
EFFECT OF BEING VEGAN/VEGETARIAN ON SOCIAL RELATIONS (UNIVERSITY STUDENTS SAMPLE)

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Abstract

This research was conducted to examine social relations of vegan /vegetarian university students. Research population constituted of vegan /vegetarian university students who were 18 years old and older. In the research, sample selection was not conducted; students who agreed to participate in the study were included to the research sample. A total of 65 students, including 38 vegans and 27 vegetarians, who agreed voluntarily to participate in the study and filled out the data collection tools, constituted the research sample. Research data were collected with open-ended questionnaire prepared by researchers. The data obtained from open-ended questions were transferred to the computer environment, and the content analysis was carried out by coding. As a result of the research, it was determined that students adopting a vegan/vegetarian lifestyle had difficulties in their family, school and social lives, but they did not consider these difficulties as a justification for giving up this vegan/vegetarian lifestyle.

Keywords: Qualitative research, social relationship, university student, vegan, vegetarian.

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VEGAN/VEJETARYEN OLMANIN SOSYAL İLİŞKİLERE ETKİSİ (ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİ ÖRNEĞİ)

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Öz

Bu araştırma vegan /vejetaryen üniversite öğrencilerinin sosyal ilişkilerinin incelenmesi amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini 18 yaş ve üzeri vegan /vejetaryen üniversite öğrencileri oluşturmuştur. Araştırmada örneklem seçimine gidilmemiş, araştırmaya katılmayı kabul eden öğrenciler örnekleme dâhil edilmiştir. Araştırmanın örneklemini çalışmaya gönüllü olarak katılmayı kabul eden ve veri toplama aracını eksiksiz dolduran 38'si vegan, 27'si vejetaryen olmak üzere toplam 65 öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Vegan /vejetaryen üniversite öğrencilerine sosyal medyada bulunan gruplar vasıtasıyla ulaşılmış ve araştırma hakkında kişilere bilgi verilmiştir. Araştırma verileri araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan açık uçlu soru formu ile toplanmıştır. Araştırmaya katılmayı kabul eden kişiler bu formdaki soruları cevaplandırmışlardır. Açık uçlu sorulardan elde edilen veriler bilgisayar ortamına aktarılmış ve içerik analizi kodlanarak yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda vegan /vejetaryen yaşam tarzını benimseyen öğrencilerin aile, okul ve sosyal hayatlarında bazı zorluklar yaşadıkları, ancak bu zorlukların onlar için bir sorun teşkil etmediği saptanmıştır. Araştırmada öğrencilerin yaşadıkları söz konusu zorlukların vegan/vejetaryen yaşam tarzından vazgeçmek için bir gerekçe olarak görmedikleri belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nitel araştırma, sosyal ilişki, üniversite öğrencisi, vegan, vejetaryen.

Introduction

Vegetarianism is called as a state of not consuming red meat, chicken, marine animal such as fish, lobster, crab, shrimp, etc., and consuming eggs, milk and dairy products (secondary animal product) based on preference. Veganism is a lifestyle reflected on daily life reflecting itself in the form of not consuming all kinds of animal products (including wool, leather, silk etc. obtained from animals outside food, and even honey obtained from animals) and products with animal experiments (such as medicines and detergents), and based on equality of living beings (TVD, 2018; Vegetarian Society, 2018; Tunçay Son, 2016, Tunçay and Bulut, 2016). It is not right to define this world view defending equality of living creatures only as a form of nutrition, because it is a lifestyle and it has many different reflections to daily life as well as to nutrition. In this study, the social relations of vegan/vegetarian individuals, especially during the university education period in which peer relations are important, were discussed in terms of this lifestyle.

Vegetarian Classes

There are classes of vegetarianism according to secondary animal products consumed. Some of vegetarians do not eat eggs but consume milk and dairy products, or they eat eggs and do not consume milk and dairy products. Vegetarian classes are basically as follows: **Lacto-ovo vegetarians:** lacto-ovos refuse to consume all kinds of meat and meat products. However, by adopting a more flexible nutritional style than both vegans, lactos and ovos, they also consume eggs with milk and dairy products. Lacto and ovo expressions in their names also come from the fact that lacto means milk, ovo means egg. **Ovo vegetarians:** ovos refuse to consume all kinds of meat and meat products, together with milk and dairy products. Ovo vegetarians, however, adopt a more flexible nutritional style compared to vegans, and they only consume eggs as secondary animal products. **Lacto vegetarians:** Lactos refuse to consume eggs together with all sorts of meat and meat products. Because according to them, the egg is the beginning of a new live formation. Lacto vegetarians consume only milk and dairy products as secondary animal products (TVD, 2018).

Although veganism is a class of vegetarianism, it is also a concept that is addressed separately since it is occasionally separated from vegetarians who consume secondary animal products (Yıldırım, 2015; Tunçay Son, 2016). Yourofsky's views on this subject are as follows: "Vegetarianism is actually

a shape-changing form of eating meat. It is not even close to veganism; because vegetarians continue to support use and captivity of animals. Vegetarians support the killing and taking cubs away from their mothers after the birth, and the murder of the male chicks since they do not give eggs. In addition, many vegetarians use silk, feather, leather and wool items. In the transition from vegetarianism to veganism, there may be a short pause point that may take a year or two; however, this process is as wild a life as a flesh-fed life” (Gaia Magazine, 2015).

The Effect of Vegan/Vegetarianism on Social Relations

Socialization is defined as the process of an individual’s belonging to a group or community, adopting the cultural norms of the society and making oneself accepted as a value in a community. The social relationship arising as a result of socialization is one of the most fundamental and most important elements of social life (Santrock, 2016). Social relationship is also defined as “an individual or a group’s interaction with individuals and groups by considering various behavioral forms and expectations among other individuals and groups other than their own.” Social relations are manifested in all phases of life and are evolving in a multidimensional structure. The most fundamental feature that distinguishes social relations from other relationships is that people who are in the relationship mutually approve and accept each other’s existence (Bandura, 2002).

Social relations are divided into two groups, primary and secondary social relations, depending on the nature of the interaction. Primary social relations are relationships with high emotional ties such as family and friendship relationships, while secondary social relations are those arising when people who are together for a particular purpose interact for a short period of time. The relationships of students who receive the same course in university but are not close can be given as examples of secondary social relationships. Because these students may never see each other again when the semester is over (Collins, 2010; Uludağ, 2017).

Social relations differ by quality of interaction, as well as factors such as society structure, culture, age, gender and nutritional habits of individuals (Nas, 2017). According to Smith et al. (2014), especially individual’s nutritional habits during university years can affect friendship relationship, which is a significant social relationship. For example, people who adopt vegan/vegetarianism can be scorned by their social environment due to the lack of knowledge of this subject. Not having the same nutritional habit in dormitory, home friendship in which especially mutual sharing among

university students is important and not embracing the same lifestyle may result in problems in issues such as cooking and choosing places to go. Besides, since vegan/vegetarian is a lifestyle more than nutrition, this may cause differences of opinion among friends (Nas, 2017; Novic, 2013).

Vegan/vegetarian people may experience problems not only with their friends, but often with their family and other individuals around them due to their preferences. They have difficulty in explaining the causes of these preferences to their families and other individuals around them, or sometimes receive overreaction (Kolaf et al., 1999). This problem can be seen even more frequently when eating outdoors or in guest relations. It is sometimes very difficult for people to understand the grounds that a vegan/vegetarian person does not eat meat or eggs, for example, in a dinner friend or business meeting. Vegetarian (especially if lacto-ovo vegetarian) people's meal preferences sometimes do not affect their social relations too much. For vegans, however, this can often be challenging and tiring. Due to the hospitality culture, rejecting an offering in a visit may cause an unpleasant environment for both parties. In addition, the consumption of animal products in his social environment can disturb a vegan/vegetarian individual and may cause him to move away from the environment (Tunçay Son, 2016). Considering the whole aspect of this issue, it is thought that it may adversely affect social relationships of vegan/vegetarian individuals especially during university years when mutual shares and friendships are important. For this reason, in this study, social relations of vegan/vegetarian university students were discussed with their own perspectives.

Materials And Methods

Research Design

This research is a qualitative research conducted to examine social relations of vegan/vegetarian university students. Qualitative research is defined as a study in which existing condition is examined in depth, qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interviews and document analysis are used, and a qualitative process is pursued to reveal perceptions and events in nature realistically and holistically (Sart, 2018). Descriptive analysis and content analysis, among qualitative research methods, were used in the study.

Research Population and Sample

Research population constituted of vegan/vegetarian university students who were between 18-29 years old. Vegan/vegetarian university students were accessed through social media. In the study, the sample selection was not conducted, and it was based on voluntariness. Accordingly, a total of 65 students (38 vegan, 27 vegetarian) who agreed to participate voluntarily to study and filled out the data collection tools constituted the research sample.

Preparation and Implementation of Data Collection Tool

In this study, open-ended questionnaire (18 items) was used by researchers as a data collection tool. This form consisted of three parts. In the first chapter, demographic questions containing the introductory characteristics of individuals (age, gender, education) and in the second part questions describing the status of being vegan/vegetarian (6 questions, e.g.: How long have you been a vegan/vegetarian? Why do you prefer to be a vegan/vegetarian? Explain. Are there any other vegans/vegetarians in your family? If any, who?" in the third chapter, any questions about vegan/vegetarianism (9 questions, e.g.: Did your state of being vegan/vegetarian have any positive or negative effects on your family relations? Explain, does being vegan/vegetarian have any positive or negative effects on your school life? Explain) were included. Research data was collected during dates between September 27-December 11, 2017. In this respect, primarily, vegan/vegetarian groups in social media were reached, and information about the study was given. Some of the students who agreed to join the study voluntarily filled out the questionnaire sent to them and sent them back via e-mail, while some of them completed the questionnaire via a link created in the Internet environment. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The study has no conflict of interest and funding wasn't received in the study. The data obtained were evaluated in accordance with qualitative study.

Data Analysis

Content analysis of the data obtained from open-ended questions was carried out by coding. The data obtained were transferred to the computer environment and the encodings were created, and then, the codes were brought together and their common aspects were found, so that the themes (categories) that would outline the research findings were uncovered. The specified themes were interpreted in a format associated with the codes, and

the results are revealed in accordance with the purpose of research. In addition, the frequency technique was utilized to digitize distributions according to the themes determined by the research data.

Results

The majority of the students involved in the study were 18-25 years old (96.0%) and female (78.0%). 54.0% students' time to adopt vegan/vegetarian lifestyle was between 1-4 years, and 38 of students were vegan and 27 of them were vegetarian. Nine of the students who were vegetarian indicated that they were not ready for veganism. Three of these students indicated reasons for not being ready for veganism as failure in finding vegan food and these foods were expensive. There were students who indicated more reasons for choosing a vegan/vegetarian lifestyle. The reason they often stated included "*ethics*" (44.0%) and "*to demonstrate a stance against animal exploitation*" (39.0%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Students' Introductory Features (n=65)

| INTRODUCTIVE FEATURES | Participants | % |
|---|---------------------|--------------|
| 18-21 | 31 | 48.0 |
| 22-25 | 31 | 48.0 |
| 26 and above | 3 | 4.0 |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 51 | 78.0 |
| Male | 14 | 22.0 |
| Duration of being Vegetarian/Vegan | | |
| Less than 1 years | 7 | 11.0 |
| 1 year-Less than 4 years | 35 | 54.0 |
| 4-10 years | 19 | 29.0 |
| Over 10 years | 4 | 6.0 |
| Vegetarian Type | | |
| Vegan | 38 | 58.0 |
| Vegetarian | 27 | 42.0 |
| Reason for being Vegan/Vegetarian * (n = 68) | | |
| Ethical | 37 | 44.0 |
| Animal rights/exploitation | 33 | 39.0 |
| Ecology | 6 | 7.0 |
| Health | 2 | 2.0 |
| Respect for lives of living beings | 2 | 2.0 |
| Conscience | 1 | 1.0 |
| A stance against speciesism | 3 | 3.0 |
| None | 2 | 2.0 |
| TOTAL | 65 | 100.0 |

* There were students giving multiple replies. The percentages were taken over the folded n.

54.0% of students participating in the research indicated that their being vegan/vegetarian influenced family relations. 42.0% of students stated that the family members did not react negatively after they had become vegan/vegetarian (Table 2).

65% of the students stated that being vegan/vegetarian influenced their school lives, and 42.0% of the students indicated that they had a problem finding food especially at school. Considering friendship relations, 55.0% of students expressed that their friendship relationship was affected because of this lifestyle that they adopted. In addition, 26.0% of students stated that there were no adverse situations in visits. According to the statements of people who experienced problems in guest relations, lack of vegan/vegetarian food at and refusal of the treats were specified most frequently by students (Table 2).

Majority of students (94.0%) indicated that the status of vegan/vegetarian in spouse selection was important, but if not, this situation would not cause much trouble on condition that there was mutual respect (Table 3).

Table 2. Social Relations of Vegan/Vegetarian Students (n=65)

| The Effect of Vegan/Vegetarianism on Family Relations | Participants | % |
|--|---------------------|--------------|
| Present | 35 | 54.0 |
| None | 30 | 46.0 |
| Situations in Family Relations (n=66)* | | % |
| Trouble at first, then understanding | 21 | 32.0 |
| I received both positive and negative reactions | 2 | 3.0 |
| The issue of food was a problem | 12 | 18.0 |
| My parents think it is unhealthy. | 3 | 5.0 |
| There were no effects. | 28 | 42.0 |
| The Effect of Vegan/Vegetarianism on School Lives | | % |
| Present | 42 | 65.0 |
| None | 23 | 35.0 |
| Situations in School Lives (n=76)* | | % |
| Who thinks it's unhealthy | 2 | 2.7 |
| I received both positive and negative reactions | 2 | 2.7 |
| The issue of food was a problem | 32 | 42.0 |
| Condescending speeches/sarcasm | 13 | 17.0 |
| Understanding after the negative response | 2 | 2.7 |
| Communication problems in the social environment | 2 | 2.7 |
| There was no effects. | 23 | 30.2 |
| The Effect of Vegan/Vegetarianism on Friend Relations | | % |
| Present | 36 | 55.0 |
| None | 29 | 45.0 |
| Situations in Friend Relations | | % |
| No respect | 11 | 17.0 |
| I just didn't have any problems around intimate friends | 4 | 6.0 |
| Received both positive and negative reactions | 9 | 14.0 |
| Problem occurs in mass feeding activities. | 6 | 9.0 |
| Other | 3 | 5.0 |
| Experienced isolation. | 4 | 6.0 |
| There was no effects. | 28 | 43.0 |
| The Effect of Vegan/Vegetarianism on Guest Relations | | % |
| Present | 48 | 74.0 |
| None | 17 | 26.0 |
| Situations in Guest Relations | | % |
| No vegan/vegetarian meals | 21 | 32.0 |
| The rejection of the treat was not welcomed | 11 | 17.0 |
| Trouble at first, then no problems | 2 | 3.0 |
| Mocking | 4 | 6.0 |
| Communication issues | 5 | 8.0 |
| There were no effects | 17 | 26.0 |
| Other | 5 | 8.0 |
| TOTAL | 65 | 100.0 |

* There were students giving multiple replies. The percentages were taken over the folded *n*.

Table 3. Distribution of Students according to their Choice of Being Vegan/Vegetarian Spouses (n=65)

| A vegan/vegetarian spouse preference | Participants | % |
|---|---------------------|--------------|
| I prefer, if not, respect is enough | 33 | 51.0 |
| I prefer a vegan wife | 28 | 43.0 |
| At least, he/she should be vegetarian | 4 | 6.0 |
| TOTAL | 65 | 100.0 |

26.7% of the students participated in the study indicated that they would feed their children in vegan way in the future when they had children; 16.0% of them indicated that they would feed their children in a standard way and not intervene in their preference in the future; on the other hand, 12.0% of them indicated that they would feed their children in vegan was and leave their children's preferences or feed them in a vegetarian way. According to the results of the study, 11.0% of students stated that they were indecisive, but there were mp students indicating that they feed as omnivore (both herbivorous and carnivorous nutrition) (Table 4).

Table 4. Distributions Related to Students' Opinions on Nutrition When They Have Children (n=65)

| Opinion on Vegan/Vegetarian Nutrition of the Child (When Born) | Participants | % |
|---|---------------------|--------------|
| I will feed as vegetarian | 8 | 12.0 |
| I will feed as vegan | 28 | 43.0 |
| I will feed as vegetarian, then I leave the choice to the child | 4 | 6.0 |
| I will feed vegan, then I leave the choice to the child | 8 | 12.0 |
| I will feed in a standard way, then I leave the choice to the child | 10 | 16.0 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 7 | 11.0 |
| TOTAL | 65 | 100.0 |

44.0% of students indicated that new people they met were surprised when they specified their choice as vegan/vegetarian, and 39.0% of them indicated that they were asked strange questions (Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution of Reactions Received by Vegan/Vegetarian Students from People They Meet (n=86)*

| Reactions | Participants | % |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Being shocked | 37 | 44.0 |
| Asking strange questions | 33 | 39.0 |
| Mocking | 6 | 7.0 |
| Get aggressive | 2 | 2.0 |
| Find unhealthy | 2 | 2.0 |
| Telling vegan/vegetarian identity | 1 | 1.0 |
| Both positive and negative responses | 3 | 3.0 |
| None | 2 | 2.0 |
| TOTAL | 86 | 100.0 |

* There were students giving multiple replies. The percentages were taken over the folded *n*.

In this study, vegan/vegetarian students were finally asked about their expectations of the society on this subject. When the answers were examined, it was seen that they wanted to raise awareness about vegan/vegetarianism most. Many students indicated that they wanted respect for their preferences, and few students wanted that vegan food etc. choices should be increased. And yet, a few students replied on this subject, “I have no expectations of a community in this regard”. There were also students who did not give their opinion on this issue.

Discussion

The majority of students participating in the study were women and 18-25 years of age. This result is similar to research findings by Sünnetçioğlu et al. (2017). Sünnetçioğlu et al. (2017), in their study, found that a large majority of vegans were female and 16-24 years of age.

The majority of students who adopted a vegan/vegetarian lifestyle indicated multiple reasons for their choices. Mainly, “*ethics*”, “*showing a stance against animal exploitation*” and “*ecology*” are prominent in these expressions. These are followed with “health, respect for living life”, “conscience” and “a stance against speciesism”. The statements of students stating that they are vegan/vegetarian due to ethics are as follows:

“I am a vegetarian because I do not find animal food ethically, and a vegan teacher who teaches ethics at the university and who is

also a medical doctor is certainly effective in my decision.” (22-year-old, female, vegetarian).

“I have become vegan for ethical reasons. I don’t think animals are slaves that can be exploited. If we are animals with ethical values as human beings, I find it wrong that these ethical values are only special to people” (24-year-old, female, vegan).

54.0% of students participating in the research indicated that their being vegan/vegetarian influenced their family relations. The students’ explanations on this subject are as follows:

“At first, they were not bringing animal food home from their respect and affection to me, but they were eating out. They stopped eating animals altogether, and I am hopeful that they will also stop exploiting” (21-year-old, female, vegan).

“There were not many changes. At first, I thought religion would be a trouble because they think the animals are created for us. But over time, they respected me as I told them how I thought and what happened in slaughterhouses. My mother cooks for me separately” (20-year-old, female, vegetarian).

“There were not many changes. My first-degree family didn’t bear down on me as far as I thought” (25-year-old, female, vegan).

“Only because of my family’s views on religion, during periods such as the Feast of Sacrifice, etc., they brought a comment that what I did might not be religiously. But I have not experienced a negative process.” (23-Year-old, female, lacto-ovo vegetarian).

Some of the students, stating that they did not receive negative reactions from their family, indicated that some of their family members were affected positively from this situation. The explanations of a vegetarian student on this subject are as follows:

“I can give my grandmother as a remarkable example. She now understands me very well, she says that she does not understand how she ate the cows she used to feed in the village, that she falls in love with the animal she feeds and she feels sad while eating

that animal, and she also blames me for the hypocrisy of still eating seafood.” (22-year-old, female, vegetarian).

“My mother and grandmother have become vegetarian for now” (21-year-old, female, vegan).

Parents may not always be positive that their children are vegan/vegetarian. Indeed, according to the results of the study, families of 32.0% of students reacted to this situation initially, but in time, they began to accept. Some students’ statements on the subject are as follows:

“At first, they felt like I had a bad habit. The animal body consumption in my family was minimized for health reasons in recent years, but for them, animal secretions like milk, eggs and cheese were still healthy “nutrients”. Over time (which, as a person with a lot of discomfort in this process, I beat all problems in an unreinforced way), everyone was impressed that my life was getting better. Such that that people outside the core family began to prepare food for me to eat when I visited their homes” (23-year-old, female, vegan).

“It was very negative at first. They were particularly concerned about health, and I was subjected to a lot of verbal warnings. But afterwards, they began to be supportive” (25-year-old, male, vegan).

One of the biggest problems experienced by vegan/vegetarian individuals is the problem of finding food (Sünnetçioğlu et al., 2017), and this situation is thought to be reflected on family relations from time to time. As a matter of fact, 18% of students have stated that the subject of food affects family relations. The explanations of a vegan student on this subject are as follows:

“Especially in cases such as holiday or family gatherings, although many kinds of meals are prepared, sometimes they do not cook for me, I have to go into the kitchen myself and deal with it” (20-year-old, female, vegan).

Two of the vegan/vegetarian students received both positive and negative reactions from their family after becoming vegan/vegetarian, and two of them expressed that their family perceived veganism/vegetarianism as an unhealthy form of nutrition.

Most students in the study stated that being vegan/vegetarian influenced their school lives and they had problem finding food especially at school. For vegan/vegetarian students, staying hungry at school can sometimes require an extra effort. In the study, while most of the students stated that they brought their food from home, they stated that it was unfair not to find suitable food at school. However, vegetarian students stated that they were not as troubled as vegan students. A vegetarian student's opinion on this subject is as follows:

"If I were a vegan, I'd have trouble with food, and I don't have that kind of trouble at school." (20-year-old, female, vegetarian).

The thoughts of students having trouble in food are as follows.

"Sometimes I cannot find a quick, fast snack in my school run because there are no vegan foods in the canteen or there are very few options" (20-year-old, female, vegan)

"There is no vegetarian menu in the cafeteria and there is no meat in the canteen other than potatoes, so I cannot eat at school" (23-year-old, female, vegetarian).

35% of the students stated that veganism/vegetarianism had no adverse effects on their school life. The opinions of the students who expressed this opinion are as follows:

"I had no problems in finding food. I was satisfied with vegetables, fruits, groceries, salty snacks that the nature offers. I'm just so sad when people eat animals in front of me." (23-year-old, female, vegan)

"I've never seen a big reaction. And there were people who appreciated what I did. There were vegan/vegetarian menus in several places in the campus enterprises. We've asked a few businesses to get a vegan menu for the regular menu price. When we're having dinner with my friends, they think about me at the first place, then we go to places that have a vegan menu. Nothing is hard when you want it." (23-year-old, female, vegan)

"I can't say I'm having a lot of food problems because there's a vegan dining option at the school cafeteria" (21-year-old, female, vegan).

As can be understood from the students' statements, there are vegan/vegetarian menus in some universities which prevents students from experiencing problems.

In addition to the students who expressed that they did not receive a negative reaction at school, 13 students expressed their exposure to ridicule and condescending speeches at school. Some students' statements on the subject are as follows:

“I have been subjected to verbal violence in the environments where I dine with my friends” (18-year-old, female, vegan)

“Yes, it is hard to find food, and there is community pressure, teasing all the time” (21-year-old, female, vegan).

According to students' statements, the other main problem they experienced in their school lives was condescending/sarcastic speeches of the people. Considering their friendship relations, most students stated that their situation affected their friendship relations. Friendships in university years are one of the most important social relations. University friendships are a type of relationship in which individual preferences are in the foreground, social conditions, shared time and common space are effective. For this reason, it is important that your friends' interests and lifestyles are similar (Nas, 2017). There were students (11 people) who expressed negative effects in their friendship relations that no respects were shown to them. Thoughts of a vegan student in this topic are as follows:

“There are many things including insist on quitting, mocking, becoming upset when we do not eat their non-vegan food, etc...” (24-year-old, female, vegan)

On the other hand, 9 of the students expressed both positive and negative effects on their friendship relations in their veganism/vegetarianism. Thoughts of a vegetarian student on this topic are as follows:

“I had a few problems with my non-vegan and non-vegetarian friends. When it comes to answering their questions, I am talking to them, but instead of giving me a rational response, they prefer to say, “Nonsense, animals have already been created for us.” I have also acquired new vegans, vegetarians or friends who are interested in this issue.” (20-year-old, female, vegetarian)

Some of the students (9%) stated that another problem with friends group was the venue chosen for eating out. Many students indicated that they felt uncomfortable about other people's eating meat and meat products although they did not eat; this problem was especially experienced in dinner activities. Another group of students stated that they became alone after becoming a vegan/vegetarian. However, one of the students stated that loneliness was a relative concept and they were happy to be left alone.

Despite the negative reactions that society adopted in a different way of life according to the majority of society, vegan/vegetarian students stated that 45.0% of them did not have problems in relations with their friends. The students' opinions on this subject are as follows:

“The positive reactions in my friend relations were more. Our perspectives are consistent with people who I have close relationships. I am a vegan and this contributes to some people in considering this situation from different ways” (23-year-old, female, vegan)

“I have not encountered a serious problem because my friends are conscious. I have friends who respect my ethical position and try to understand me. I wish they were vegan though...” (20-year-old, female, vegan)

“I have not seen a negative reaction from my friends, but they questioned why I made this decision, we talked about it, and I explained my thoughts. They usually declared that I am right (especially not about consuming meat, but for the exploitation of animals in the meat industry) but they cannot do the same thing.” (24-year-old, female, lacto-ovo vegetarian)

In the study, a large majority of students (46.0%) stated that their veganism/vegetarianism experience affected their guest relations and they were particularly troubled about finding vegan/vegetarian food (32.0%). Thoughts of a lacto vegetarian student who mentioned having trouble during a visit are as follows:

“I usually can't find the nutrients to consume, and people insist on consuming animal products in places where I visit” (20-years-old, female, lacto vegetarian)

26% of students in the study stated that they had no problems in their guest relations. The statements of students regarding no problems in guest relations are as follows:

“I traveled recently. For two days, there were six times of lunch break, and in every restaurant, we went to, everything was pre-ordered. It was also surprising that the region was the Eastern Black Sea, so there were no herbal nutrients in the menus. That’s why I carried supplies with me for two days. I usually keep my life in that way. I consider these things positively because people are questioning me with curiosity, and that gives me the opportunity to talk about my veganism” (23-year-old, female vegan)

“When I visited someone’s house, I observed that people were always polite to me. For example, when they accidentally put meat food in front of me, they apologize immediately, saying what they can bring me and they're very sorry” (22-year-old, female, vegetarian)

There is a culture of hospitality in Turkish society; the host wants to treat the guest and to please him. Therefore, refusal of the treat suggests that the guest is not satisfied and is often not welcomed. Treats are expected to be tasted even if they are not eaten completely. Otherwise, this situation may be regarded as disrespectful. Eleven students stated that they experienced such problem. A vegan student’s thoughts on this issue are as follows:

“When you don’t eat the food at the invitations, insistence increases. It is considered disrespectful not to eat the food that is presented in our culture. Regardless of how many times you tell the situation, it does not change the situation” (22-year-old, female, vegan)

The choice of spouse to marry affects the entire life of the person. Many factors such as common shares, having similar characteristics, culture, family structure etc. are important in selection of spouses (Efe, 2013). The vast majority of students who adopted vegan/vegetarianism as a lifestyle indicated that the status of vegan/vegetarian was important for spousal selection, but an omnivorous spouse would not cause much trouble, provided that there was respect in the relationship. Students’ opinions on this issue are as follows:

“Not important as long as you are respectful” (19-year-old, female, vegan).

“No, it’s not. But it would be nice if she is vegan or vegetarian. It is even enough that she understands and supports me.” (23-year-old, male, vegetarian)

“Of course, I would like my wife to be vegan or vegetarian. That would be an important criterion for me. But even if it is not vegan/vegetarian, it may be sufficient for my future spouse to at least respect me and perform the consumption of meat at minimum level” (20-year-old, female, lacto-ovo vegetarian)

The majority of students said that they would feed their child vegan when they had children in the future. Other than that, there were also been students indicating that they would feed their children in a standard way or vegan, then leave the choice for their children in the future. A remarkable result in the study is that students remained uncertain about this subject, but none of them specified the opinion of as omnivorous nutrition of their children. The thoughts of the students indicating that they would feed their child as vegan are as follows:

“Since it is wrong to support exploitation in a body born as vegan, Yes, I will continue to bring up my child as a vegan” (25-year-old, male, vegan)

“Definitely (I feed as vegan). If you do not consume animal products from childhood, the body will develop accordingly, and the child will not need to find alternatives of animal products from time to time” (23-year-old, female, vegan)

When students say “animal product alternatives,” they mean *vegan meat* or *artificial meat*. Artificial meat is derived from the root cell of the animal and is supported by the Turkey Vegan Society because this and similar studies are thought to be a transition to veganism. Vegan meat, on the other hand, is a food that tastes like barren or raw meatballs obtained by blending spices, such as chickpeas and garbanzo. Some vegans do not approve meat alternatives on the grounds that they remind of animal exploitation (Özkan, 2014; Tunçay Son, 2016). Besides, it has also been seen from statements of the person that vegan/vegetarians may need meat alternatives.

Students indicated that, when they specified their veganism/vegan/vegetarianism, many people they met were mostly surprised

and asked strange questions. The most frequently asked questions include, “*Don't you ever eat meat?*”, “*don't you want any meat?*”, “*aren't plants alive, too?*” or “*don't you eat even chicken/fish?*” Students expressed reactions of people they newly met as follows:

“There is often confusion and unconsciousness; most people are unaware of this form of nutrition.” (22-year-old, female, lacto-ovo vegetarian)

“The wonder first, and the question comes after that, “don't you ever any meat?” (23-year-old, female, vegetarian)

“The state of surprise and inability to make sense. After simply explaining some reasons, the inability to make sense of it is somewhat diminished” (21-year-old, female, vegetarian).

In the study, students' expectations about this issue mainly include social awareness and respect for their preferences. Other than that, few students expressed their desire to increase their vegan food choices, and a few students said they had no hope of community. The statements of a vegan student stating opinions towards raising public awareness are as follows:

“Vegan individuals choose this path as a result of long studies. If the community is conscious about it, however, the misconceptions about being vegan are eliminated” (19-year-old, female, vegan)

Conclusion

As a result of the research, main reasons of students in choosing vegan/vegetarian lifestyle include subjects of “*ethics, animal rights advocacy and showing a stance against animal exploitation*”. Animal rights and animal exploitation issues can also be addressed in their ethical aspects.

Students who are involved in the study seemed to have problems in both family, school and guest relations. It was found that students were able to cope with these problems and did not see these problems as a justification for giving up this lifestyle. According to the results of the research, the majority of students wanted to be respected for their preferences and to make society more conscious in this regard.

In accordance with conclusions of this study, it can be suggested;

- To conduct more scientific studies such as studies, books and research etc. on veganism/vegetarianism,
- To conduct awareness studies in the media about nature, living beings and animal rights,
- To have and increase vegan/vegetarian products in schools, dormitories, hotels, establishments, restaurants, supermarkets, etc.
- To teach children respect for differences, empathy, love of nature and animals that play an important role in emotional and social development of children and to give their families training in this regard.

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