakup, after sharing their experiences with their friends or doing research on the

internet. This situation shows that ghosting is a very new social phenomenon among young men in Türkiye.

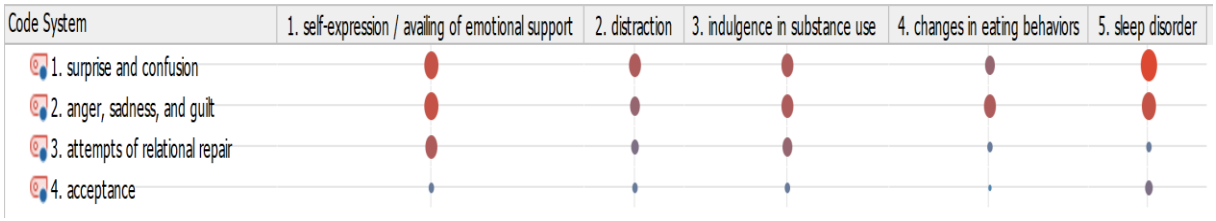
When we look at the processes of men coping with ghosting experiences, it is understood that self-expression is considered equivalent to availing of emotional support. In the interviews, it is seen that the people who men express themselves and benefit from emotional support are their close friends. It is seen that self-expression and availing of emotional support are expected intensely for male participants, especially in the first and second stages, but this expectation decreases considerably in the later stages.

It is seen that male participants have high distraction abilities in the first stage of ghosting. Men's first preferences for distraction are socializing with their friends, doing sports, focusing on work and playing computer games. However, it is understood that distraction decreases steadily in the following stages.

It is observed that male participants use cigarettes and alcohol intensively in the first two stages of the ghosting process, and continue to use them, although they tend to decrease in the later stages. In the first two stages of the ghosting experience, there is a relative deterioration in the eating and drinking behaviors of male participants. However, it is understood that the eating habits return to the old ones after the second stage.

It is understood that male participants experienced intense sleep problems in the first stage of their ghosting experience. It is observed that sleep disturbance continues to decrease in the first three stages and increases in the last stage compared to the third stage.

Table 6.Stage and Response Crosstab Showing Post-Ghosting Process of Male Participants



In the interviews conducted with male participants, especially in the second stage, when they were asked in an open-ended manner which emotions they experienced in order, it was seen that the first emotion was injustice, the second emotion was sadness, the third emotion was guilt, and the fourth emotion was loss. It was understood that anger was also felt.

M 1	anger	sadness	guilt	loss
M 2	sadness	anger	guilt	
M 3	guilt	anger	loss	sadness
M 4	guilt	sadness	anger	loss

M 5	injustice	anger	guilt	sadness
M 6	injustice	loss	sadness	guilt
M 7	anger	injustice	loss	sadness
M 8	injustice	sadness	guilt	loss
M 9	guilt	anger	sadness	loss
M 10	injustice	anger		
M 11	injustice	guilt		
M 12	sadness	injustice	guilt	
M 13	loss	guilt		
M 14	anger	sadness	guilt	loss
M 15	anger	sadness	guilt	

Male and Female Participants' Prominent Similarities and Differences in Ghosting Processes

Similarities

For both groups, the stages and reactions of the experience they experienced after ghosting are parallel.

When the processes of coping with ghosting experiences are examined in both groups, it is understood that self-expression is seen as equivalent to availing of emotional support.

For both groups, the actors they expect emotional support and self-expression are their close friend groups.

When asked whether they thought of going to a psychologist because they expected emotional support and self-expression, it is understood that none of the participants went to a psychologist. A close friend group was seen as sufficient for both groups.

For both groups, the most intense reaction accompanied by close friend support during the ghosting process is sleep disorder. These two reactions are followed by changes in eating behaviors, indulgence in substance use and distraction, respectively.

Differences

Male participants do not need close friend support as much as female participants.

Male participants are more successful than female participants in terms of distraction.

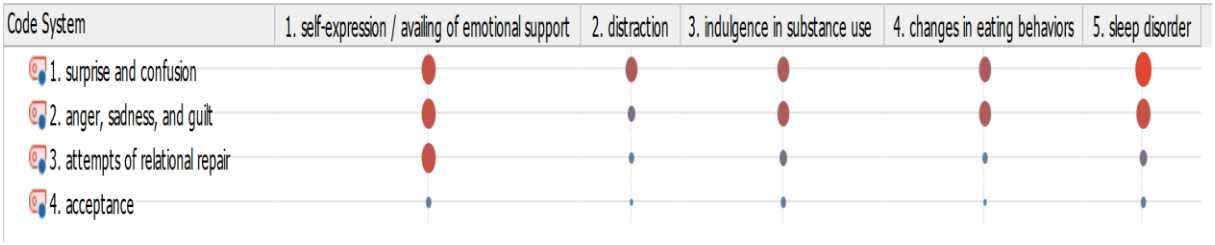
Male participants have much less changes in eating behaviors than male participants.

Female participants tend to return to normal quickly after giving the indulgence in substance use response intensively in the first two stages. This response of male participants is continuous compared to female participants.

Female participants give the sleep disorder response intensively in the first two stages and gradually decrease in the following stages. For males, this response is given intensively in the first stage and then decreases until the third stage and then intensifies again.

The emotions that female participants experience in the second stage are guilt, sadness and injustice, respectively. It is seen that male participants have injustice, sadness, guilt and loss.

Tablo 7. Stage and Response Crosstab Showing the Post-Ghosting Process of Participants in Total



Theme 3: The Impact of Ghosting Experience on Future Relationships

The responses given by the participants regarding the impact of ghosting experience on the relationships they will establish in the future are seen to be grouped under 7 subthemes.

The Effect of Ghosting Experience on Future Relationships in Women

i. Effect on future social relationships: Female participants were asked to indicate the negative effect of ghosting on future social relationships on a scale of 1-5. It was understood that ghosting experience had an average negative effect of 2.66 out of five on future social interactions of female participants.

ii. Effect on future romantic relationships: Female participants were asked to indicate the negative effect of ghosting on future romantic relationships on a scale of 1-5. It was understood that ghosting experience had an average negative effect of 4.46 out of five on future romantic relationships of female participants.

Table 8*.The Impact of Ghosting Experience on Romantic and Social Relationships in Female Participants*

	W 1	W 2	W 3	W 4	W 5	W 6	W 7	W 8	W 9	W 10	W 11	W 12	W 13	W 14	W 15	ort.
Effect on romantic relationships	4	2	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4,46
Effect on social relations	1	2	3	2	4	2	2	2	2	3	4	4	4	1	4	2,66

iii. The effect of ghosting on self-perception: It is seen that the questions related to this sub-theme are the most difficult questions for the participants. When the participants were asked "How did your ghosting experience affect your self-perception?", 4 female participants said that the experience strengthened them, while 11 female participants stated that they presented a stronger image to the outside world but became much more fragile women.

iv. Ghosting anxiety in future romantic relationships: 14 female participants stated that the possibility of ghosting by their future partners created great anxiety for them. They stated that due to this anxiety, they became a kind of "connection addict" in romantic relationships. They stated that they had difficulty managing ghosting anxiety if contact with their partners was cut off. Participants stated that they felt serious anxiety and started to stalk their partners (what time did they wake up, did they share anything else, etc.) if they did not receive a response to even a simple message such as a "good morning" message within a few hours.

v. Precaution taken to avoid being ghosted again: Be selfish and build walls around yourself: All female participants stated that they reluctantly decided to be more selfish after the ghosting experience in order not to experience a similar experience again. Female participants believed that they built walls around themselves for potential future suitors and that men who were truly interested in them would be determined to overcome these walls. For female participants, this attitude reduces the risk of possible ghosting. They think that a man who would put in so much effort to reach them would be less likely to ghost them.

vi. The effect of the ghosting experience on the age of marriage: 11 of the female participants stated that the ghosting experience increased their age of marriage. The other 4 participants stated that they were already planning to get married later and that the experience did not have an effect on their age of marriage.

vii. The effect of the ghosting experience on the age of having children: 12 of the female participants stated that they would not have a trust problem in having children with a man after they trusted him enough to decide to get married. 3 female participants stated that the decision to get married and the decision to have children are different. Three female participants stated that after their ghosting experience, they thought that even if they married another man, they would have to test that man again in order to have children with him.

The Effect of Ghosting on Future Relationships in Men

i. Effect on future social relationships: Male participants were asked to indicate the negative effect of ghosting on future social relationships on a scale of 1-5. It was understood that

ghosting had an average negative effect of 3.06 out of five on male participants' future social interactions.

ii. Effect on future romantic relationships: Male participants were asked to indicate the negative effect of ghosting on future romantic relationships on a scale of 1-5. It was understood that ghosting had an average negative effect of 3.93 out of five on male participants' future romantic relationships.

Table 9.The Impact of Ghosting Experience on Romantic and Social Relationships in Male Participants

	M 1	M 2	M 3	M 4	M 5	M 6	M 7	M 8	M 9	M 10	M 11	M 12	M 13	M 14	M 15	ort.
Effect on romantic relationships	4	5	5	3	2	5	5	2	3	3	3	5	4	5	5	3,93
Effect on social relations	2	5	5	3	0	5	5	3	4	1	1	1	1	5	5	3,06

iii. The effect of ghosting on self-perception: It is seen that the questions related to this sub-theme are the most difficult questions for male participants. When asked "How did your ghosting experience affect your self-perception?", 4 male participants stated that the experience strengthened them, while 10 male participants stated that they presented a stronger image to the outside world but became much more fragile women.

iv. Anxiety about ghosting in future romantic relationships: 8 male participants stated that the possibility of being ghosted by their future partners created great anxiety for them. They stated that they had difficulty managing their anxiety about ghosting if they lost contact with their next partner.

v. Precautions taken to avoid being ghosted again: Become selfish and build walls around themselves: All male participants stated that they reluctantly decided to be more selfish after their ghosting experience in order not to experience a similar experience again. Male participants stated that they constantly tested their potential suitors. They said that they built walls around themselves for this reason. Male participants believe that women who have undergone the tests have a reduced risk of ghosting them.

vi. The effect of ghosting on age of marriage: 10 of the male participants stated that the ghosting experience increased the age of marriage. The other 5 participants stated that they were already planning to get married later and that the experience had no effect on age of marriage.

vii. The effect of ghosting on age of having children: 9 of the male participants stated that they would not have a trust problem in having children with a woman after they trusted her enough to decide to get married. 5 male participants stated that the decision to get married and the decision to have children were different. 5 male participants stated that even if they married another woman after their ghosting experience, they thought they would have to test that woman again to have children with her.

The Effect of Ghosting Experiences of Male and Female Participants on Future Relationships

Similarities

Both groups stated that they tried to appear strong after the experience, but in fact their self-perception was even more fragile. Only four participants from both groups stated that the experience they experienced strengthened them. The experience had devastating consequences on the self-perception and self-confidence of both groups.

Both groups believed that they had to become selfish in order not to be ghosted again. At the same time, they thought that they needed to test their new partners. For this reason, they built walls around themselves for potential suitors and waited for their suitors to prove themselves.

Two-thirds of both groups stated that the experience they experienced delayed their marriage age. Another third said that it had no effect because they had already planned to get married very late.

Differences

While the experience experienced by female participants almost completely negatively affected their romantic relationships, it also negatively affected their social relationships. Male participants stated that the experience they experienced had serious negative consequences on both their romantic and personal relationships.

Men also have a high level of anxiety about being ghosted again. However, female participants experience the anxiety of being ghosted by their future partners much more than men. Female participants want to stay in constant contact with their new partners to calm this anxiety. The experience affects male participants more than female participants in terms of having children. Female participants tend to test their spouses less after marriage to have children, while male participants tend to test them more.

Discussion

Concepts such as ghosting, love bombing, orbiting, gaslighting, incel are increasingly used in the communication language used to describe interpersonal interactions transformed by social change. The fact that these concepts have managed to enter not only daily verbal communication but also written literature such as dictionaries shows how realistic their social equivalents are (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024; Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). In Türkiye, the concepts of "Ghosting, love bombing, orbiting, gaslighting" were searched separately in TRDİZİN (as of December 11, 2024) and no academic study was found on "Ghosting, love bombing, orbiting". There are two studies on gaslighting (Çabuk and Kumoya, 2024; Akdeniz and Cihan, 2023).

Ghosting is a strategy where one of the couples who met through technological means ends their dating relationship by suddenly ending communication for no apparent reason (LeFebvre et al., 2020). Studies show that young people's approval of ghosting as a relationship termination practice is quite low (i.e., 18.9–38.6%) (Freedman et al., 2019). In contrast, a US-based study showed that 13% of a sample of 1000 adults were ghosted by their partners and 11% used ghosting as a breakup strategy themselves (Moore, 2014). It is known that especially when the level of intimacy decreases, partners exhibit avoidance behavior rather than open communication (Baxter, 1982). In addition, there are studies that include retrospective rationalization, where the left behind try to understand why they were ghosted (LeFebvre et al., 2020).

It is seen that the ghosting experiences of the participants had a destructive effect not only on their romantic relationships but also on their social relationships. These results confirm how central romantic relationship experiences are in the life processes of young people, as stated by Furman and Collins (2008).

Developing communication technologies are restructuring all the relationship styles that people are accustomed to (initiating, maintaining, and dissolving relationships) (Dutton et al., 2008). Young people used to be in the same physical space. However, without a certain geographical boundary and adult supervision, they can spend less time and socialize more (Meenagh, 2015). The fact that the interaction networks where the participants' relationships started in the study were social media platforms confirms this data.

The complex relationship biographies of young adults are at a pace that social sciences have difficulty keeping up with (Manning, 2020). While they used to develop romantic relationships

with people they had some kind of social connection with, now they are developing romantic relationships with people who are complete strangers and online connections (Ortega & Hergovich, 2017). In studies conducted on romantic relationships before the widespread use of digital communication tools, it is seen that two elements are at the forefront. First of all, it is seen that the process has an important place in relationships (Baxter, 1979; Derlega, 1984; Lee, 1984; Rose, 1984; Tolstedt & Stokes, 1984). The second grouping of relationship termination strategy types is as follows. Directness-Indirectness Open (Confrontation and Withdrawal/Avoidance, respectively) and Other-Self Orientation (Positive Tone strategies and Manipulation, respectively) (Baxter, 1982; Wilmot et al., 1985). In this context, ghosting appears as a sudden, indirect and self-oriented separation strategy. However, in contrast, scientific interest in the actual phenomena of social change is quite low (Pancani et al., 2022). Very few studies focus on the unilateral sudden termination of romantic relationships using technological tools by removing connections or blocking access. What makes ghosting unique as a breakup strategy is that it eliminates the need for open communication to end an open relationship (Koessler et al., 2019). Many studies show that the abandoned party experiences more breakup distress (Morris et al., 2015; Perilloux & Buss, 2008). Breakup distress is so strong that it can produce results similar to the pain felt after the death of a loved one (Field et al., 2009). Sprecher et al., on the other hand, stated in their study that ghosting is a selfish and uncaring strategy (Sprecher et al., 2010).

The study shows that the current meaning attributed to romantic relationships is already closed to open communication from the beginning. According to the participants, it is understood that the reason for the widespread ghosting tendency is the differentiation of the meaning attributed to romantic relationships. All participants, both male and female, agree that romantic relationships used to be seen as a long-term investment for the purpose of marriage, but today romantic relationships are considered as a fun time activity. However, another argument they agree on is this; for men, having a fun time is getting sexuality. For women, having a fun time is getting attention. Two elements strengthen this tendency. The first is the multitude of alternatives, and the other is the accusation of being boring. The person who thinks he/she is not having a good time accuses the other party of being boring and goes to other alternatives without giving any explanation. Pancani and colleagues (2021); As a result of their study with 208 young adults who were victims of ghosting, orbiting, and rejection, the reaction stages are seen as follows. Surprise and confusion, anger, sadness and guilt, attempts to repair the relationship, acceptance The study confirms these stages. Especially the second stage, which is

anger, sadness and guilt, varies according to the participants. The emotions that the female participants experience in the second stage are guilt, sadness and injustice, respectively. For the male participants, it is seen that these are injustice, sadness, guilt and loss.

In the study conducted by McKiernan and his colleagues, the following stand out as ways for young people to cope with the end of their romantic relationships: benefiting from emotional support, expressing oneself, distracting oneself, indulging in substance use or changes in eating and drinking behaviors (McKiernan et al., 2018). The results of the study confirm this order. However, during the interviews conducted with the participants, it was understood that expressing oneself was perceived as the most basic form of availing of emotional support. In a sense, the most basic emotional need of the participants was for someone they believed cared about to listen to them. Norona and Olmstead (2017) evaluated theoretical and empirical studies evaluating the end of a dating relationship. Of the 24 studies they examined, 17 were categorized as either a decline perspective or a growth perspective. 7 studies did not carry any theoretical perspective. The findings obtained in the study were in the decline perspective category for both groups of participants. Because the common assessment of all participants was that the ghosting experience made their self-perception more fragile. It is understood that two-thirds of the participants have different experiences in their inner worlds than what they show to the outside world. The participants say that the experiences they have had to their immediate and distant surroundings have strengthened them, but in reality, their sense of self has become more fragile.

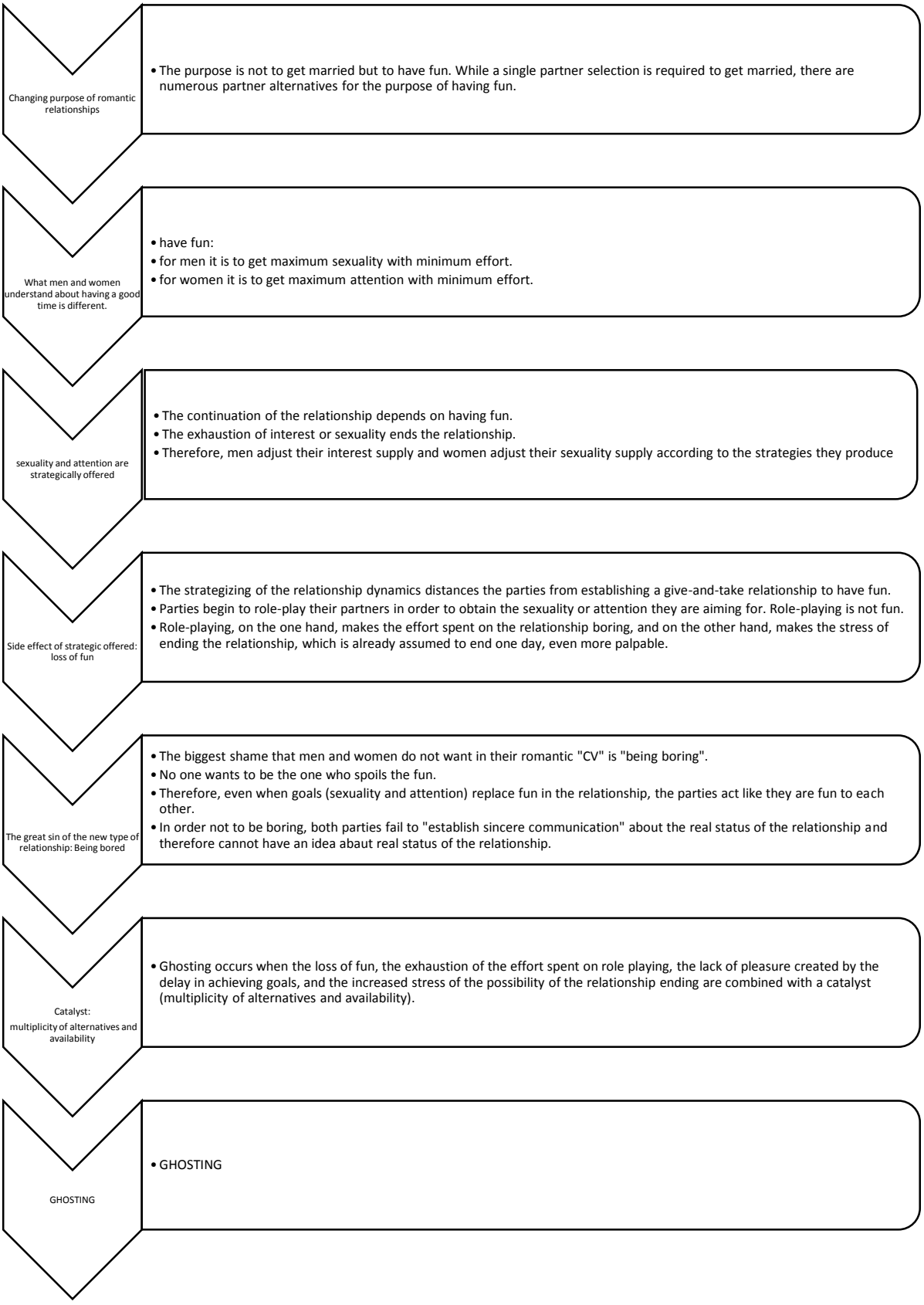
Conclusion

Changing social conditions are now also changing young adults' romantic relationship preferences. The change in young people's romantic relationships is accelerating social change. One of the most prominent social phenomena of these changes that create a multiplier effect on each other is ghosting. The prominent results of the study focusing on the ghosting experiences of young adults in Türkiye are as follows.

Theme 1 prominent results: Men are the initiators of romantic relationships in Türkiye. The digital media where romantic relationships begin is Instagram. Although the experience of being abandoned suddenly has been present in the lives of young adults for a long time, it is only recently gaining conceptual acceptance that the experience is "ghosting". Ghosting is common among young adults in Türkiye and is expected to spread further. Men believe that women ghosting more, and women believe that men ghosting more. Approximately two-thirds

of women and one-third of men state that partners who ghost them are more attractive. Participants gave similar answers as if they agreed on why ghosting has increased in Türkiye. In terms of the answers, it is seen that ghosting has an algorithm.

Figure 1. Ghosting algorithm in Türkiye



Theme 2 prominent results: Although the questions were asked to the participants in a semi-structured and open-ended manner, it is seen that the coping processes they expressed regarding their ghosting experience overlap with the study of Pancani et al. (2022). All participants go through the stages of i. surprise and confusion, ii. anger, sadness, and guilt, iii. attempts of relational repair, and iv. acceptance, respectively. The data on how the participants reacted at each stage overlaps with the data of McKiernan et al. (2018). In the interviews conducted, it is understood that the self-expression and availing of emotional support reactions mean the same thing for the participants. For this reason, the availing of emotional support and self-expression reactions, which McKiernan et al. (2018) separated as the first two reactions, are analyzed together in the study. In addition, it was observed that the reactions of the participants to changes in eating behaviors and sleep disorder differed. The emotions that the female participants entered in the second stage were guilt, sadness, and injustice, respectively. It is seen that the male participants were injustice, sadness, guilt, and loss.

Theme 3 prominent results: the experience had a negative impact on the female participants' future romantic relationships (out of 5) by 4.46 and on their social relationships by 2.66. For men, these rates were 3.93 in romantic relationships and 3.06 in social relationships. It is seen that the experience deeply shook the participants' future romantic and social relationships. The participants experience ghosting anxiety in future relationships. In order to reduce this anxiety, they believe that they need to be selfish and build walls around themselves in future relationships. The ghosting experience increased the age of marriage of two-thirds of the male and female participants. It is understood that the experience did not significantly affect the participants' tendency to have children after marriage.

It is understood that more qualitative or quantitative academic studies are needed specifically for Türkiye.

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ETİK ve BİLİMSEL İLKELER SORUMLULUK BEYANI

Bu çalışmanın tüm hazırlanma süreçlerinde etik kurallara ve bilimsel atıf gösterme ilkelerine riayet edildiğini yazar(lar) beyan eder. Aksi bir durumun tespiti halinde Toplumsal Politika Dergisi'nin hiçbir sorumluluğu olmayıp, tüm sorumluluk makale yazarlarına aittir.