

FAMILY PROJECTIONS AFTER COVID-19: A TURNING POINT?

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ABSTRACT

The global experiences of Covid-19 (such as staying at home, physical distance and social isolation practices, moving work and education to home, unemployment, income losses, digitalization) gave birth to the idea of a "new normal" and to projections predicting that it would fundamentally affect the future of family structure along with other areas of life. Critically examining the literature in terms of the effects of Covid-19 specifically on the family and the projections related to it, this paper argues that a new discourse centered on Covid-19 has been produced, which presents it as a 'turning point' as if it had revolutionary effects in human history. Based on the aim of making a critical evaluation of this discourse, firstly, some basic features of future projections were determined. Secondly, the risk/uncertainty/fear environment emphasized by the discourse in question is discussed within the framework of the relevant literature. Third, projections for the future of family life are examined and discussed within the framework of three main themes. This paper shows that, contrary to the emerging new discourse, family transformations and discussions related to Covid-19 were already happening in many societies long before Covid-19. Therefore, it is concluded that the new discourse uses Covid-19 as a scapegoat for the problems of the reconstructed order of global capitalism, which deepens inequalities and ignores disaster preparedness.

Keywords: Covid-19, Future of Family, Global Capitalism, Risk and Uncertainty, New Norms of Normality.

COVID-19 SONRASI AİLE PROJEKSİYONLARI: BİR DÖNÜM NOKTASI MI?

ÖZ

Covid-19'un küresel deneyimleri (evde kalma, fiziksel mesafe ve sosyal izolasyon uygulamaları, iş ve eğitimin eve taşınması, işsizlik, gelir kayıpları, dijitalleşme gibi), "yeni bir normal" fikrini ve hayatın diğer alanları ile birlikte aile yapısının da geleceğini temelden etkileyeceği öngörülerini doğurdu. Covid-19'un özellikle aile üzerindeki etkilerine ve bununla ilgili projeksiyonlara odaklanan bu makale, ortaya çıkan literatürü dikkate alarak, insanlık tarihinde devrim niteliğinde etkiler yaratmış gibi bir 'dönüm noktası' olarak sunan Covid-19 merkezli yeni bir söylemin üretildiğini savunmaktadır. Bu söylemin eleştirel bir değerlendirmesini yapma amacına dayanarak öncelikle gelecek projeksiyonlarının bazı temel özellikleri belirlenmiştir. İkinci olarak, söz konusu söylemin yoğun olarak vurguladığı risk/belirsizlik/korku ortamı ilgili literatür çerçevesinde tartışılmaktadır. Üçüncü olarak, aile hayatının geleceğine ilişkin projeksiyonlar üç ana tema çerçevesinde incelenmekte ve tartışılmaktadır. Bu makale, ortaya çıkan yeni söylemin aksine, aile dönüşümlerinin ve Covid-19 ile bağlantılı tartışmaların Covid-19'dan çok önce birçok toplumda zaten yaşandığını göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla makale, yeni söylemin eşitsizlikleri derinleştiren ve afetlere hazırlıklı olmayı göz ardı eden küresel kapitalizmin yeniden yapılandırılmış düzeninin sorunları için Covid-19'u günah keçisi olarak kullandığı sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Covid-19, Ailenin Geleceği, Küresel Kapitalizm, Risk, Belirsizlik, Yeni Normallik Normları.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been said that Covid-19 has changed many things in our individual and social lives and that nothing will be the same as before, and that it will force us to get used to a new normality. In the words of Livingstone (2020), "Covid-19 has swept through the world like a

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tsunami wave. It has showed no discrimination, infecting people regardless of religion, class or wealth, ignoring national borders, demanding attention and sweeping aside any attempts to deliver 'business as usual.'" This mysterious power attributed to Covid-19 mediates its construction as a turning point and the birth of a seemingly new discourse. As one of the typical representatives of this discourse, for example, Professor Klaus Schwab, the founder and chairman of the World Economic Forum, says: "Many of us are pondering when things will return to normal. The short response is: never. Nothing will ever return to the "broken" sense of normalcy that prevailed prior to the crisis because the coronavirus pandemic marks a fundamental inflection point in our global trajectory" (Schwab & Malleret 2020: 1).

Within the conceptualization of "new normal", it is frequently emphasized that Covid-19 also affects/will affect family structure and life. In this context, it is predicted that new norms of normality will dominate family life, communication processes within the family, family economy, consumption and shopping attitudes, education of children and young people, care of the elderly and sick, and many more.

In general, the most obvious concern about the Covid-19 pandemic is the atmosphere of risk and uncertainty that this pandemic brings. In connection with this, stay-at-home, physical distance and social isolation practices, relocation of work and education to home, unemployment and/or income losses, and digitalization appear as other developments that occupy more place on the agenda during the Covid-19 process.

How might all these developments affect family life? Within the framework of this general question, it is observed that a new discourse centered on Covid-19 has been produced. This new discourse offers a wide variety of projections from family life to the future of socio-economic, cultural and political life. This study focuses on the emerging discourse about the effects of Covid-19 on family life, keeping other dimensions in the secondary plan, and aims to make a critical evaluation of this discourse. For this purpose, firstly, some basic features of future projections are determined. Secondly, the environment of risk/uncertainty/fear, which the discourse in question heavily emphasizes, is discussed within the framework of the relevant literature. Thirdly, the projections regarding the future of family life are analyzed and discussed within the framework of the themes consisting of a) Disruption of Work-Family Balance, Transformation in the Institutional Identity of the Family and the Roles within the Family, b) Transformation in Family Health and Communication within the Family, c) Situation of Children and Young People.

Variety, Logic and Limitation of Future Projections

In every period of history, humanity has been in a sense of curiosity mixed with anxiety about the future and endeavors to know the future. Behind this emotion and preoccupation lies the awareness of a wide variety of dangers and threats that surround life. People who want to feel safe would like to know where, when and how threats and dangers will come and thus they tend to take precautions accordingly. This is a natural tendency that manifests itself both at the individual level and at the level of states. In addition, against the future that the current socio-economic and political order foresees for them, people may also try to design alternative futures¹. Therefore, future predictions are based on the assumption that the future can be known, if not definitively, at least in general terms, and that control/hegemony can be established over nature and society. Undoubtedly, trying to predict the future would not be a very meaningful endeavor if it were not based on such an assumption. This assumption, which is widely accepted today as it was in the past, prompts individuals, organizations, states and international organizations to build researches, plans, institutions and organizations in order to increase knowledge about the future.

It is an important and common type of academic work for social scientists to make projections for the future. But the future projections of social scientists are different from the way astrologists and conspiracy theorists, who are also interested in the future, work². As it is known, astrologists make some information claims based on so-called claims of communicating with mystical beings and/or the positions of celestial bodies. Such claims are so subjective and general that they can neither be confirmed nor falsified. It is clear that astrologists' claims to knowledge are unscientific. Unlike them, conspiracy theorists, who mostly emerge in times of crisis, claim to base their thought on scientific data. In fact, this is true, at least for some conspiracy theorists. However, conspiracy theorists do not directly produce knowledge; they use certain scientific data produced by others to justify/support a preconceived scenario or grand plan. Moreover, while doing this, many conspiracy theorists can speak up and describe scientists as ignorant³.

¹ Utopias and ideological programs

² Another area that deals with the future is religions. However, the future predictions of religions are usually related to the Day of Judgment and beyond.

³ For example, Ramazan Kurtoğlu wrote in a tweet on March 16, 2020: "Don't panic, be cautious. Covid-19 is aimed at scaring rather than killing. Earth is used as a laboratory. Para-religion-humanity is being formatted. Laugh at the words of some academically ignorant people on TV saying "this is not biological warfare". It's pure biological warfare."

As Karaosmanoğlu (2009: 4) says; conspiracy theories are more concerned with *appearing* 'scientific' than *being* scientific. This attitude is shaped, of course, with the aim of finding as many buyers as possible. Despite this, conspiracy theories display a reductionist attitude while analyzing social and political events and close themselves to criticism. According to them, the cause of everything is clear and unique. Although conspiracy theorists often deal with intricate and complex issues, the argument they use is usually simple or based on stereotypical assumptions (Karaosmanoğlu 2009: 5). According to Brotherton and Eser (2015), a mutual interaction can be seen between conspiracy theories and paranoid thinking and they can trigger each other.

Conspiracy theories, which are closed systems just like astrology, have many buyers as they promise people an 'alternative reality' and the pleasure of discovering the 'mystery' of this reality. Those who tend to interpret history as the "battle of good and evil" put these theories in place of reality, enjoying the pleasure of not being from the "other" who is evil and understanding the "big game" that has been played. In addition, people who are afraid of uncertainty and in a state of extreme anxiety tend to believe in conspiracy theories more easily (Bozkurt 2020).

Unlike astrologists and conspiracy theorists, social scientists use past experiences and statistical trends when making future projections. In other words, it can be said that the most distinctive feature of future projections of social scientists is that they make projections based on scientific data. In this context, they can make predictions about the issues, for example, what will be the total population of Turkey in 2050, what the fertility rate will look like, what the average family size will be, etc. With Covid-19, it has been observed on a more popular basis that social scientists have some predictions about working life, production and consumption relations, political participation and citizenship behaviors, free time and communication grounds, and of course family structure and relations in the future. Surely, how far future predictions of social scientists can encompass is a matter of question. Predicting the near future is undoubtedly a stronger possibility than predicting the distant future.

Making projections for the future cannot be separated from visions on the world and future. In other words, the theoretical tradition on which the social scientist relies can be very influential on this vision. In this context, it can be said that future predictions in social sciences are based on four basic theoretical foundations (İnayatullah 1990): The first is the positivist/empirical predictive approach based on social sciences. As a matter of fact, scientific

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projections for the future are mostly the product of a positivist understanding of science based on the causality principle. According to this, nothing in the universe is accidental; things are connected to each other by a mechanical causality. This understanding enables scientific activity to aim at "explaining".

The second is the interpretative approach, which is not based on predicting the future but on understanding competing images of the future. This approach rejects the idea of one-way causality and emphasizes "understanding" over explanation.

The third is critical, derived from poststructural thinking and focused on asking who benefits from the realization of particular futures and what methodologies privilege certain types of future studies.

The fourth approach is participatory action learning/research. This approach is much more democratic and focuses on stakeholders' development of their own future based on their assumptions about the future (for example, is the future linear or cyclical) and what is critical for them (Inayatullah 2007).

Of course, no matter what theoretical tradition they are based on, the future projections of social scientists are too valuable to be equated with the projections of astrologists and conspiracy theorists. However, this does not mean that social scientific projections are perfect or that they always provide accurate predictions. First of all, it is clear that scientific projections about how the family structure will be after Covid-19 is shaped according to the theoretical traditions mentioned above. Secondly, sufficient scientific data accumulation is necessary to make a projection within the framework of either the positivist/empirical tradition or other traditions. However, the data we have on the effects of Covid-19 is based on only one year of experience. In addition, it is known that researches on this subject are mainly focused on countries that have reached a certain level of development, and most of the studies are based on online surveys with controversial data quality. Therefore, it should be taken into account that these facts limit the possibilities of making accurate projections. In addition to these issues, this study argues that post-Covid-19 family projections are presented as the effects of a new situation with Covid-19, but in reality, they should be considered in terms of the effects of some changes/transformations that date back to much earlier times. In other words, this study is built on the argument that the transformations attributed to family life after Covid-19 are not actually the results directly caused by Covid-19, but that Covid-19 is just an intervening variable and only plays a catalyst role in these transformations.

Covid-19 and an Environment of Risk/Uncertainty/Fear

Undoubtedly, it cannot be denied that there is an atmosphere of risk, uncertainty and fear associated with Covid-19. However, this emphasis may lead us to think that there was no atmosphere of risk and uncertainty prior to Covid-19. In fact, it is known that a large literature focused on the atmosphere of risk and uncertainty developed much earlier. As a matter of fact, Giddens (2003) and Beck (1992) played important roles in the formation of this literature. Giddens argued that we are now experiencing a “transition from the predominance of external risk to that of manufactured risk” (Giddens 2003: 26). Similarly, according to Beck, risks used to be personal, but today they are in peril that will threaten humanity or destroy all life on earth. In other words, globalized risks “are no longer tied to their place of origin - the industrial plant. By their nature they endanger all forms of life on this planet” (Beck 1992: 22).

In addition to those who draw attention to the *real* risk/uncertainty environment, such as Giddens and Beck, there are also those who emphasize a *perceptual* risk/uncertainty environment. For example, by asking the question of “Are We at Risk?”, in his work titled *Culture of Fear*, Furedi (2002) draws attention on how a culture of fear is created especially through the media and on how risks are turned into fears. According to him, the fears artificially produced lead to panic; “Decreased sense of control” occurs among individuals who accept panic as a lifestyle. Thus, in a *World Full of Dangerous Strangers*, there appears a loss of trust between people who try to live with the "other". For Furedi (2002), “experts” who write in newspapers or speak on television channels without a sound scientific knowledge/data play the biggest role in the emergence of these situations.

What happened during the Covid-19 process has shown a development in line with the thoughts of Giddens, Beck and Furedi, both at the level of reality and at the perceptual level. As a matter of fact, the global network of economic relations, global air travel, and intercontinental and international travel in general, which we can generally count as the product of modernity, played an important role in the transformation of Covid-19 into a global epidemic.

On the other hand, the Covid-19 experience has clearly demonstrated the weakness of global risk governance mechanisms. Neither the World Health Organization nor the EU could take effective decisions at the global or regional level, and could not provide unity of action and solidarity. Nation-states have tried to implement three types of risk management policies in the face of this epidemic: First, *epidemiological control mechanisms* have been implemented in many countries, such as testing to detect cases of infection or the presence of antibodies to

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infection, isolation of infected or suspected cases of infection, and detailed monitoring of each case to identify potential affected persons. Secondly, restrictions were imposed on the curfew of the population and *physical distancing* rules were introduced. The third policy was to *strengthen the capacity of public health services* and vaccination studies (Çakı 2020: 41-43). Despite all these policies, the epidemic led to the infection of approximately 180 million people in the world and the death of close to 4 million people (Wordometers 2021).

It has been observed that physical distance and isolation policies have eliminated many socio-cultural activities and negatively affected almost all intellectual activity areas while they enabled many jobs to be moved to homes. In this process, the individual is encouraged to stay away from their real social networks and is imprisoned in online socialization until "science finds a cure" against the virus. From this point of view, Laszczkowski (2020) envisions that, after Covid-19, our lives under the "new normality" will be reduced to just two functions: production and (maximum individualized) consumption.

Covid-19 has also reinforced an already existing culture of great and pervasive fear, with contributions from an oligarchy of media and experts. A great atmosphere of fear, panic and paranoia has been created, especially by the images of patients from China in the process of struggling with pain or dying, and by the statistics on the number of cases/deaths presented to the masses on TV screens. In this case, everyone started to see each other (including one's closest relatives) as a potential virus carrier. The fact that experts often talk about future pandemic diseases has also ignited the atmosphere of global fear reinforced by Covid-19. Now people can't help asking themselves these questions: Which "Disease X" is next? When and where could this happen? (Leach & MacGregor 2020). As Staples (1997: 132) states, the culture of fear provides the legitimization of surveillance. While the media, on the one hand, contributes to the stigmatization of certain groups during the pandemic processes (Brooks et al. 2020), it prompts the individual, on the other hand, to give up all social relations and to observe everyone else by reminding him/her the following slogan: "Attention! You could be the next!"

As a result, it can be said that Covid-19 reinforces the previously existing social processes that imprisoned the individual in the "freedom-security dilemma". Thus, in return for the security of life, individuals can voluntarily give up their right to control their private lives, cultural values and behaviors, and social relations.

It has thus been understood that these features of Covid-19, which are associated with the atmosphere of risk, uncertainty and fear, are not really new at all, and that this atmosphere,

which was the direct consequence of modernization and globalization, was already noted much earlier. After this main determination, we can return to the question of what changes/transformations family life will be exposed to in the future after Covid-19.

The Future of Family Life

It can be said that many projections for the future of the family after Covid-19, experienced in an atmosphere of risk, uncertainty and fear, are based on the assumption that the observations in the Covid-19 process will become permanent. It should be noted that this assumption is problematic in at least two respects. First, the thought that the observations in question (some of which will be mentioned below) will become permanent tends to consider the '*structure*' as the determinant in social action and ignore the '*agency*'. Secondly, this assumption conditions the observations in question to Covid-19, assigning only a secondary role to pre-Covid-19 changes and transformations. However, discussions about the future of the family have been going on for a long time. While some take a rather pessimistic approach to this issue, others take a more positive view (see Baskerville 2009; Beck & Beck-Gemshem 2001; Cliquet 2003; Duncan 2007; Haskins 2015; Hunter 2012; Kotkin 2012; Wardle 2015). Keeping these issues in mind, it is possible to summarize – under a few subheadings – what kinds of projections have been made about family life with a focus on Covid-19.

a) Disruption of Work-Family Balance, Transformation in Family's Institutional Identity and In-Family Roles

First of all, it is claimed that Covid-19 will create radical transformations in the institutional identity of the family and in the roles within the family. In this context, it is often pointed out that the pandemic has made the work-family balance increasingly difficult, exacerbating gender inequalities, and forcing women to do more housework (Fisher et al. 2020; Ruppanner et al. 2020). On the other hand, it is predicted that due to the deteriorated balance between work and family life, marriage, gender and parenthood will be separated from each other and a new set of family forms will converge. In this context, trends such as cohabitation, celibacy, late marriage, extra-marital fertility, single parenthood and increased divorce rates, which have already emerged before Covid-19 and which are alternatives to the institutional identity of the family, can be expected to continue increasingly after Covid-19.

The prediction that divorces will increase during and after the Covid-19 process can be objected to from one point of view, because in the economic crisis that has been or will be experienced during and after the Covid-19 process, divorce will not seem logical to married

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individuals, as it will result in a doubling of living costs, at least for low and middle income families in many respects. In general, although the divorce rates in Western societies seem to be much higher than in other parts of the world (Wardle 2015: 241; Becker 1993: 350), crisis situations also affect them. As a matter of fact, in the past crisis periods, for example, during the Great Depression of 1929-1932, divorce rates decreased rather than increased (Cherlin 2020). For the same reason, it is reasonable to expect a decrease in individuals' childbearing behavior. The current/will-experienced economic crisis and the environment of uncertainty will also result in young people postponing their marriage plans (and thus turning to cohabitation) (Guetto et al. 2021). However, none of these situations is a new situation that has emerged with Covid-19. As a matter of fact, these were already foreseen in the publications published by the OECD in 2011 and 2012:

Since the 1960s the family in the OECD area has undergone significant transformation. In many countries, the extended family has all but disappeared, and the traditional family consisting of a married couple with children has become much less widespread as divorce rates, cohabitation, couples “living together apart”, single parenthood and same-sex partnerships have all increased. With rising migration, cultures and values have become more diverse. Families have seen more mothers take up work in the labour market (and many of them earn more than their male partners). Adolescents spend longer and longer in education and training, and the elderly members of the family live longer and, increasingly, alone. The repercussions of these changes on housing, pensions, health and long-term care, labour markets, education and public finances, have been remarkable (OECD 2011: 7).

Projections conducted or commissioned by more than a third of all OECD member countries suggest that to 2025-2030, the number of one-person households is expected to grow significantly. Strong growth is also expected in the numbers of single-parent families and in the numbers of childless couples. By the same token, the proportion of single-person households as a share of all households is expected to increase considerably, as is the proportion of single-parent households as a share of all households with children (OECD 2012: 9).

Due to the closure of schools during the Covid-19 period and nurseries operating in a limited capacity, many parents with children have become responsible for childcare and even homeschooling. There is no doubt that this situation creates an extra workload especially for women. Even if fathers, like mothers, spend more time at home in this process, this is not equally reflected in the workload sharing at home. In fact, parents spending more time at home can create a sense of burnout (Ahmed et al. 2020: 335). However, it is highly likely that quick steps will be taken to open new institutions for child care. In fact, the opening of new kindergartens in terms of childcare has long been one of the main elements of social policies aimed at relieving the tension between work and family in many countries. In this context, it is

compulsory for the employer to provide nursery and kindergarten services in some countries (Waldfoegel 2009: 51).

It is frequently emphasized that physical distancing and staying at home practices during the Covid-19 process, decreased both parents' and children's social relations of outside the family while increasing the time spent at home as a family (Kalil et al. 2020; Salin et al. 2020; Ahmed et al. 2020; Fisher et al. 2020). According to this, "the COVID-19 pandemic and global lockdowns have fundamentally changed the everyday lives of families. In particular, families with children have faced different kinds of challenges regarding how to organize and manage their everyday lives. With school premises closed and daycare facilities operating at a limited capacity, many parents with children were solely responsible for childcare and perhaps even homeschooling" (Salin et al. 2020: 1). Along with these evaluations, it has become widespread to think that the issue of dividing up the extra housework, childcare and homeschooling turned out to be a matter of negotiation and conflict in families where both parents worked.

However, this prediction is not new, of course. The transformation of dividing housework into a matter of negotiation and conflict was a process that had already begun as a result of women's gaining effectiveness in business life and individualization processes, regardless of the time spent at home. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) argue that as the pressure to balance the demands for paid work and care for children increases, women increasingly expect their spouses to be more involved in the active day-to-day care of their children, and therefore men should expand their traditional breadwinner roles and engage more actively in parenting and the domestic sphere. Women had stated at the beginning of the millennium that they expected men to participate in such a way. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001: 204), who determined that "people have to negotiate relationships on the basis of equality", stated that this process also increases the possibility of relationships becoming more and more unstable and resulting in separation and divorce, but paradoxically, higher levels of love and close relationship. They argue that the family as we know it is replaced by "new diversities such as negotiated family, alternative family, multi-family, new arrangements after divorce, remarriage, re-divorce, you and me, our children, our past and present families" (Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 8).

Therefore, despite all their fragility, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim see individualization as a factor that contributes positively to the future of the family. For them, alternative family forms and lifestyles are part of the democratization of family relations. In contrast, social scientists

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such as Murray (1994), Dennis & Erdos (1992) and Dench (1994) attribute the increased choice and freedom associated with individualization and the resulting diversity of family forms to be in a 'crisis'. According to this approach, which accepts that changing family styles are the result of growing up in 'selfish individualism' and lack of morality, individuals place their personal satisfaction above their parenting obligations and pave the way for the formation of an increasing number of 'damaged' children. This situation poses a threat not only to the family but also to the future of society.

How do these discussions about the future of the family before Covid-19 relate to the projections of the future after Covid-19? These discussions that took place before Covid-19 clearly show that the processes of transformations in the working life, the employment of women, individualization, the negotiation of domestic roles, etc. were considered as the determining factors for the future of the family and were evaluated as positive or negative developments according to the point of view. Projections about the future of the family after Covid-19 basically do not offer a new and authentic contribution to these discussions.

b) Transformations in Family Health and Family Communication

There are contradictory evaluations about how Covid-19 affects family health and communication and what kind of permanent effects it will leave. The pessimistic assessments often highlight the increased domestic stress associated with the uncertainty created by Covid-19 and the economic crisis. Accordingly, the economic stress of the Covid-19 crisis particularly worsened the mental health and stress of mothers, reduced their sense of hope for the future, and significantly increased the amount at which parents yelled at their young children and lost their temper (Kalil et al. 2020: 17). In addition, it has been reported that parents are worried about their ability to provide income for their families, experience general feelings of stress and fatigue, have difficulties in their relationships and managing their children's academic pursuits, and have poor mental and physical health (Salin et al. 2020: 2).

Individual differences are important in coping with uncertainty. "While some people can tolerate uncertainty very well, others have difficulties tolerating uncertainty and try to avoid it at best" (Janssen et al. 2020: 3). However, during the Covid-19 process, concerns were frequently expressed that being confined to home in almost all families could lead to more tension, irritability, family conflicts, and domestic violence or child abuse (Janssen et al. 2020: 2).

In addition to this pessimistic view, there were also relatively more optimistic approaches. Particularly theologians and some social scientists have emphasized that for some families, spending more time together during a lockdown can bring family members closer and develop a sense of well-being. Accordingly, moving the work to home, which has started to be talked about more with the pandemic, and the development of flexible working conditions can contribute positively to parent-child relations; parents can spend more time with their children. Although the Covid-19 process has created disruption in certain areas, it “might have brought with it many opportunities that could address the fragility of family relations and communication” (Ahmed et al. 2020: 332). According to this approach, the global practice of staying-at-home during the Covid-19 process can be a great chance to re-establish, strengthen or preserve family ties that have weakened over the years. In this context, quality time activities with family members play an important role. “Physical distancing gave many people and especially youth more opportunities to change their perception about social life by acknowledging the importance of spending time together with their family first before their friends. The long-time of family gathering built new relationships that brought a positive environment and made many children feel happier, safer and more relaxed during this experience” (Ahmed et al. 2020: 333-34; Szabo et al. 2020).

Now it is clear that spending more time at home is read by some as a positive potential and by some others as a potential with various risks. Of course, the Covid-19 crisis will not affect all families equally. It is important which family is mentioned here. As a matter of fact, it can be said that the rate of work that can be carried home and working hours that can be arranged flexible remains around 20-25% in the employment world (Livingstone 2020); so even if it is accepted as an advantage, a relatively small group can benefit from this advantage.

It is necessary to consider the predictions about the negative effects of Covid-19 on the mental health of individuals, together with the transformation of business and working life in the global capitalist system. Many studies have been carried out in this context before Covid-19. For example, in the 1990s, Sennett drew attention to the fact that capital had the opportunity to organize more flexibly than ever before in the global capitalist system, and argued that this situation led to the flexibility of the production process in every sense, and thus to the flexibility of labor. According to him, flexible working conditions, which change not only the work life but also the daily life practices of the employees, cause some negative consequences on the personality structure of the individual, which can be briefly called “the corrosion of character”. In an environment of extreme competition, in which “the winner takes everything” logic is

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created within this new capitalist organization, productivity increases to an incredible extent, but high levels of anxiety and stress are produced among the employees along with "the specter of uselessness" (Sennett 1998; 2006). It is necessary to accept that this anxiety and stress, which had already started to become widespread before the pandemic, has become even more common among many employees and their families who lost their jobs, risk losing their jobs or lose part of their income during the pandemic process. However, it can be predicted that the said anxiety and stress will continue after the pandemic. That is because the main source of this anxiety and stress is not the Covid-19 pandemic, but the transformation of business and working life in the global capitalist system, as Sennett emphasized. For the same reason, xenophobia is on the rise in societies where this transformation makes itself felt the most. Thus, immigrant and asylum-seeking families will be among the families who will experience the anxiety and stress most during and after the Covid-19 process.

c) Situation of Children and Young People⁴

The literature focused on Covid-19 predicts that although the pandemic does not affect children and young people medically, it will affect them indirectly. Accordingly, especially during the periods when closure policies were implemented, Covid-19 generally affected children's physical activities and triggered longer screen times, irregular sleep patterns, less favorable diets, intolerance to rules and mood changes (Salin et al. 2020: 2). It is predicted that the above-mentioned anxiety and stress may reduce the quality of parent-child interactions, which in turn may increase socio-emotional or behavioral problems in children (Kalil et al. 2020: 4). As a matter of fact, a joint commission of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, which takes these and similar risk trends into account, expresses the effects of Covid-19 on especially vulnerable children as follows:

Projections suggest that over a million preventable child deaths might occur due to decreased access to food and disruption of essential health services. Children risk missing out on growth monitoring, preventive care, and timely management of acute disease and injuries. Some children are experiencing reduced access to social service referrals while suffering from increased rates of domestic violence.

Children's futures are at risk, especially those who are poor, female, disabled, Indigenous, from racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, or are otherwise vulnerable in unequal societies. Among the children who make up more than half of the world's refugees, the shocks engendered by COVID-19 are especially dire. The UN Committee

⁴ There are many analyzes on the effects of Covid-19 on vulnerable groups, including children and youth. For example, Altindal (2020) offers sociological analyzes on the effects of Covid-19 on women, minorities, Roma, refugees and the elderly. Each of these groups is important, but this study limits the discussion to children and young people.

on the Rights of the Child warned that COVID-19 poses grave threats to children's rights, and the pandemic has been used as a pretext to circumvent laws and treaties designed to protect children—eg, the US order in March, 2020, that allows expulsion of unaccompanied children who are “from a country where a communicable disease exists” (The WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission 2020: 298-99).

On the other hand, in terms of the effects of Covid-19, one of the most emphasized segments is the youth. It is claimed that Covid-19 will have profound impacts on young people especially regarding the quantity and quality of education offered to young people, employment opportunities, partnership behaviors, etc. as well as in many other areas. In this context, special attention is drawn to the fact that COVID-19 hinders continuing education for more than 1.5 billion children and young people. In this process, although the children of wealthier families had the opportunity to continue their education with digital tools, poor children and youth were deprived of it. Poor children and youth, who have had to experience a serious learning gap, lag behind their wealthier peers in all countries (The WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission 2020: 298). This situation is expected to affect the youth in the job market after the pandemic as well. According to Schwandt & Wachter (2020: 4), “not only will the COVID-19 recession give new entrants to the job market a rocky start to their careers, it will also put them at risk to make less money for decades, commit more crimes, have less satisfying family lives, and maybe even die earlier than luckier job seekers. That's the bleak conclusion emerging from an expanding arena of research into the long-term effects of entering the job market in a recession.”

As another possible impact of Covid-19 on young people, partnership behaviors are also frequently emphasized. Accordingly, “young adults faced with blocked opportunities, and especially the lower educated, might prefer cohabitation to marriage due to its lower level of commitment and due to its more uncertain nature. Alternatively, they might decide to postpone marriage until they are more optimistic about their prospects” (Guetto et al. 2021: 5684). However, the decision to choose living together instead of marriage, to postpone marriage or to remain single, has long been taken for granted in many societies as a result of women's greater involvement in paid employment, the disintegration of patriarchal values and individualization processes, as mentioned above with reference to Giddens and Beck.

These analyzes focusing on the effects of Covid-19 on children and youth in the context of education, employment and impoverishment are in essence reflections of the literature on social inequalities and thus do not offer any new arguments. As a matter of fact, suggestions such as strengthening the understanding of the social state, improving social service opportunities and encouraging and supporting social solidarity mechanisms, as commonly seen

in the social inequalities literature, are offered for the solution of the problems considered as the consequences of Covid-19.

CONCLUSIONS: IS COVID-19 A TURNING POINT FOR THE FUTURE OF FAMILY LIFE?

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that a new discourse centered on Covid-19 is being produced. This new discourse offers various projections from family life to the future of socio-economic, cultural and political life. Despite the fact that we do not yet have enough robust data to support such projections, the emergence of such a discourse requires an explanation.

It is understood that in this new discourse, Covid-19 is presented as a 'turning point' as if it has created revolutionary effects in human history. Although a small amount of studies draw attention to the positive effects of Covid-19 on intra-familial relations, the Covid-19-centered discourse mainly paints a pessimistic picture, and is shown as causing a serious change and transformation in many areas of life, including the family. Aiming to discuss what extent so-called effects of Covid-19 are truly direct results of Covid-19, this paper argued that presenting Covid-19 as a turning point is not appropriate at least in terms of family life.

In an environment of risk and uncertainty linked to Covid-19; anxiety and stress among family members is associated with a decrease in marriages, increased divorce rates, increased cohabitation, lower fertility rates, a more egalitarian shift in family roles, and an increasing risk of job and income losses. Opinions and concerns claiming that mental health problems will arise and that automation and digitalization processes will radically transform consumption, communication, socialization and various routine activities in families are becoming widespread both in the academic world and in the public.

On the contrary of the emerging new discourse, this study showed that transformations and related debates mentioned on the basis of the pre-Covid-19 literature have already been taking place in many societies for a long time. Of course, saying this does not imply that Covid-19 has no effect at all; it simply means that the new discourse on the effects of Covid-19 on family life does not actually put forward a new argument, does not make a new projection of the future. If this is the case, then why is there the impression that a new discourse is actually emerging? This paper argues that such an impression is created mainly because Covid-19 appears to be a perfect tool to be used as a scapegoat for the problems of the restructured order of global capitalism.

The transformations in family life allegedly caused by Covid-19 are actually the results of the social inequalities and the tensions between family and work life, both factors been deepened by the neoliberal policies that have gained global dominance since the 1980s. Covid-19 plays the role of a catalyst, in other words, an intermediate variable, which greatly accelerates the process. However, being associated with an environment of risk and uncertainty, the apparently new discourse on Covid-19 has two important functions:

- a) The function of legitimizing and/or masking the aforementioned tensions and inequalities, albeit indirectly, by indexing them to a so-called nature-based objective factor, such as Covid-19, although in reality they are the consequences of the order established by men.
- b) The function of the compulsory and rapid internalization, by the society, of a transformation and of ‘the new normality’ that has already begun at least a few decades ago.

In the face of these controversial functions, it is obviously necessary to be sensitive about the use of this discourse and to deal with the issue in its holistic way. Although the emergence of pandemics is associated with factors like population density, industrialization, urbanization, poverty and mobility in the emergence of pandemics is emphasized (Uzun & Oğlakcı 2020: 76-84), it can be argued that the main problem is not Covid-19. There may be Covid-19 today, Covid-25 tomorrow, a major earthquake or other national or global disasters the next day. The main problem is the type of social organization that deepens inequalities and ignores preparedness for disasters.

Because of and despite this main problem, individuals of the 21st century will find various options related to family life and lifestyles different from previous generations and/or will produce new options. Each of these options will be evaluated in terms of advantages or insecurity, dilemmas and contradictions presented by the changing socio-economic and cultural conditions and will be used by actors of different profiles. It is highly possible that these options will be manipulated by the capitalist elite as usual. In any case, pluralism will be the dominant character in the family life of the 21st century.

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