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CONTENTS

Research Article

Working and Living Conditions of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Istanbul during the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Adviye Damla ÜNLÜ BEKTAŞ[1] (iD), Berrin OKTAY YILMAZ[2] (iD), Hakan BEKTAŞ[3] (iD)

[1]Asst. Prof. Dr., Istanbul University, Faculty of Political Science, Department of Political Science and International Relations, İstanbul, Türkiye
[2]Asst. Prof. Dr., Istanbul University, Faculty of Political Science, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, İstanbul, Türkiye
[3]Assoc. Prof. Dr., Istanbul University, Faculty of Economics, Department of Econometrics, İstanbul, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Adviye Damla Ünlü Bektaş
E-mail : damla.unlu@istanbul.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

In the context of increasing international migration, the destructive force of the pandemic has been evident in the closure of borders and disruptions to travel plans, affecting millions of migrants worldwide. The economic and social consequences have deeply impacted vulnerable social groups such as women, migrants and precarious workers, further intensifying the 'care crisis'. Women migrant domestic workers, constituting a significant proportion of international migrant workers, have found themselves particularly vulnerable while grappling with challenges such as health risks and economic and social impacts. In this context, this study explores the multifaceted impact of COVID-19 on the working and living conditions of women migrant domestic workers. The methodology employed a qualitative approach, with insights derived from in-depth interviews with 12 migrant domestic workers in Istanbul. The findings confirm precarious conditions and highlight deepening issues related to COVID-19. This reveals that their already precarious situation, characterized by low wages, job insecurity and inadequate access to protective equipment and health services, has been exacerbated by the pandemic. This article emphasizes the need to address the broader care crisis intensified by the pandemic.

Keywords: Crisis of Care, COVID-19, Migrant Domestic Workers, Pandemic, Women

1. Introduction

Migration movements have various effects on countries of origin and destinations of migrants. Movements that contribute to both communities must be supported by appropriate policies, have positive consequences for migrants and their families, and contribute to the development and growth of countries of origin and destination. When supported by well-designed policies and decent living and working conditions, migrants contribute to countries' economies in the care economy, agriculture, construction, and similar areas. However, deficiencies in migration governance systems, discrimination, stigmatization, and xenophobia in receiving countries affect the working and living conditions of precarious migrants (Ohndorf, 1989; Papademetriou, 1978). In addition to these adverse conditions, the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic deeply affected vulnerable social groups such as women, migrants and precarious workers on the one hand and increased gender-based inequalities on the other. Throughout the pandemic, especially with the implementation of closures and curfews, women migrant domestic workers have been subjected to multiple forms of discrimination (Kabeer et al., 2021; Sumalatha et al., 2021). From this general perspective, this study examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working and living conditions of women migrant domestic workers. The study asks how these conditions have changed for women migrant domestic workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the number of international migrants worldwide was 173 million in 2000, it reached 281 million globally in 2020, with nearly two-thirds being labor migrants (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2022, p. 40). The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed the growth of international migrants by around two million people in mid-2020. One significant reason was the closure of national borders and the severe disruption of international travel. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of people voluntarily or compulsorily canceled their plans to move abroad (United Nations [UN], 2020, p. 5). In this case, some migrants could not return to their countries, while others had to return to their countries earlier than planned when job opportunities were exhausted and schools were closed. However, migrants who have completed their migration movements have been among the vulnerable groups most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as personal, social, or structural factors make them more susceptible to crises.

Furthermore, they have been particularly vulnerable to the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19, as in many other crises. In this context, changes have occurred in the working and living conditions of migrants around the world, including difficulties in avoiding infection, "receiving adequate health care, coping with the economic, social, and psychological impacts of the pandemic, and a lack of consideration of their cultural and linguistic diversity in service delivery", limited access to rights and participation in host communities in narrow local information networks and often concerning migration situations (Kluge et al., 2020). In addition, the pattern of migrants' exclusion from the host country's welfare systems has had an impact during COVID-19, and their ability to travel between their origin countries and destination countries has been significantly affected by border closures (Guadagno, 2020).

Women domestic workers are generally vulnerable to informality, insecurity, unrecognition, and the invisible nature of domestic labor. Informal contracts, irregular work, exploitative and undefined wages, working conditions, and legal loopholes make working conditions precarious. In addition, through the lens of intersectionality, factors such as age, immigrant identity, and ethnicity reinforce the structural problems that women face as domestic workers and create a situation of multiple discrimination. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) data, there have been 169 million international migrant workers worldwide as of 2019, 58.5 percent of whom are women (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2021a, p. 11-12). In the distribution of male and female migrant workers by economic activity category, it is seen that 79.9% of female migrant workers work in the service sector, 14.2% in industry, and 5.9% in agriculture (ILO, 2021a, p. 24). Among the reasons that migrant women predominantly work in the service sector is the increasing demand for labor in the care economy, including health and housework (ILO, 2018, p. 16). The ILO estimates the number of domestic workers at 67 million worldwide and adds that 75% of this number is informal (ILO, 2020a, p. 1). However, it should be noted that the intensity of informality, the lack of a clear job description for domestic work, and the unpaid and invisible structure of domestic labor, which are closely related to gender inequality, are significant obstacles to accessing reliable data. Although gender inequality and informality are among the leading causes of the problems experienced by migrant domestic workers, these problems have deepened in the context of COVID-19 (Fong & Yeoh, 2020; Lui et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures, increased needs for children, the elderly, and sick care, and constraints on access to commercially procured consumer goods and services have led to an unprecedented increase in demand for care work (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2020a). In this case, essential workers have played a crucial role, and the importance of this role in the fight against COVID-19 has been underlined, even described as heroes by the public (Pandey et al., 2021). In this process, the fundamental contradiction between the necessity of domestic workers' labor and their precarious working and living conditions has become more

acute (Acciari et al., 2021). Therefore, it is appropriate to describe domestic workers as "expendable essential workers" whose work is demanded but not paid fairly (Pandey et al., 2021, p. 1287).

From a broader perspective, one could argue that the peak of the crisis of care, which has been ongoing for many years, has been reached with the COVID-19 pandemic. Chatzidakis et al. (2020) highlighted the crisis of care, the absence of care (less care delivery and less care received), and the urgency of a policy that focuses on care because of the wrong policies pursued on the axis of neoliberalism. Equitable distribution of care and prevention of the identification of paid care for women, the poor, and immigrants are the first steps of a radical transformation to get out of the care crisis. In the near future, the importance of social policies for care workers is expected to continue to increase with population growth worldwide, aging societies, and strengthening women's position in the labor market. Global inequality is expected to increase the supply of women in care work in low-income countries (Toksöz, 2021, p. 104-105). These future projections require a review of the working and living conditions of migrant domestic workers in the context of the feminization of migration and the global care chain. From this perspective, the study was conducted in a specific context to shed light on the experiences and challenges faced by migrant domestic workers living in Istanbul during COVID-19.

The next section presents the concepts of feminization of migration and global care chains, which brings together studies on the experiences of women migrant domestic workers and forms the conceptual framework of the study.

2. Feminization of Migration and Global Care Chains

Studies on the feminization of migration, which emerged in the 1980s, have become part of migration literature for many years. However, the migration movement of these women was much older than in the 1980s, and the number of women who migrated did not increase significantly in the 1980s; for instance, there was no significant increase in the percentage of women migrants between 1960 and 2005 (Donato & Gabaccia, 2015). Therefore, the concept of feminization of migration should not lead to the perception that women have not participated in the migration movement. From this perspective, Christou and Koffman (2022, p. 4) emphasize "the need to distinguish the feminization of migration and the feminization of the migratory discourse" in which women are conceptualized as actors of migration. However, it is possible to state that economic policies mainly affected the migration movement of women in the 1980s.

In the 1980s, neoliberal policies transformed the Global South into economies dominated by high poverty levels, social inequalities, unemployment, and informality. With this transformation, global wage disparities have led women to migrate because of economic problems. The rise of production based on flexible and cheap labor has been another factor driving migration; this has increased the demand for migrant women's work. This demand has led to the employment of migrant domestic workers in low-wage economic sectors, often without legal protection, in adverse working conditions.

Saskia Sassen (2000) underscored the increasing dependence of societies, governments, and states on the active participation of women in the workforce through a phenomenon she defined as the "feminization of survival." As a result, the burden of conditions necessary for both work and survival increasingly falls on the shoulders of migrant women who suffer from low wages, deprivation, and exploitation.

In addition to these economic changes, gender inequalities and discrimination in countries of origin are critical driving forces of women's migration. With the weakening of the welfare state, changes in the traditional family-based care models of countries in the Global North have accelerated the feminization of migration. The aging population and the increasing participation of women in the workforce in certain countries necessitate the procurement of services for the care of children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled. In other words, another effect of the dissolution of the welfare state was the commodification and commercialization of care work (Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2009, p. 281). As a result of the gender-based division of labor, the burden of care services has shifted from upper-middle-class women to lower-class immigrant women in certain countries (Toksöz & Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2012, p. 90). This process in which the responsibility of care work is passed from one woman to another is defined as the 'global care chain/network' (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003).

The manner in which families delegate caregiving responsibilities differs based on their position within global care chains. In less affluent households in their origin countries, the approach involves mothers migrating abroad to engage in care work, necessitating a restructuring of domestic arrangements. Conversely, wealthier families in target countries prefer imported labor (Yeates, 2005). From this perspective, care chains are dependent on inequalities rather than correcting the unequal distribution of labor, which perpetuates these inequalities.

Care work is delegated to women of another social class, immigrant status, or ethnicity. In this case, the employment of migrant domestic workers in precarious and low-paid jobs reproduces gender dynamics (Maulik & Petrozziello,

2016) and gender, race, and class inequalities (Rodriguez, 2010; Onuki, 2011; Romero, 2018). From this perspective, this study documents the experiences of migrant domestic workers, the main actors in care chains that reproduce structural inequalities, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Methodology

This study has a qualitative research design that deals with the impact of COVID-19 on the working and living conditions of women migrant domestic workers in Istanbul. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 12 women migrant domestic workers. An interview guide was developed, which included sociodemographic characteristics (age, place of residence, marital status, number of children, education level, length of stay in Türkiye) and focused on the subjects of migration experiences (living conditions before arriving in Türkiye, why and how she decided to migrate, what she experienced during the migration, her expectations from Türkiye), working and living conditions before COVID-19 and during COVID-19. Interviews took place between February and May 2022 through face-to-face and online meetings. They lasted for approximately 40 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Ethics approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Istanbul University. The thematic analysis used in the analysis of the research data was carried out in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis approach. In this context, the initial stage of the thematic analysis involved familiarization with the data collected during the transcription process. This was followed by the generation of initial codes, the search for themes, and the review, definition, and naming of the themes. Finally, the research findings were written. Transcription, literal reading, and thematic analysis were conducted using MAXQDA (2020-VERBI Software).

Table 1. General Characteristics of Participants

	Nationality	**National Origin**	**Age**	**Education**	**Marital Status**	**Number of Children**	**Length of Stay in Türkiye (Years)**
Participant 1	Philippine	Philippine	38	Bachelor	Married	2	2
Participant 2	Philippine	Philippine	38	Bachelor	Married	3	9
Participant 3	Philippine	Philippine	38	High School	Single	-	6
Participant 4	Turkmenistan	Turkmenistan	30	High School	Single	-	10
Participant 5	Turkmenistan	Turkmenistan	50	High School	Widowed	2	3
Participant 6	Philippine	Philippine	55	Bachelor	Divorced	3	29
Participant 7	Turkmenistan	Turkmenistan	55	Bachelor	Widowed	2	5
Participant 8	Russian	Daghestani	52	Bachelor	Single	1	23
Participant 9	Turkish	Turkmenistan	49	Bachelor	Divorced	1	18
Participant 10	Turkmenistan	Turkmenistan	39	High School	Married	3	8
Participant 11	Uzbekistani	Uzbekistani	39	Secondary School	Divorced	1	7
Participant 12	Turkmenistan	Turkmenistan	27	Bachelor	Married	2	4

The size of the research population could not be determined because it needs to be clarified due to the prevalence of informal work in domestic work. In the ILO (2021b) calculation using data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) data, it was revealed that there are 221,751 domestic workers in Türkiye. However, the EVID-SEN (2020) report differs from this calculation and estimates that more than one million domestic workers live in Türkiye. Therefore, the total number of domestic workers is unknown, and the proportions of various international workers, such as migrants, are also unknown.

The sample consisted of 12 migrant women aged 27–55 who lived in Istanbul at the time of the interviews. The purposive sampling method was employed with the following inclusion criteria: (1) born in a country other than Türkiye, (2) residing in Istanbul, and (3) working in domestic services (child care, elderly care, cleaning, and other housework). The extent to which migrants are employed in care work differs by city and region. Migrants are likely to contribute more to domestic labor in large cities (Chritou & Koffman, 2022, p. 39). Therefore, the sample comprises migrant domestic workers living and working in Istanbul. Half of the participants (n = 6) were originally from Turkmenistan,

four from the Philippines, one from Dagestan, and one from Uzbekistan. A woman of Dagestan origin is a Russian citizen, and one Turkmenistan woman is a Turkish citizen by marriage. There is a wide variety of length of stay in Türkiye, from 2 years to 29 years. Most women (n = 10) had children. More than half of the women (n = 7) had bachelor's degrees, four high school graduates, and one secondary school graduate.

4. Findings

Women migrant domestic workers have faced unique challenges in their work and private lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following sections, these difficulties are included within the scope of the themes that emerged specifically for women migrant domestic workers living in Istanbul during the pandemic.

4.1. Working and Living Conditions before COVID-19

It is essential to understand the working and living conditions of participants before COVID-19 to examine the impact of the pandemic. From this perspective, the participants provided information about their work experiences before arriving in Türkiye, the migration process, and their relations with their families.

Most of the participants had work experience before their work in Türkiye. Three Filipino women have previously worked in care work in countries such as Hong Kong, Qatar, Kuwait, and Cyprus. Although two participants did not have any work experience before the care work in Türkiye, the remaining participants worked in jobs other than care work (such as farming, teaching, sales, and marketing) in their hometowns.

All participants stated that they came to Türkiye for economic reasons. Friends, relatives, or acquaintances living in Türkiye influenced their migration decisions. Filipino women said that European countries were their first choice because working conditions were better in Europe, and they came to Türkiye because they could not travel to those countries. Another factor affecting migration decisions is the lack of job opportunities in their hometowns, especially for Turkmen women. Two Turkmen women said that after their husbands died, they decided to migrate to pay off their debts and have their children educated. Again, Turkmen women stated that they had to choose between Istanbul and Moscow but preferred Istanbul because they thought it was better than Moscow. However, the limited job opportunities of migrant women in their hometowns and economic reasons are only one dimension of the feminization of migration, as are gender norms based on various social forces that encourage women to migrate (Akalın, 2007). In addition, social networks have been revealed to play a prominent role in migration decisions, provide immigrants "access to information, for instance, about jobs and conditions at their destination, and act as a safety net for migrants by providing financial or social support" (Blumenstock et al., 2022). This study also revealed that women's friends, relatives, and acquaintances living in Istanbul influenced their migration decisions. However, these networks cannot prevent them from experiencing certain difficulties during the early stages of migration. These difficulties included the cost of visa procedures, language problems, problems with intermediary companies, exposure to violence by the employer's family, and seizure of passports. Participant 4 was exposed to violence for three years: "the bosses constantly threatened me for three years, I was constantly insulted" (Participant 4). Another participant stated that the biggest problem she faced was language: "I could not understand what the employer was saying. I was constantly going out on the balcony and crying" (Participant 9). Participant 11, who stated that she could not get paid for a month, used the following expression while describing the other difficulties she faced: "Employers are taking away the passport. You cannot apply anywhere; even if you do, they will send you back" (Participant 11). Except for the Turkmenistan participant with Turkish citizenship by marriage, the participants stated that they did not have a work permit in Türkiye and provided vague information about their residence permits. This situation peculiar to migrant domestic workers has caused them to feel insecure, continue working despite difficulties in their working and living conditions, and develop various coping strategies. Nevertheless, most participants stated that their migration experiences strengthened them: "Now, I think about how I got on the plane and got there without fear. Now I manage my family, and they all listen to me. I also act as the head of the family. Even though I am younger than my siblings, they consult me" (Participant 4).

The families and children of most of the women interviewed were in their hometowns, and the children were taken care of by their spouses, mothers, sisters, mother-in-law, and father-in-law. The children of women who had been working in Türkiye for many years passed in their hometowns until they reached adulthood, and after a certain age, the children came to Türkiye. The spouses of two of the four married participants are in their hometowns, and two are in Türkiye. Women with children send a significant portion of their income to their children and family members who care for them. Most of them stated that they came to Türkiye to provide better living for their children and siblings. Participant 4 said that she was sent to Türkiye based on his brother's decision because there was no job in Turkmenistan, and while talking about her future plans, she stated the following:

I could not save anything. When I say I could not save, there are many things that I can help my family. If I work for him for five more years, I can come back... I always say that after working for ten years, nothing I get is nothing. Because bosses give you clothes, you wear them. They buy gifts, for example, on holidays. I have never taken anything of my own (Participant 4).

Participant 12, whose children were with her, stated that she sent half of her income to her family to build a house in her hometown. In this respect, all women in Türkiye send a large part of their income to their families and state that their purpose is to achieve this. Therefore, living conditions in Türkiye are arranged so that residents can save as much as possible. For example, most women live in shared houses. Two women whose families are in Türkiye live with their family members. Women working for and living with their employers share the expenses of their place on their leave days with their friends. Moreover, a woman stays with her employer's family 24/7, without a home of her own.

The migration experiences of the participants and their working and living conditions before COVID-19 reveal the insecurity of migrant domestic workers. What they conveyed during the COVID-19 period revealed three themes: reduction in income, financial hardship, increased workload, mental/physical health problems, and access to appropriate care.

4.2. Reduction in Income and Financial Hardship

During the interviews, most women stated that they had financial problems due to COVID-19. COVID-19 and Türkiye-specific economic problems caused women's income to decrease and delay salary payments. It should be noted that there was a differentiation between the incomes of migrant domestic workers according to nationality. For instance, while the average income of Filipino women was 1000 dollars and above, that of Turkmen, Uzbek, and Dagestan women was 300 dollars. Filipino women explain their higher wages than women of different nationalities because they speak English and are prone to childcare. However, most participants performed cleaning and cooking in addition to cleaning and cooking as well as taking care of children and the elderly.

On the other hand, Filipino women stated that they only cared for their children, and if necessary, they cooked for their children. In this case, Filipino women have lower work intensity and a higher income. However, the economic effects of COVID-19 and rising living costs affected all women. Filipino domestic workers stated that because they receive their salaries in foreign currency, they are adversely affected by the economic problems experienced by COVID-19 as a result of their employers being affected, and even delays in their payments occur (Participant 1). A Filipino woman (Participant 6) who expressed her economic hardship stated that she could not visit the Philippines and visit her family because of the pandemic. The main reason for this is that the price of plane tickets has significantly increased.

A Turkmen woman who previously worked in more than one place stated that 'she had to work at a house in one place due to COVID-19 and that she worked only for the rent and bill of the house where she did not live for six months' and she mentioned that many women went to different countries, such as Poland and Russia when the borders opened due to Türkiye's increasing living costs (Participant 4). Women whose working conditions were adversely affected sought ways to cope with their deteriorating living conditions, as they had nowhere to go since. For instance, Turkmenistan implemented one of the most striking examples of border policies. Although Turkmenistan has not reported any COVID-19 cases, it has closed its borders for two years without government permission. Many Turkmen migrants abroad could not return to their homes and also could not work in their home countries because their visas expired. This situation has also had consequences for families of Turkmen migrants living in Turkmenistan. This border policy has had significant effects on migrant workers working abroad. These people have not been able to return to their countries, and at the same time, their visas have expired. However, it has also affected households in Turkmenistan, as family members working abroad experienced job losses and financial difficulties due to COVID-19 (Schweitzer, 2022).

People got into debt, got sick, and even died... we tried to help each other. Sometimes they send money from home. So they sent back the money I had sent home before. I could not send money to my children (Participant 11).

Another country where policies to combat COVID-19 caused a decrease in remittances was Uzbekistan (ILO, 2020b). The Uzbek participant in this study also stated that she had difficulties meeting basic needs with her other Uzbek friends during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, there were interruptions in remittances to their families. The same participant stated that she had to share the same house with seven people in this process; she tried to cover the food expenses of all the people in the place with what she earned through daily work when possible and that they sometimes survived these bad days by fasting.

In the case of migrant domestic workers, the reduction in income and job loss affected the remittances that many families survive (ILO, 2022). For instance, the decline in remittances in Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, including Uzbekistan, where remittances represent 15% of GDP, has significantly impacted the households of the sending countries (UNDP, 2020b). Confirming the work of the UNDP and ILO, this study also shows that the

pandemic has affected women migrant domestic workers' working and living conditions and transnational families in terms of remittances. After these difficulties and in this economic context, the participants, whose primary purpose was to transfer their income to their families, stated that they were planning to return to their countries soon or to work in countries with higher income opportunities. In other words, their COVID-19 experiences in Türkiye affected their future plans and caused them to look for better opportunities.

4.3. Increased Workload

As a result of the increase in the severity of the pandemic, the mobility of people has been restricted by government measures. This situation has had two different consequences on domestic workers' working conditions. Daily domestic workers were at risk of losing their jobs. Domestic workers living with their employers have been prohibited from leaving their homes on their days off. This change in working conditions has led to an increase in the workload of employees. Women living with their employers during the COVID-19 pandemic stated that their workload increased.

It was very difficult. The family I worked for did not allow me to go out. The children were also always at home; I was very tired (Participant 6).

The lack of leave days and the obligation to stay at the employer's home have profoundly affected the social lives of employees. Participants emphasized the stress created by not being able to socialize.

It was so stressful with COVID-19; we could not go out. We did not have a day off, which made me very stressed. Because I go to church every day; it takes my stress away. I can go to Church and pray, etc. But when COVID-19 arrived, even though the Church was closed, there was no place to go. The hardest part was that you had to stay; sometimes there were guests, and it was tiring and stressful (Participant 2).

He makes me work until 1 am because he is paying for it. It is 01:30 when you go to bed and 07:30 when you wake up (Participant 11).

The statements of the participants regarding the increased workload confirmed previous studies on migrant domestic workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Diego-Cordero et al. (2022), in their study with migrant caregivers living in Spain, revealed that domestic workers who perform care work are not limited to this job alone; they can be responsible for the entire house, which increases their workload. In this study, too, the participants mentioned the increase in workload, and moreover, they defined this situation as stress-inducing due to continuous work without any personal leisure time or socialization.

4.4. Mental/Physical Health and Access to Appropriate Care

Another consequence of being banned from leaving the house on days off is that migrant domestic workers feel stressed, tired, depressed, and exhausted. Compared with other international migrants (for example, international students), international migrant workers face more barriers to accessing healthcare in host countries, mainly domestic workers. They usually have more mental problems and a lower quality of life than the local population, and it was predicted that with the pandemic, this could worsen (Liem et al., 2020). One of the early studies showed that the pandemic significantly contributed to the anxiety symptoms of female migrant domestic workers (Yeung et al., 2020). Documenting the mental health narratives of migrant domestic workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, Kaur-Gill et al. also (2021) noted how mental health is negotiated amid conflicts in the performance of precarious labor and found that with COVID-19, the mental health and well-being of migrant workers are disabled.

The psychological impact of COVID-19 on migrant domestic workers can be considered in two dimensions. The first is the direct effect of disease and disease risk on individuals. The second category is the indirect effects caused by changes in employees' relations with their employers, working conditions, and private lives. One of the issues raised by most participants was that they were perceived by their employers as potential carriers of COVID-19. A few participants stated that their families kept information regarding their COVID-19 status from them. Participant 8 noted that an individual she cared for had COVID-19, but they did not take the patient to the hospital despite her insistence. She eventually felt ill: "What is there to hide in that?" If you don't tell me now, I'm going home on my day off; I'll infect my son" (Participant 8).

In addition to the risk of being infected and the discrimination they were exposed to in this regard, the unregistered and insecure work of many domestic workers in Türkiye led to the fact that they could not benefit from the support packages announced by the government and could not receive appropriate health services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hospital fees are among the most critical obstacles for employees seeking healthcare services. The vast majority of participants stated that they have residence permits, but they cannot benefit from health services free of charge because they do not have a work permit. A few domestic workers stated that their employers covered their health expenses during the COVID-19 pandemic, while the majority said they did not receive health services. As a result, the lack

of appropriate access to health services and care has reinforced the precarious situation that makes migrant domestic workers dependent on their employers.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This article describes the working and living conditions of women migrant domestic workers during COVID-19. Findings confirmed the precarious working and living conditions of migrant domestic workers before the pandemic and highlighted their worsening during the pandemic. Low wages, increasing job insecurity, lack of overtime pay, lack of adequate personal protective equipment, and insufficient rest are among the problems domestic workers face during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reductions in income, financial hardship, increased workload, and difficulties in mental/physical health and access to appropriate care came to the fore in the scope of this study.

The difficulties they face are closely related to the unregistered and insecure working conditions of women migrant domestic workers. However, these features have posed significant challenges during the pandemic. Undocumented migrant domestic workers have been excluded from the country's welfare regime and cannot access care. Domestic workers living in shared houses could not even go to these houses, had to stay at their employers' houses with heavy workloads, and could not get paid for overtime.

Moreover, they had to accept these difficult conditions with fear of losing their jobs and income. Migrant domestic workers' experiences of inequality stem from their migrant status. This status makes them more vulnerable and dependent on their employers (Anderson, 2007), resulting in their exclusion from benefits, healthcare, and other social welfare benefits. This situation has been reinforced during the pandemic by health risks, job loss, and insecurity (Vilog & Piacos III, 2021).

Regarding the deteriorating conditions, the COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the future plans of domestic workers. Due to the challenging living conditions in Türkiye amid the pandemic, they are making plans to go to Europe, where working conditions are better. In Türkiye, on the other hand, there is a need to increase the supply to meet the demand for care work. Due to the inability to collect regular data in Türkiye, there is not enough standard information on the number, migration processes, and working conditions of those who migrated to Türkiye and worked in domestic services (Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2009, p. 505). Because domestic work is perceived as a low-status and heavy-duty business, it is not attractive to the domestic workforce, and migrant domestic workers predominantly perform residential housework. In this situation, the acceptance of the migrant workforce in Türkiye to serve with low wages and harsh working conditions has increased the demand for the migrant workforce (Uğur & Yanık, 2016, p. 74). The high demand for migrant labor, especially in domestic work, is accompanied by low-pay and insecure working conditions. On the other hand, this system is valid for domestic workers in Türkiye, regardless of whether they are migrants. In general terms, problems include the prevalence of unregistered work in the working system of domestic workers, the fact that domestic workers are outside the scope of the Labor Law and Occupational Health and Safety Laws, uncertainties regarding working hours, leave and rest rights, the absence of wage standards, employer violence and the lack of supervision by intermediary consultancy companies.

The experiences of women migrant domestic workers in Türkiye indicate that the care crisis has reached a peak during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the policies pursued until now need to be corrected. Making the necessary legal arrangements to improve the working conditions of domestic workers in Türkiye will be the first step to correct these policies. Convention No. 189 has not yet been ratified by Türkiye yet. The International Labor Conference adopted the Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers (Domestic Workers Convention No. 189) and a Recommendation (No. 201) in supplementing it in 2011 (ILO, 2011). To ensure that domestic workers have access to decent jobs and enjoy social protection rights, both documents contain explicit provisions for migrant domestic workers. The disapproval of Convention No. 189 is an essential obstacle for all domestic workers in Türkiye to achieve decent work and thus social rights. A global crisis such as COVID-19 has demonstrated the urgency of ratifying the ILO Convention (189) and has increased demands for it. However, what is necessary to combat the care crisis is to prevent the identification of paid care for women, the poor, and migrants. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the value of essential workers in general and domestic workers in particular at the discursive level, this study and other studies show the adverse impact of the pandemic on the working and living conditions of domestic workers and the contradiction between the discourse and policies. In contrast, the value of care work has increased on the one hand, and the depth of the care crisis has increased on the other. Therefore, improving working conditions and, consequently, the living standards of migrant domestic workers in the context of decent work and establishing policies that foster resilience against crises like COVID-19 require rethinking the global crisis of care and developing policies to combat it.

ORCID :

Adviye Damla ÜNLÜ BEKTAŞ	0000-0002-5902-4096
Berrin OKTAY YILMAZ	0000-0002-4572-2731
Hakan BEKTAŞ	0000-0002-7856-2674

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How cite this article

Research Article

The Effect of Psychological Contract Breach on Organizational Silence: The Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital

Fatma Merve DURDAĞ[1] , Atılhan NAKTİYOK[2]

[1]Oltu Vocational School, Atatürk University, Erzurum, Türkiye
[2]Atatürk University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Management and Organization, Erzurum, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Fatma Merve Durdağ
E-mail : merve.durdag@atauni.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of psychological capital in the relationship between perceptions of psychological contract breach and organizational silence. According to the results of the analysis, changes in psychological capital play an important role in the effect of psychological contract breach perception on defensive silence. Additionally, the sample was divided into 3 clusters according to psychological capital levels through cluster analysis to determine the regulatory effects of psychological capital. For each cluster, the effects of psychological contract breach perception on the independent variables of acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial silence were examined. As a result of the cluster analysis, it was observed that psychological contract breach perception caused a significant decrease in all types of silence (acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial) for the group with medium-level psychological capital. Psychological contract breach perception (PCB) at all capital levels (high, medium, and low) has been shown to reduce prosocial silence. These findings provided valuable information about psychological capital and its level, which is a unique resource for organizations.

Keywords: Psychological Contract Breach, Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, Prosocial Silence, Psychological Capital

1. Introduction

When employees' expectations are considered within the framework of psychological contracts in today's business environment, where change is important, employees no longer see their employers as loyal custodians. On the other hand, organizations avoid offering long-term employment opportunities to their employees and think that their employees work to ensure their career development (Allen, 2009). It can be said that the concept has changed based on the expectations and priorities of employees from their organizations during this period. Thus, based on this change, we conclude that the concept of psychological contract breach, which is an abstract link between organizations and employees, has gained importance.

Psychological contract is a concept that demonstrates that the expectations of all employees and managers in an organization are met (Buranapin, 2007) and that loyalty, Kingshott et al. (2020), and trust are established between the parties. However, the contract parties do (and can) not always fulfill their obligations and promises. The total negative perception of employees who feel that their promised promises are not fulfilled is called psychological contract breach (Kiefer and Briner, 2006). Considering that promises made and unpaid debts in an employment relationship between an employee and employer are the foundation of this relationship, the concept of psychological contract emerges as an important phenomenon. The importance of the promises made in relationships becomes visible in Shakespeare's words: "A promise given is an unpaid debt" (Hamel, 2009).

An individual can change his/her attitude or behavior toward work depending on whether the promises made according to the psychological contract are fulfilled or not. Studies show that the occurrence of breach perception leads to low performance (Patrick, 2008), an intention to leave the job, and a decrease in organizational commitment (Gong & Sims, 2023: Luthans, Youssef, Avolio, 2007). In addition, employees may experience a decrease in their productivity level due to these negative affections they experience, they may abuse information, organizational resources, and working time, and they can be arbitrary about overtime (Gruys &Sackett, 2003). Thus, many positive behaviors, such as trust, which is the foundation of an employment relationship, decrease and increase in negative behaviors (Bal, Lange, Jansen, Velde, 2008; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). One of the attitudes or behaviors that can change is the employee's voice/silence. While expressing the individual's dissatisfaction with managerial practices, an employee may choose to either exit or voice the model suggested by Hirschman (1970) (Thomas, Feldman, 2009: Dos Santos et al. 2023). In other words, the individual's reactions to a psychological contract breach can be described as voice and silence (Razzaghian, & Ghani, 2015: Kingshott et al., 2020). The first aim of this study is to reveal the effects of perceptions of psychological contract breach on organizational silence.

Silence is the state of employees withholding their opinions, views, and concerns about organizational problems (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). In this case, employees consciously avoid voicing their thoughts, knowledge, and suggestions (Van Dyne et al. 2003). At this point, the question of "What is the role of psychological capital, which represents individual power and capacity, in a person's choice of silence or voice due to the psychological breach perception, which is an individual perception that varies from one person to another, gains importance. In this study, we aim to address the moderating effect of psychological capital on the relationship between perceptions of psychological contract breach and organizational silence. Psychological capital refers to "who we are" and "what we can be through positive changes" (Luthans, Youssef, Avolio, 2007). At the center of this concept are not only the positive and strengths of individuals but also positive psychological entities necessary to overcome difficulties in life, including stressful and conflictual workplaces (Min, Kim, Lee, 2015). Positive organizational behavior has been considered an important way to decrease negative attitudes, especially in employee behavior (Avey et al., 2008), because employees with positive predictions exhibit more positive attitudes and behaviors, whereas those with negative predictions exhibit more negative attitudes and reactions (Wanous et al., 2000). Depending on the level of psychological capital, individuals' responses to unfulfilled responsibilities, namely, voice, silence, loyalty, and neglect, vary (O'Donohue, Martin, Torugsa, 2015). Accordingly, depending on the level of psychological capital, the relationship between perception of psychological contract breach and organizational silence may differ. The second aim of this study was to verify the moderating model of psychological capital. Therefore, we can contribute to the literature by enriching the understanding of how psychological capital affects employee attitudes and behaviors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological Contract Breach

Psychological contracts are individuals' beliefs that obligations and benefits are mutually exchanged in relationships. A perception of psychological contract breach occurs when the relationship is thought to be out of balance (Topa et al., 2022; Arunachalam, 2020). Psychological contract breach is defined as the total negative perceptions of the employee

regarding the degree of unfulfillment of a psychological contract. In this respect, the organization did not fulfill or keep its promises before the employee (É. Lapointe et al., 2020; Tyagi and Agrawal, 2010). In the literature, it is seen that social exchange theory and equality theory are emphasized for the establishment of healthy psychological contracts between employees and employers. Within this framework, the pursuit of balance and justice gains importance in the relationship between the parties. If individuals do not find a balance in this relationship, their probability of displaying negative behaviors and attitudes will increase (Antonaki & Trivellas, 2014).

2.2. Organizational Silence

Organizational silence is defined as the state of employees withholding their thoughts, opinions, and information about organizational problems from their institutions (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). In the definitions of employee or organizational silence, the three main functions are emphasized, and silence is considered an active and conscious behavior (Kahveci and Demirtaş, 2013). In addition, silence can be used for affirmation, approval, harmony, or overlooking. If the person thinks that (s)he will encounter a risky situation when (s)he speaks or believes that talking will not be beneficial, then (s)he may express his/her disagreement or dissatisfaction in this way (Blackman &Sadler-Smith, 2009). Organizational silence has been addressed under three main headings: acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial (Van Dyne, Ang, Botero, 2003).

1. **Acquiescent Silence:** Refers to an employee's deliberate choice of silence and avoidance of events. In this case, the employee is aware of alternative ways to change their situation, but he or she remains reluctant to resort to these methods (Pinder &Harlos, 2001).
2. **Defensive Silence:** Refers to employees keeping their ideas and opinions to themselves to protect themselves (based on fear). Here, the employee consciously preferred defensive silence as a proactive behavior to protect themselves from external threats. acquiescent silence is more passive, whereas defensive silence is more proactive (Van Dyne, Ang, Botero, 2003).
3. **Prosocial Silence :** Employees avoid expressing their thoughts about their job and skills for the benefit of their colleagues and/or organization with the motive of cooperation. In this case, the motive that drives an employee to silence is the desire to help other employees or the organization (Van Dyne et al., 2003; Westerman, 2008).

2.3. Psychological Capital

Psychological capital refers to a personal entity with situational characteristics and a greater tendency to change than inherent invariant personal characteristics (Luthans et al., 2008). Psychological capital is defined as "the individual's positive psychological progress state" (Luthans et al., 2007b). Therefore, psychological capital can be measured, developed, and managed (Zhao & Hou, 2009). Psychological capital is more permanent than short-term and momentary mental states and tends to change more than inherent constant personal characteristics (Luthans et al., 2008). As a result of studies on psychological capital, it can be seen that four concepts best describe psychological capital. The concepts accepted as dimensions of psychological capital are self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007b; Nelson & Cooper, 2007). Psychological capital (optimism) refers to an individual's prediction of obtaining the most beneficial and positive results (Belcher, 2009); (self-efficacy) refers to believing that the individual has the skills necessary to achieve their goals (Bandura, 1994); (hope) refers to perseverance toward goals to achieve success; and (psychological resilience) represents the positive psychological sources of personality, which has the dimensions of resilience and recovery, when faced with problems and difficulties (Luthans, Youssef et al., 2007).

Although positive psychological capital consists of self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, it is more than the sum of these dimensions (Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2006). The fact that psychological capital is more than the sum of its components can be an example of the formation of synergy from a psychological perspective.

2.4. Psychological Contract Breach and Organizational Silence

As a result of the PCB, the individual becomes silent because he/she is clearly afraid of the negative repercussions of the challenge. In a negative ethical climate, he/she may believe that his/her opinions will not be evaluated by a manager who displays irrelevant attitudes. For example, (s)he may prefer silence to not arouse feelings of revenge in individuals through a decrease in job satisfaction or abnormal behaviors toward an organization. Therefore, the individual would not harm the harmony of group work and would not be noticed by managers (Wang and Hsieh, 2014). He may prefer silence if he thinks that unfair practices or abuse toward employees (Somers, 2009; Morrison and Milliken, 2000). However, the perceived power difference between employees who have to confront unfair attitudes and those who exhibit these

attitudes also affects employees' silence. In institutions where justice (Pinder and Harlos, 2001) and ethical values are ensured, individuals can express themselves comfortably without fear of facing negative consequences or being condemned (Erkutlu & Chafra 2020: Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009). On the other hand, if the individual who experiences psychological contract breach thinks that there is a suitable environment for talking in an organization, (s)he can try to improve their deteriorated relationships by using his/her voice. In this case, the employee expresses her or his dissatisfaction and attempts to understand why the organization has not fulfilled its promises. In other words, individuals expect explanations or hope that the organization will address the current situation (Ruiter, Schalk, Blomme, 2016). If the individual speaks about his/her dissatisfaction and expresses himself/herself, management will have to find remedial alternatives to the situation. However, if the individual thinks that the administration is not making enough effort, (s)he may restrict himself/herself from using his/her voice. Thus, (s)he obtains the perception that what they speak cannot be heard by a deaf ear (Hamel, 2009). Here, the opinion of the individual who has the perception of psychological contract breach plays an important role in their preference for voice or silence with their manager. In other words, it is of great importance to determine whether the breach was committed intentionally or unintentionally. In addition, before the individual decides to speak, they conduct a profit-loss analysis by considering what they will lose or gain and then take action accordingly. If they believe that the breach occurred unintentionally, a desire for empathy and explanation occurs in the individual. However, if the individual believes that the breach was committed deliberately, he/she may want to obtain "compensation" from the psychological contract breach through opposing attitudes. Thus, the employee harms the organization to which they are in and where they experience a breach (Ruiter, Schalk, Blomme, 2016). In other words, individuals with a perception of psychological breach become silent over time or, on the contrary, can express their dissatisfaction by using their voices (Wang & Hsieh, 2014).

Studies conducted to investigate the relationship between psychological contract breach perception and organizational silence show that employees who perceive psychological contract breach prefer to remain silent instead of engage in deviant behavior to obtain revenge (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Ng & Feldman, 2012; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). In other words, it can be seen that there is a negative relationship between psychological contract breach and voice (Suazo, 2002). In a study by Thomas and Feldman (2009), silence behavior was shown to differ according to age and experience. These results indicate that employees who are young and less experienced can defend their rights when faced with breaches, whereas employees who are older and more experienced prefer silence (Thomas & Feldman, 2009).

There are few studies that examine this relationship in terms of the subdimensions of organizational silence. According to the results of these studies, there is a positive and significant relationship between acquiescent silence and the perception of contract breach (Wang & Hsieh, 2014; Riantoputra et al., 2016). However, a significant relationship was not found between defensive silence and the perception of contract breach, which can be explained by the low perception of contract breach (Riantoputra et al., 2016).

Studies demonstrating that psychological contract breaches significantly affect organizational silence have been examined in the previous section. As a result of the evaluation of these studies, organizational silence is affected by the perception of breach of psychological contracts. In other words, it decreases in some cases and increases in other cases depending on individual (age, gender, personality structure, etc.) and organizational (ethical climate, organizational justice, organizational trust, conscious violation, etc.) variables. In light of this information, the following hypotheses were developed.

H1: Employees' perceptions of psychological contract breach affect their organizational silence and the subdimensions of organizational silence, namely, acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial silence. (have different effects)

H1a; Employees' Perceptions of Psychological Contract Breach Affect Their Acquiescent Silence.

H1b; Employees' Perceptions of Psychological Contract Breach Affect Defensive Silences.

H1c; Employees' Perceptions of Psychological Contract Breach Affect Their Prosocial Silence.

2.5. Moderating Role of Psychological Capital on Psychological Contract Breaches and Organizational Silence

According to studies examining the relationship between psychological capital and organizational silence, the relationship between psychological capital and organizational silence is negative (Hoveyda & Seyedpoor, 2015; Abdi & Hosseini, 2015; Şevik, 2019). Psychological capital affects acquiescent silence negatively but positively affects defensive silence and silence for the benefit of the organization positively (Tutar et al., 2018).

When we examine the relationship between the perception of psychological contract breach that triggers many negative emotions such as stress (Gong & Sims, 2023), frustration, and insecurity in the individual and the individual's psychological capital and subdimensions, it is seen that in the case of low optimism, when individuals have the

perception of psychological contract breach, they are unsuccessful in taking control, obtaining the results they desire (Tomprou, Rousseau, Hansen, 2015), and managing stress and problems (Sivanathan, Arnold, Turner, & Barling, 2004). In addition, it is stated that individuals with high psychological capital have the ability to cope with stress, and the possibility of psychological contract breach perception decreases (Toor & Ofori, 2010). An individual with high psychological capital responds more actively to environmental events. It can be said that in line with the confidence they have in their abilities, they behave in a more responsive and result-oriented way instead of being passive in the difficulties they experience with their organizations.

Studies on psychological contract breach have shown that individuals who perceive breach exhibit negative behaviors and manage the process successfully and constructively. This shows that the moderator variable plays an important role in the response of individuals who perceive a breach (Dodena, Groteb, Rigottic, 2018). Psychological capital (Han and Hwang, 2019; Yu and Liu, 2016; Ghadampour et al., 2017) and self-efficacy perception have been shown to mediate voice behaviors (Wang et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2019). It is seen that low ethical leadership and organizational support, which are among the factors that can cause breach of psychological contract, have an effect on silence with the moderating effect of psychological capital. Thus, psychological capital can play a role in the relationship between perception of psychological contract breach and silence. In cases where the perception of breach of psychological contract and psychological capital intersect, silence can be affected in different ways. In light of all these views, the following hypotheses were developed.

H2: Psychological regulatory capital plays a role in the effect of employees' perceptions of psychological contract breach on their Organizational Silence.

H2a: Psychological capital plays a role in the effect of breaching psychological contracts on acquiescent silence.

H2b: Psychological capital plays a role in the impact of contract breaches on defensive silence.

H2c: Psychological capital plays a role in the impact of contract breaches on prosocial silence.
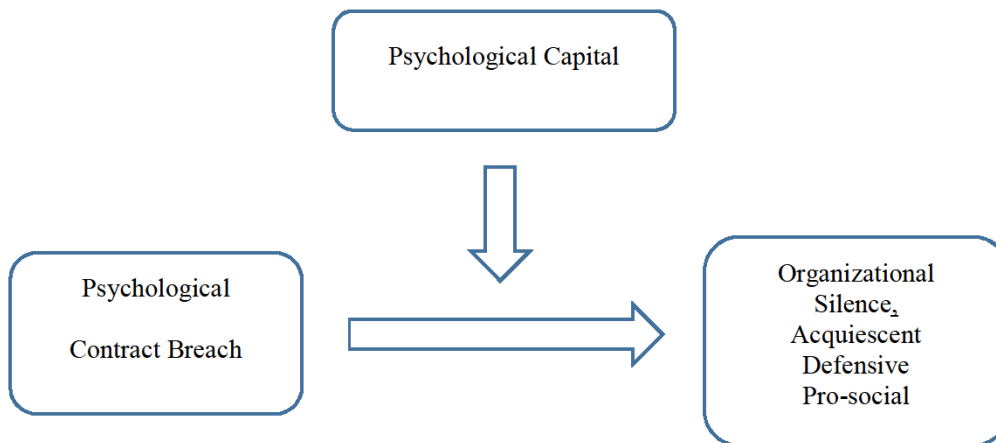
Figure 1. An illustration of our theoretical model showing the role of psychological capital in the relationship between psychological contract breach and organizational silence (acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and pro-social silence).

3. Method

3.1. Sample

The data used in this research were obtained from surveys applied to employees of the Ankara branch of the company between 15.03.2017 and 28.06.2017. The population of the research comprises 458 personnel working in the factory and product distribution for the company in question. The sample size to be selected from this research population was calculated as 209, within the 95% reliability limit, with a margin of error of 5% anticipated (http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm). To determine whether the sample size was sufficient for the study, retrospective power analyses were performed on the basis of the basic hypothesis regarding the research data. As a result of the G-Power analysis, which was carried out within the 95% reliability limits and with a margin of error of 5%, taking into account the sample size of 356 the actual power was found to be 0.82. However, taking into account possible answering errors and incomplete evaluations, 356 survey forms were prepared and distributed to the employees and collected by the researcher himself. In the selection of the sample, a simple random method was used, which ensured that every

employee in the universe had an equal chance of being included in the sample. Before distributing the survey forms, the necessary permissions were requested from Atatürk University Social Sciences Institute, and an ethical permission certificate was obtained from the ethics committee on 02.02.2017. Then, interviews were held with company managers, information was given about the questions in the survey, and the necessary permissions were obtained. While the surveys were distributed, employees were promised the purpose of the study, how the surveys would be evaluated, that the findings obtained would not be used outside of the relevant scientific research, and that the name of the company would not be disclosed while the necessary analyses were conducted. The distribution of the surveys by the researcher personally to the recipients and providing necessary explanations about the structure and purpose of the survey were effective in achieving a high survey return rate. A total of 356 surveys that were not incomplete or had missing information constituted the sample of the study. Most of the participants in the study were men (84.6%). While 24.4% of the participants were in the 26-30 age group, 24.2% were in the 31-35 age group. In terms of marital status, 63.2% of the participants were married and 32% were single. In terms of educational status, 47.8% of the employees were high school graduates, 18.8% vocational school graduates, and 19.7% university graduates.

3.2. Measures

The scales used in this study were originally developed in English. In adapting the scale to Turkish and ensuring cross-linguistic comparability of scale items, scale items in English were first translated to Turkish and then back-translated to English by a bilingual (English-Turkish) scholar and a bilingual professional translator (Brislin, 1980). After ensuring that none of the scale items lost meaning linguistically, a survey form was developed.

3.2.1. Psychological Contract Breach

Employees' perceptions of psychological contract breach were measured with a 9-item psychological contract breach scale developed by Robinson and Rousseau (1994). First, the internal consistency of the 9-item scale was examined to investigate its reliability. Item analysis showed that the total score correlation for any item was not lower than 0.30, which is considered the cut-off point. Thus, there was no need to remove any items related to the scale. In general, the reliability coefficient of the survey is .934. The factor loads of the items varied between 756 and 866. Confirmatory factor analysis was completed to determine the compatibility of the factor structure identified by exploratory factor analysis. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the factor loads of all items were higher than .50, and the fit index values of the single factor scale were within acceptable limits (Table 1).

3.2.2. Organizational Silence

In determining the employees' attitudes toward organizational silence, a scale developed by Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003), which addresses organizational silence in three dimensions: acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and prosocial silence, was used. The scale comprises 15 items with 5 items addressing each dimension of silence. First, an item analysis was conducted to determine the reliability of the scale. The results show that the total score correlation of all items exceeded 0.30. Then, a varimax rotation exploratory factor analysis of the 15 items constituting the scale was conducted using the principal component method. Confirmatory factor analysis was completed to determine the fitness of the three-factor structure revealed by exploratory factor analysis. When the regression loads (parameter estimates) obtained from the model were examined, it was seen that the standardized regression load of the items was not lower than 0.50, and the fit index values of the three-factor structure were within acceptable limits (table 1).

3.2.3. Psychological Capital

Employees' psychological capital was evaluated using the scale developed by Luthans et al. (Luthans, Youssef and Avolio, 2007). This scale consists of 4 dimensions that are hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and endurance. The hope dimension was adapted from Snyder et al. (1996), the optimism dimension from Scheier and Carver (1985), the self-efficacy dimension from Parker (1998), and the endurance dimension from Wagnild and Young (1993). The scale includes a total of 24 items, and each dimension is evaluated with 6 items. First, an item analysis was performed on a 24-item scale. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed using the psychological capital scale to determine the fitness of the four-factor structure. The regression loads obtained from the model are higher than 0.50, and the fit index values of the four-factor structure are within acceptable limits (table 1). Because psychological capital is considered as a whole in the research model, the factors of hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism were linked to a single factor called psychological capital (PS), and a second-level confirmatory factor analysis was completed on the scale. The results demonstrate that the fit values of the model were within acceptable limits.

Table 1. Goodness of Fit Values of the Scales

Variables	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
P.C.B.P	3.652	.95	.90	.97	.97	.95	.08
O.S	2.079	.93	.90	.97	.97	.96	.05
P.C 1. Level	2.524	.87	.84	.96	.96	.95	.07

3.2.4. Controls

Previous research has demonstrated that gender (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Taşkıran, 2010) and age (Turnley and Feldman, 1999; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005; Near and Miceli, 1996) are related to organizational silence. Therefore, gender and age were included as control variables in this study.

4. Discussion

4.1. Findings and Theoretical Implications

First, a correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses that form the basis of our research and to determine the relationship between psychological contract breach perception, psychological capital, organizational silence, and their subdimensions. Correlation analysis measures the level or degree of relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient is indicated by the letter "r" and 0 indicates that there is no relationship between variables, +1 indicates a complete relationship in the same direction, and 1 indicates a complete opposite relationship (Köksal, 1994).

Table 2. Relationships between Variables

Factors	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. PCBP	2.65	.98	1				
2. Pro. S.	3.47	1.47	-.641**	1			
3. Acquiscent S.	1.80	.77	-.168**	.251**	1		
4. Defensive. S.	1.59	.67	-.011	.162**	.621**	1	
5. P. C.	3.98	.61	-.159**	.115*	-.300**	-.294**	1

*p<0.05 ** p<0.01

The correlation coefficients of the relationships between psychological contract breach perception, psychological capital, and organizational silence dimensions are presented in Table 2. As shown in the table, there is a significant and negative relationship at the 99% significance level between psychological contract breach perception and prosocial and acquiescent silence, which are the factors constituting organizational silence. When the relationship between psychological capital and the dimensions of organizational silence is examined, there is a 99% negative relationship between psychological capital and acquiescent silence (r = - .300) and defensive silence (r = -.294). However, it is understood that the relationship between psychological capital and prosocial silence (r =.115) is positive.

After determining the existence and strength of the relationship between organizational silence, psychological capital, and perception of psychological contract breach and the factors related to them by completing a correlation analysis, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed with the variables to test the hypotheses. To determine whether there is a multiple linearity problem in terms of the reliability of the findings obtained in the hierarchical regression analysis, the VIF and tolerance values of the independent variables at each step of the hierarchical regression analysis were calculated. All specified VIF values of the variables were lower than 10, and tolerance indexes were lower than .10, indicating that there was no multiple linearity problem in the regression analysis. In this study, averaging or standardizing the predictor and regulatory variables was deemed necessary because otherwise the interaction variable,

which is calculated by multiplying the predictor and regulatory variables, would be highly correlated with these variables. Therefore, variables are centered and standardized when measuring the effects of regulatory variables.

Table 3. Effects of Psychological Contract Breach Perception on Organizational Silence

Factors	Acquiescent Silence		Defensive Silence		Prosocial Silence		Organizational Silence	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
P.C.B.P.	-.168**	-3.206	-.011	-.212	-.641***	-15.702	-.496***	-10.741
R²	.028		.000		.411		.246	
Adjusted R²	.025		-.003		.409		.244	
F	10.281**		.045		246.552***		115.372***	
Durbin-Watson*	1.341		1.690		1.274		1.366	

*p<0.05   **p<0.01   ***p<0.001 Tolerance: 1 VIF:1

In the first regression equation in which acquiescent silence is determined as the dependent variable, it was found that the psychological contract breach perception explained approximately 3% of the total variance and was significant at the p <.01 level (R2 = .028 and F = 10,281). This shows that employees' perceptions of psychological contract breaches negatively affect their acquiescent silence. In other words, as employees' perception of contract breaches increases, their acquiescent silence decreases. Based on these findings, H1a was supported.

In the second step of the analysis, defensive silence was determined as the dependent variable, and regression analysis did not yield significant results in the regression equation (F =.045 and p =. 832). This shows that perception of psychological contract breach does not have a significant effect on defensive silence. Accordingly, the H1b hypothesis was rejected.

Regression analysis yielded significant results in the third regression equation, in which prosocial silence was the dependent variable (F = 246,552 and p =.000). In this step, the psychological contract breach perception variable predicts 41.1% of the total variance of prosocial silence. This indicates that the third regression equation has more explanatory power than the second. In other words, the psychological contract breach perception explains prosocial silence (= -.641 and p =.000) more than acquiescent and defensive silence. According to this result, prosocial silence decreased as psychological contract breach perception increased. Thus, H1c is supported.

Regression analysis yielded significant results in the fourth regression equation, in which organizational silence was the dependent variable (F = 115,372 and p =.000). In this step, psychological contract breach perception explains approximately 25% of the total variance of organizational silence, and this perception negatively affects organizational silence (= -.496 and p =.000). In other words, as employees' perception of psychological contract breaches increases, their organizational silence decreases, and they use their voices more. Thus, the H1 hypothesis is supported.

The results of this study show an inverse relationship between breach of psychological contract and acquiescent silence. Contrary to our findings, previous studies have shown that the acquiescent silence of employees increases in response to psychological contract breaches (Wang and Hsieh, 2014; Riantoputra et al., 2016). On the basis of the acquiescent silence lies negative possibilities such as the employees' seemingly dissatisfaction with their work environment, losing their reputation, and the advantages they have (Milliken et al., 2003; Premeaux & Bedeian 2003), as well as the fear of being excluded by group members with (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003: 1393). If an organization supports the voice of its employees, it is not wrong to generalize that these fears are replaced by courage in the individual (Al-Khlaifat & Al Zoubi, 2021). The support that the organization can offer in this direction includes keeping communication channels open and an organizational culture that supports employees to share their recommendations and opinions and talk to provide a creative environment in the organization. As a result of these positive organizational actions, acquiescent silence is expected to decrease. The results showed that the means of breach of psychological contracts are very low. This may indicate that the perception of breach has not occurred for a long time or that there has been a belief that the breach was not committed intentionally. As a result, due to the organizational reasons explained above, the acquiescent silence of employees against their perception of breach of psychological contract has decreased.

It was found that breach of psychological contract breach does not have a significant effect on defensive silence. In the study of Riantoputra et al. (2016), a significant relationship was not found between defensive silence and psychological contract breach. The researchers explained this with a low perception of contract breach (Riantoputra et al., 2016). The data obtained in the current study yielded similar results, namely, that perception of contract breach is low.

If employees feel that they have been deceived, that is, their psychological contract has been breached by the organization's representative or even the managers of the organization, they cannot be expected to prefer to remain silent for the benefit of the organization. The deceiver is the organization itself. If the promises made by managers are not fulfilled, the perception of psychological contract breach that emerges in individuals can cause cognitive conflict (Mamonov, 2014). This contradiction is observed when employees who cannot break their silence express their reactions through their behaviors. For example, employees who maintain prosocial silence reduce their participation in their work. Other examples include employees neglecting their responsibilities and distancing themselves from supporting the organization (Bal, Lange, Jansen, Velde, 2008). Thus, they may develop negative behavioral models, such as trying to take revenge through the benefits they provide to the organization due to the expectations promised and not fulfilled by the organization and its managers (Wang & Hsieh, 2014). In summary, it was found that as employees' perception of psychological contract breach increases—whether this is a balance or a mechanism of revenge—their tendency to remain silent (prosocial silence) or to exhibit behaviors (altruistic attitude and cooperation with the organization) decreases.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Factor	Acquiescent Silence			Defensive Silence			Prosocial Silence		
	1. Model	2. Model	3. Model	1. Model	2. Model	3. Model	1. Model	2. Model	3. Model
	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	β
Age	-.154**	-.137**	-.137**	-.100	-.084	-.085	.003	.002	.003
Gender	.056	.050	.051	-.044	-.049	-.047	-.131**	-.130**	-.131**
P.C.B.P.	-.209***	-.256***	-.252***	-.024	-.068	-.054	-.618***	-.616***	-.624***
P.C.	-	-.328***	-.347***	-	-.300***	-.361***	-	.012	.044
P.C.B.P* P.C	-	-	-.044	-	-	-.143*	-	-	.076
R^2	.053	.158	.159	.012	.100	.116	.427	.427	.432
Adjusted R^2	.045	.148	.147	.004	.089	.103	.422	.421	.424
F	6.614***	16.429**	13.259**	1.431	9.716***	9.174***	87.474**	65.456**	53.205**
ΔR^2	.041	.104	.002	.001	.088	.016	.355***	.000	.005

Hierarchical regression analysis with the variable of acquiescent silence was performed in 3 steps. In the first step, the psychological contract breach perception variable was included in the analysis together with the control variables of age and gender. In the second step of the hierarchical regression analysis, in which acquiescent silence was taken as the dependent variable, the psychological capital variable was also included in the analysis. In the third step of the hierarchical regression analysis, the variable reflecting the interaction between contract breach perception and psychological capital was included. This model, which includes all direct and indirect effects of psychological contract-broker perception and psychological capital on acquiescent silence, yielded significant results (F = 13.259 and p =.000). The third model explains 15.9% of acquiescent silence. Although this rate was higher than that of the second model, the change was not within a criterion that can be considered statistically significant. **H2$_a$ was not supported.**

In the first step of the hierarchical regression analysis, in which defensive silence was the dependent variable, the psychological contract breach perception variables and control variables together explain approximately 1.2% of the total variance of defensive silence. In the second step of the hierarchical regression analysis, the psychological capital variable was included in the analysis. In the third step of the analysis, the variable reflecting the interaction between contract breach perception and psychological capital was included in the regression analysis. This model, which includes all direct and indirect effects of contract breach perception and psychosocial capital on defensive silence, yielded significant results. The third model explains approximately 12% of defensive silence (ΔR^2 = .016 and p = .012). In this step, the variable created by the interaction between psychological contract breach perception and psychological capital that was added to the model affects defensive silence significantly and negatively (β = -.143 and p =.012). This shows that the interaction variable affects defensive silence. In other words, changes in psychological capital play an important role in the effect of psychological contract breach perception on defensive silence. **H2$_b$ was supported.**

In the first step of the hierarchical regression analysis in which prosocial silence was considered the dependent variable, the psychological contract breach perception and control variables together explained approximately 43% of the total variance of prosocial silence. In the second step of the hierarchical regression analysis, in which prosocial silence was the dependent variable, the psychological capital variable was included in the analysis. The explanatory power of the second model is lower than that of the first model and is not statistically significant at relevant significance levels (Δ R^2 = .000 and p =.772). In the third step of the hierarchical regression analysis, the variable reflecting the interaction between contract breach perception and psychological capital was included. In the third model, the change was not statistically significant. Thus, H2c was not supported.

The hierarchical regression method was used to investigate the H2 hypothesis (psychological capital plays a role in the effect of psychological contract breach perception on organizational silence).

The results of the analysis revealed that psychological capital does not play a role in the effect of employees' perception of psychological contract breach on acquiescent silence. Although the direct effect of employees' perception of psychological contract breach on their acquiescent silence is significant, it does not have an indirect (interaction of psychological contract breach perception and psychological capital factor) effect. This can be explained by the high levels of psychological capital of the members of the organization where the study was conducted and the low levels of perception of psychological contract breach. The interactions between these two factors are limited by the low perception of breach. It can be said that there are no indirect effects. In addition, even if there is a real breach in the presence of a low perception of breach in this organization, the employee will interpret this situation as "accidental, unconscious, temporary" in good faith and will not take it seriously, regardless of their psychological capital. Similarly, according to the hierarchical regression results, the interaction variable does not affect prosocial silence. Therefore, H2$_a$ and H2$_c$ are not supported.
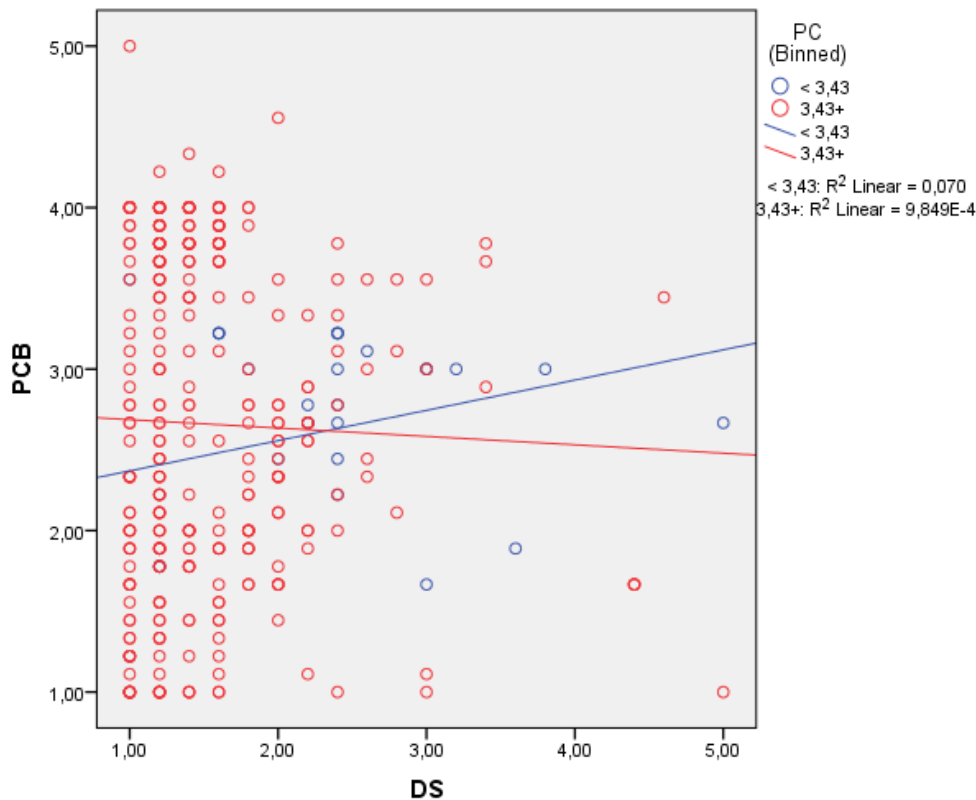
Figure 2. Moderating effect of PC on the relationship between PCB and defensive silence. Note: PCB = psychological contract breach; PC = psychological capital; DS = defensive silence.

The effect of psychological capital on the effect of psychological contract breach on defensive silence was found to be significant; thus, the regression slope that reveals this effect was examined. A graph showing how the relationship between psychological contract breach perception and defensive silence changed at different levels of psychological capital is presented below. The fact that lines are not parallel in the graph indicates that psychological capital plays a regulatory role in the effects of psychological capital breach on defensive silence.

According to the analysis results, the level of psychological capital plays an important role in the effect of employees' perception of psychological contract breach on defensive silence. In other words, as employees' psychological capital increases, the interaction between perceptions of psychological contract breach and their psychological capital decreases their defensive silence. Thus, H2.2 was supported. Defensive silence is proactive and turns into voice when an appropriate time and space are established. Therefore, it can be said that it is the transition from accumulated silences to life. Individuals with psychological capital exhibit more active behaviors such as voicing their concerns than passive behaviors such as loyalty and neglect (O'Donohue, Martin, Torugsa, 2015) because the endurance, self-efficacy, and optimism of individuals with psychological capital are high. A resilient and optimistic individual is more resistant to difficulties and obstacles, sees the failure they encounter as temporary and does not attribute it to personal inadequacy (Luthans, 2011), and sees events positively (Avey, Luthans, Jensen, 2009). Hopeful individuals have high beliefs about their ability to create alternative plans when they encounter obstacles (Snyder, 2000). People with a sense of self-efficacy set difficult goals and do not hesitate to strive for and even fight for them (Jex & Bliese, 1999). In light of all these characteristics, we can say that "as the psychological capital of employees increases, their perception of psychological contract breach will decrease their defensive silence more and more." No matter how low the breach perception level is in the company, it is quite normal for such companies to have a high level of employee quality, where cumulative perceptions reduce defensive silence.

In this part of the study, we aimed to obtain more data to support the assumption of psychological capital. In this case, as psychological capital levels (high, low, medium) change, does the effect of psychological contract breath perception on acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial silence differ? The question has gained importance.

To determine the role of psychological capital in the regulatory effect of psychological contract breach on organizational silence factors, the sample was divided into 3 clusters according to psychological capital levels using the k-means method. There were 27, 104, and 225 samples in the second cluster, and 225 samples in the third cluster. The overall mean of the clusters is 2.23-4.54 and 3.93, respectively. Considering the cluster means and the lowest and highest values of the clusters, cluster 1 was named low, cluster 2 was named high, and cluster 3 was named the sample with a medium psychological capital level. The difference between the psychological capital means of the 3 clusters that emerged in the cluster analysis was significant.

Table 5. Cluster Analysis Results

Clusters	Mean	S.D	Minimum	Maximum
Low	2.23	.57	1.00	3.00
High	4.54	.21	4.25	5.00
Moderate	3.93	.16	3.13	4.21
Wilks'Lambda: 0.145 F: 1041.107 p: 0.000				

First, the means of the variables in terms of 3 clusters were examined, and a one-way analysis of variance was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the means. As shown in the table below, the group with the high mean level of psychological capital had a lower perception of psychological contract breach than the other groups. When the means are examined in terms of silence, the acquiescent and defensive silence levels of the group with a low psychological capital level are higher than those of the other groups, while the group with moderate psychological capital has a lower prosocial silence level than the other groups.

To determine the regulatory effect of psychological capital, the effects of psychological contract breach perception on the independent variables of acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial silence were examined for each cluster.

As shown in Table 7, although the effects of psychological contract breach on acquiescent and defensive silence were not significant for the group with low and high levels of psychological capital, its effect on prosocial silence was significant. Considering the relationship in terms of the group with a moderate level of psychological capital, it can be seen that the psychological contract breach affects all three levels of silence significantly. In other words, psychological contract breaches only cause a significant decrease in prosocial silence in groups with low and high levels of psychological capital, while causing a significant decrease in acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial silence in groups with moderate psychological capital. Therefore, the effects of perceptions of psychological contract breach on organizational silence factors differ among groups with low, moderate, and high psychological capital levels.

The results of the cluster analyses revealed that psychological contract breach perception caused a significant decrease

Table 6. Differences between Means by Clusters

Factor		Mean	Stand. Deviation	F	Significance (Sig)
P.C.B.P	Low	2.57	.68	23.454	.000
	High	2.14	.89		
	Moderate	2.89	.957		
Acquiescent Silence	Low	2.64	.99	20.093	.000
	High	1.64	.73		
	Moderate	1.78	.69		
Defensive Silence	Low	2.23	.98	20.565	.000
	High	1.36	.51		
	Moderate	1.61	.63		
Prosocial Silence	Low	3.74	.85	24.203	.000
	High	4.22	1.11		
	Moderate	3.09	1.53		

Table 7. Predictive Results of the Structural Model among the Groups

PREDICTED PREDICTOR VARIABLE VARIABLE	Low	High	Moderate
	Stand. R	Stand. R	Stand. R
Acq. ⟵ P.C.B	.026	.001	-.341***
Def. ⟵ P.C.B	.276	.021	-.148*
Pro. ⟵ P.C.B	-.368*	-.330***	-.690***

in all types of silence (acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial) for the group with moderate psychological capital. There is balance at the foundation of the concept of psychological capital (Lazarus, 2003). It can be stated that the levels of hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy—which are the components of psychological capital—are neither too high nor too low and are not ideal for an organization and its employees. For example, if we address capital through optimism, it has a deeper meaning than "Pollyannaism" in business life (Luthans, 2011). The concept should be realistic and flexible so that neither the individuals claim all their achievements and get the perception that they are in control of all areas of their life, nor should they avoid responsibility by attributing all failures to external causes (Luthans et al., 2007a). The same can be applied to resilience, hope, and self-efficacy. A moderate level of psychological capital indicates that an individual's self-confidence, beliefs about what they can do, and hopes for the future are at an optimal level, which prevents them from acquiring false wisdom. They know that their assets must be developed, and they believe that they can contribute. Therefore, individual interests are balanced with organizational interests. When promises are not fulfilled, it is inevitable that people will experience a serious decrease in their silence when they are wrong.

Psychological contract breach perception (PCB) at all capital levels (high, moderate, and low) has been shown to reduce prosocial silence. However, the largest decrease was also observed in the group with moderate psychological capital. Since psychological capital in balance represents individual power and independence, the interests of collective structures may not make sense for these individuals. Personal purposes and requests are prioritized. Therefore, they do not communicate and avoid conflict, if necessary. However, when this individual wealth rises above a certain level can lead to arrogance and apathy in individuals. The results show that in the group with high psychological capital, PCBs' decrease in prosocial silence was lower than in the other groups. When psychological capital (PC) exceeds a certain

level, individuals may go on their way, downplaying the problems in their environment. This can lead to some degree of unresponsiveness and insensitivity.

Identification of the individual with low psychological capital in the organization, the reckless attitude and selfishness of individuals with high capital can be shown as factors in the emergence of this situation. As a result, employees with moderate psychological capital are skilled at perceiving themselves, their organizations, and the problems in their environment. They clearly see the situations that develop around them and display an optimal judgment skill in these situations. When they review the events and the positions they would take when facing them, they clearly reveal their reactions by making new inferences. This creates an environment in which individual silence can decrease significantly.

4.2. Practical Implications

Practical managerial implications can be drawn from the results of this study. Uncertainties and threats related to the perception of a person lie at the foundation of silence. It is revealed by this determination that in such a situation, the organization must psychologically strengthen the employee and encourage them to continue making efforts regardless of their perceptions to include the employee in such a situation back into the cycle of participation. The employee should be able to address the uncertainty and threats or share their problems and ideas with people who can help resolve the issues. At this point, it is the psychological capital of the person that gives this power to the employee regardless of the unfavorable conditions. Psychological capital plays an important role in the individual's perception of their environment, giving meaning to their past and their perspective on the future. It serves as a compass through which people can act. It goes beyond economic and social capital and offers organizations the opportunity to create dynamic and sustainable resources that can be developed over time. In this sense, psychological capital appears as an indispensable tool for today's organizations that cannot be imitated to achieve organizational goals and objectives or ensure the competitiveness of organizations. The psychological capital level, self-efficacy perception, optimism degree, hope, and resilience of a person are first reflected in their thoughts and then in their attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, psychological capital and its components (hope, resilience, self-efficacy, optimism) will play a role, along with organizational characteristics, in the individual's preference for using their voice or silence in the face of problems in the event of a perception of breach.

It is known that the occurrence of psychological contract breach perception affects the behavior and attitudes of employees (there are studies showing that it decreases job satisfaction (Kraak et al., 2023), organizational commitment, organizational trust (Gong & Sims, 2023), and organizational citizenship). It was found that psychological contract breach perception decreases acquiescent and prosocial silence and that employee behaviors such as seeking their rights, expressing their creative thoughts, not hesitating to discuss problems, and not hiding their reactions when they experience injustice can be exhibited.

In addition, it is seen that psychological capital plays a role in preventing the defensive silence of employees due to PCB (psychological contract breach perception). It was concluded that employees who think they are wronged or deceived do not prefer silence for the purpose of protecting and defending themselves because of their psychological capital. The culture and supportive practices of the organization in which the research was conducted should also be considered in this result.

Employees' silence behavior is closely related to their culture (Fujio, 2004). Turkish people adopt obedience and silence as elements of decency because their customs and religious traditions are orthodox, that is, limited by strict rules (Delaney, 2017), and they attach great importance to loyalty to authority (Aytaç, 2007). Similarly, loyalty to authority and community is essential in business life. For example, a subordinate cannot say "I have a good idea" because it means "I know better than you, and I have my eyes on your position". Therefore, employees cannot express their opinions (Cüceloğlu, 2008). However, the most obvious indicators of the transformation in Turkish business culture are; It is understood that it is compatible with society, at peace with its employees, and prone to modern management methods that pave the way for innovation and creativity (Bayrak, 2003). Turkish business culture has moved away from collectivist behavior, which is the cultural code of Anatolia (Seymen et al., 2005). As a result, we can say that Turkish businesses tend to change their traditional characteristics (Öğüt, Kocabacak, 2008).

4.3. Limitations and Future Research

Because the research is based on human factors and includes evaluations regarding personal perceptions, the reliability of the findings is limited to the evaluation of employees and the characteristics of the survey method used in data collection. A cross-sectional research design was used in our study, which limited us from obtaining results that could be obtained in a longitudinal study. It has also made it impossible to capture the dynamic aspects of psychological

capital in terms of its regulatory effect. In a longitudinal study, having data on all variables in each of the time periods you use can establish a healthier causal relationship between the variables. The findings suggest that further research should consider adopting a longitudinal design that can shed light on these relationships over time.

This study is important for determining the relationships among PCB, PsyCap, and OS. However, their results cannot be generalized to the general population. Results are also based on self-report. therefore, it depends on the individual reactions of employees; Some of them may have been reluctant or antisocial to participate in the survey in general or during the period when the survey was administered.

5. Conclusion

This study provides evidence supporting the regulatory role of psychological capital in the relationship between perceptions of psychological contract breach and acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial silence. Our study reveals how psychological capital, which affects organizational silence, impacts results at different levels (high, moderate, low). We hope that our study will attract more researchers' attention.

ORCID :

Fatma Merve DURDAĞ   0000-0002-5727-0453
Atılhan NAKTİYOK   0000-0001-6155-5745

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Strategic Management in IT Companies in Türkiye: Examining Strategic Statements

Mesut ATASEVER[1] (ID)

[1] Assoc. Prof. Dr., Uşak University, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Department of Logistics Management, Uşak, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Mesut ATASEVER
E-mail : mesut.atasever@usak.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine in detail the strategic expressions of the IT sector in Türkiye. The main goal of the study, which will be carried out using a detailed content analysis method, is to determine Türkiye's strategic directions and priorities in the IT sector and to reveal the opportunities and challenges in the sector by examining the strategic statements of different actors. This research also aims to make a significant contribution to understanding Türkiye's current strategic IT situation and predicting future trends. Türkiye is an important country in Europe with a rapidly developing and remarkable IT sector. This sector plays a prominent role in Türkiye's national economy, and it is important to compare strategic statements to understand its future trends and growth potential. This study aims to identify common and different elements in the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye and to analyze the sector's priority strategic areas and main challenges. For this purpose, websites, press releases, and other textual documents of IT companies in Türkiye will be examined using a detailed content analysis method. The research results provide important information about the strengths and weaknesses of IT companies in Türkiye. Strengths include a clear vision, customer focus, pursuit of excellence, innovation, and teamwork. Weaknesses can be summarized as a lack of concreteness and detail in strategic statements, not clearly expressing the services and solutions offered, and not sufficiently emphasizing the special aspects that distinguish each company from others.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Information Technology (IT) Sector, Strategic Expressions, Comparative Analysis

1. Introduction

Today, the IT sector stands out as a rapidly evolving field in Türkiye and plays an important role in economic development. Türkiye is an important country that leads the rapid growth and development process in Europe's IT sector. This study aims to examine and compare the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye. By examining Türkiye's strategic orientations, priorities, and challenges in the IT sector, the value and meaning of this information will be revealed for the parties in the sector.

Strategic management is the process of determining long-term goals and developing and implementing strategies to achieve these goals. The strategic statements of IT companies reflect their efforts to maintain the competitive advantage, promote innovation, and position themselves effectively in the market. This study aims to understand and compare the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye using a detailed content analysis method.

Türkiye's IT sector is recognized as a significant driving force in its national economy. Therefore, comparing the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye is critical when evaluating the future trends and growth potential of the sector. This research will reveal and compare these strategic statements through detailed content analysis of websites, press releases, and other textual documents of IT companies in Türkiye.

The main focuses of this research include identifying common and different elements in the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye, identifying priority strategic areas in the sector, and analyzing the main challenges faced by the IT sector in Türkiye. This information will significantly contribute to supporting the strategic decisions of companies operating in the IT sector and those investing in this sector.

This research aims to provide new information about the strategic orientations, priorities, and future trends of the IT sector in Türkiye, as well as contribute to understanding the challenges in the sector and offer solutions. The findings of this study will provide valuable perspectives to companies operating in the IT sector and policymakers, helping them to better understand strategic management and development in the IT sector.

2. Strategic Management and Strategic Expressions

Strategic management is a process that involves developing and implementing plans to help an organization achieve its goals. This process may include creating strategy, planning organizational structure and resource allocation, managing change initiatives and controlling processes and resources. Strategic planning involves identifying business challenges, selecting the best strategy, monitoring progress, and adjusting the implemented strategy to improve performance. Tools such as SWOT (challenges, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis are used to evaluate the opportunities and threats that exist among the organization, competition, and the overall market. Strategic management occurs broadly at leadership levels throughout an organization; however, it can also be implemented at a department or team level. There are two basic approaches to strategic management: prescriptive and descriptive. While the preliminary written model focused on how strategies should be developed, the descriptive model was based on trying different methods to find solutions and involved learning from experience. Strategic management can be applied to business as well as to nonprofit organizations, the government, and the public sector.

Businesses that implement strategic management should make their goals, objectives, mission, and vision concrete and express them in special sentences. These statements are important as a guide for managers, employees, and other stakeholders in the business and its environment.

Strategic management is the process of developing and implementing strategies to determine a business' long-term goals, use its resources effectively, and achieve competitive advantage (David,& David, 2021). This management approach aims to make strategic decisions, direct resources, measure performance, and achieve strategic goals by evaluating the business' internal and external environments (Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2017).

Strategic management enables businesses to establish strategies to determine goals and achieve and maintain the competitive advantage. These strategies aim to improve the competitive position of the business, meet customer expectations, and support sustainable growth. The strategic management process includes the stages of analysis, planning, implementation and control (Li et al., 2021).

Porter's (1980) five force analysis (Anton, 2015) enables businesses to evaluate forces in the industry environment to gain the competitive advantage. Barney's (1991) resource-based view (Purnomo, 2013) emphasizes that businesses must have unique and valuable resources to maintain their competitive advantage. Hamel and Prahalad's (1990) defined core capabilities as the basic capabilities that enable a business to stand out and create a competitive advantage. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel's (1998) strategy phase model explains in detail the analysis, planning, implementation, and control stages of the strategic management process. Kaplan and Norton's (1992) balanced scorecard is a management tool that provides strategic performance measurement, including non-financial performance indicators. Johnson,

Scholes, and Whittington's (2008) strategic management approaches address different theoretical frameworks (growth, resource-based, cultural, etc.) and implementation models of strategic management.

A mission refers to a statement that explains an organization's primary reason for existence, objectives, and activities. It emphasizes why the organization exists and the needs that it aims to meet (Muslu, 2014). A vision is a statement that defines the goals and ideals that the organization wants to achieve in the future. It usually reflects an inspiring and long-term perspective (Erol,& Kanbur, 2014). Values are fundamental principles that guide an organization's beliefs, ethical principles, and business culture. These values affect decision-making processes and organizational behaviors (Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2008).

While mission is defined as the reason for the existence of a business, vision; It is defined as an image of the place a business wants to reach in the future. While businesses create their mission and vision statements, they also reflect their goals and objectives, strategies, values, the issues they care about, and their entrepreneurial characteristics (Kuduz ,& Atasever, 2022)

3. IT Companies and Their Importance

IT companies are very important for a country. These companies contribute to the country's economy and reduce unemployment. Additionally, these companies improve the country's technological infrastructure and help develop other sectors. For example, IT companies in one country can help other sectors digitalize (Akkaynak, 2023) . They can also increase the country's global competitiveness. In developing countries, IT companies can contribute to the economic development of the country. However, for IT companies to succeed, countries must provide an environment suitable for their development. The environment should include legal regulations, education, research and development activities, infrastructure investments, and other factors (Seyrek, 2011).

There are many IT companies in Türkiye. These companies contribute to Türkiye's economy and reduce unemployment. IT companies in Türkiye operate in software, hardware, telecommunications, e-commerce, financial technology, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, game development, and many other fields (Aydın, 2012). IT companies in Türkiye can also help the country's other sectors develop. For example, IT companies in Türkiye can help digitalize other sectors as well. IT companies in Türkiye can also increase the country's global competitiveness. IT companies in Türkiye can contribute to the economic development of the country. However, for IT companies to succeed, countries must provide an environment suitable for their development. The environment should include legal regulations, education, research and development activities, infrastructure investments, and other factors (Damar, 2022).

4. Method

In this study, a detailed content analysis, a qualitative analysis method, was used. This method uses text, audio, video, and images. The analysis technique aims to discover symbols and meanings in content. Content analysis allows the discovery of words, meanings, messages, symbols, thoughts, themes, and categories. The researcher discovers semiotics hidden in texts by objectively and systematically coding the symbols and meanings desired to be discovered in the text (Baltacı, 2019). Detailed content analysis is a qualitative research method that has many advantages. Content analysis offers a methodology that can be customized according to the research question, giving researchers a significant advantage in terms of flexibility. This method, which can be used for different types of data, allows researchers to analyze data in various ways. At the same time, content analysis allows for a comprehensive examination of the data. In-depth analysis helps the researcher discover symbols, meanings, ideas, themes, and categories in the data. In terms of methodological accuracy, content analysis required the researcher to code the data objectively and systematically. This prevents misinterpretations or erroneous conclusions. Furthermore, content analysis presents an economic advantage over alternative qualitative research methodologies because it facilitates expeditious data analysis (Questionpro, 2024).

However, content analysis has certain drawbacks. The necessity of subjective interpretation may engender misapprehension of the data or the formulation of erroneous conclusions by the researcher. Additionally, content analysis requires more time investment than other qualitative research techniques, demanding supplementary resources for data coding and analysis.

Coding difficulties are another weakness of content analysis because they can cause researchers to incorrectly code data or draw erroneous conclusions. Content analysis draws attention with its advantages, such as flexibility, comprehensiveness, and methodological accuracy, but also its weaknesses, such as subjective interpretation, time costs, and coding difficulties. However, the correct use of this methodology allows researchers to conduct an in-depth and meaningful analysis (Sociologer, 2024)

In this study, a list of the leading information technology companies from Türkiye was taken, and the first 10

companies from these lists were evaluated for convenience. Mission, vision, and value statements were taken under different tabs on the companies' websites and were subjected to content analysis. Strategic goals, policies, and tactics were not included in this study. Since it would not be appropriate to take all these statements in terms of efficiency, they were summarized in a meaningful way.

A list of Türkiye's IT companies is presented in the following:

"According to the BT Haber Bilişim 500 Research, the 500 largest IT companies in Türkiye achieved a total turnover of 100 billion TL in 2023 (BT Haber, 2024)." The strategic statements of the top 10 companies among these 500 companies were taken and analyzed. Companies are listed on the 2023 list.

In the analysis section, after the mission, vision, and values of the companies are summarized, the concepts they focus on are emphasized. Then, an internal evaluation was performed.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1. Türkiye IT Companies

Turkcell, Türk Telekom, Vodafone, İndeks Bilgisayar, Arena, Teknosa, Bilkom Bilişim, Armada Bilgisayar, Penta Teknoloji, and Lenovo, Türkiye

Table 1. *Turkcell*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To develop Türkiye and Turkish people by using technology.	To play a leading role in Türkiye's digital transformation and become one of the most valuable telecommunication companies in Europe.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Turkcell's strategic statements clearly outline the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer.

Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, Teamwork, playing a leading role in Türkiye's digital transformation and being one of the most valuable telecommunications companies in Europe.

Turkcell's strategic statements demonstrate that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 2. *Turkish Telecom*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To increase connectivity and prosperity in all areas by leading Türkiye's digital transformation.	To be Türkiye's leading telecommunications and digital services company.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Türk Telekom's strategic statements clearly reveal the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer. Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, Teamwork, Leading Türkiye's digital transformation. Türkiye is Turkey's leading telecommunications and digital services company. Türk Telekom's strategic statements show that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 3. *Vodafone*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To contribute to Türkiye's digital transformation by using the power of technology and to offer our customers the best digital experience.	To be Türkiye's most respected and valuable telecommunications company.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency. Team work

Vodafone Türkiye's strategic statements clearly reveal the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer.

Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, Teamwork, Contributing to Türkiye's digital transformation, being Türkiye's most respected and valuable telecommunications company. Vodafone Türkiye's strategic statements show that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 4. *Index Computer*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To contribute to Türkiye's digital transformation by using the power of technology and to offer the best digital solutions to our customers.	To become Türkiye's leading IT solutions and consultancy company.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Index Bilgisayar's strategic statements clearly reveal the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer.

Key Points of Strategic Statements: Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, Teamwork, Contributing to Türkiye's digital transformation, being Türkiye's leading IT solutions and consultancy company Index Bilgisayar's strategic statements show that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 5. *Arena Computer*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To offer the best experience to game and technology enthusiasts in Türkiye by using the latest innovations in technology.	To be Türkiye's most prestigious and leading game and technology retailer.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Arena Bilgisayar's strategic statements clearly reveal the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer. Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, teamwork, and being Türkiye's leading game and technology retailer. Arena Bilgisayar's strategic statements demonstrate that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 6. *Teknosa Computer*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To facilitate every aspect of life in Türkiye by using the power of technology and to offer our customers the best digital experience.	To be Türkiye's most loved and preferred technology retailer.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Teknosa Bilgisayar's strategic statements clearly reveal the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer. Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, teamwork, and being Türkiye's most loved and preferred technology retailer. Teknosa Bilgisayar's strategic statements demonstrate that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 7. *Bilkom Informatics*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To promote digital transformation in Türkiye by using the power of technology and to offer the most appropriate and innovative IT solutions to our customers.	To become one of Türkiye's most respected and leading IT solutions providers.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Bilkom Bilişim's strategic statements clearly reveal the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer. Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, Teamwork, Promoting Türkiye's digital transformation, Being one of Türkiye's most respected and leading IT solutions providers, Evaluation of Bilkom Bilişim's Strategic Statements: Bilkom Bilişim's strategic statements show that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 8. *Armada Computer*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To offer the best experience to game and technology enthusiasts in Türkiye by exploiting the power of technology and becoming a leading player in the industry.	To be Türkiye's most prestigious and preferred game and technology retailer.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Armada Bilgisayar's strategic statements clearly reveal the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer. Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, teamwork, being Türkiye's most prestigious and preferred game and technology retailer. Armada Bilgisayar's strategic statements demonstrate that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 9. *Penta Technology*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To contribute to Türkiye's digital transformation by using technology and to offer the best value-added solutions to its business partners.	To be Türkiye's leading value-added technology distributor.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Penta Technology's strategic statements clearly outline the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer. Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, teamwork, and being Türkiye's leading value-added technology distributor. Penta Technology's strategic statements demonstrate that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

Table 10. *Lenovo Türkiye*

Mission:	Vision:	Values:
To help businesses and individuals of all sizes in Türkiye become more productive and connected by exploiting the power of technology.	To be the most preferred PC and mobile device brand in Türkiye.	Customer Focus Excellence innovation Sustainability Openness and Transparency Team work

Lenovo Türkiye's strategic statements clearly reveal the company's future growth and development plans. These statements show which areas the company will invest in, which markets it will enter, and what services it will offer. Customer focus, Excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Openness and transparency, teamwork, and being the most preferred PC and mobile device brand in Türkiye. Lenovo Türkiye's strategic statements demonstrate that the company has a clear vision. The company attaches importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

5.2. Evaluation of Strategic Statements of Turkish IT Companies

5.2.1. In the Terms of Mission

Similarities can be observed across the mission statements of various companies, as they consistently highlight the utilization of technology to contribute to Türkiye's digital transformation and enhance customer experiences. Collectively, companies aim to contribute to Türkiye's digital advancement, underscoring their commitment to the

nation's technological growth and prosperity. Furthermore, a common theme in most mission statements is the emphasis on customer satisfaction and the provision of tailored solutions to meet customers' needs. Various distinctions emerge among companies, including differences in target audience specificity, industry focus and innovation and leadership approaches. Some companies cater to niche audiences, such as gaming and technology enthusiasts, whereas others target a broader demographic. Additionally, certain companies concentrate on specific industries like gaming, while others adopt a more expansive approach, offering technological solutions across various sectors in Türkiye. Divergent strategies also emerge concerning innovation and leadership, with some companies prioritizing technological advancement to establish industry dominance, while others prioritize customer-centric approaches and value delivery to business partners. In terms of prevailing trends, the digital transformation narrative remains prominent among IT companies in Türkiye, presenting an opportunity to enhance the country's technological infrastructure and operational efficiency. Moreover, steadfast commitment to customer satisfaction persists, with companies recognizing the pivotal role of tailored solutions in gaining a competitive edge. While some companies align their efforts with specific sectors, others pursue a more versatile approach, aiming to address the needs of multiple industries. Mission statements serve as crucial documents that articulate a company's core purpose, operational scope, and value proposition. However, certain statements may lack clarity or relevance to the company's activities, necessitating refinement to achieve greater precision and alignment with organizational objectives.

Although the statement "To be Türkiye's most prestigious and leading game and technology retailer" seems to be focused, it is not a very specific and functional mission statement. The mission statement should more clearly express how the company provides value to customers and the needs it meets. The phrase "being Türkiye's leading value-added technology distributor" does not clearly state what is meant and does not clarify what services are offered as a value-added technology distributor or in which field to be a leader.

The mission statement should clearly state the company's core purpose and how it provides value to the customer. For this reason, more concrete and clear expressions should be preferred over general or vague expressions.

5.2.2. *In Terms of Vision*

Companies commonly express their aspirations for leadership within the Türkiye market in their vision statements, indicating a strategic aim for prominence in the face of competition.

Moreover, many companies underscore the importance of cultivating a prestigious, respected, and valuable brand image, reflecting a concerted effort to uphold their reputation and brand equity. Distinguishing characteristics among companies are evident in their industry focus, target audience, and service offerings. The varied industry focuses on telecommunications, technology retail, and IT solutions, reflecting the diverse strategic orientations adopted by companies. Furthermore, while some companies tailor their offerings to specific target audiences, such as gaming and technology enthusiasts, others adopt a more generalized approach to cater to broader demographics. Additionally, divergence exists in the service areas, with some companies prioritizing product sales while others emphasizing the provision of information technology (IT) solutions or consulting services.

Current trends highlight a pervasive pursuit of leadership and prestige among IT companies in Türkiye, underscoring the significance of attaining a prominent market position despite competition.

Moreover, a nuanced approach to customer orientation is observed, with some companies emphasizing customer satisfaction and preference in their vision statements, while others prioritize sectoral leadership and brand valorization. Furthermore, companies exhibit variance in their focus on technology distribution and product sales, with some emphasizing direct sales of technology products and others concentrating on technology distribution and solution provision. Notably, vision statements are expected to embody clarity, measurability, and inspiration. However, certain statements may lack specificity or a clear definition of goals. For instance, phrases like "most loved and most preferred" lack measurability and may render the vision statement ambiguous. Employing specific and measurable objectives instead of such statements can enhance the effectiveness of the vision statement.

5.2.3. *Values*

The data are analyzed based on value expressions as follows:

Customer focus, perfection, innovation, sustainability, openness and transparency, and teamwork are frequently encountered themes in the mission, vision, and value statements of companies. Customer focus and excellence emerge as the most prevalent value expressions, underscoring companies' dedication to customer satisfaction and the pursuit of high-quality products and services. Similarly, innovation and teamwork are widely cited, highlighting companies' emphasis on fostering innovative practices and collaborative work environments.

However, disparities exist in the frequency of usage of certain expressions. Sustainability, openness, and transparency are less commonly referenced than customer focus and excellence. This variance may suggest different levels of emphasis or awareness regarding sustainability and transparency among companies.

An exhaustive analysis of mission, vision, and value statements reveals a convergence of themes, although nuanced differences are attributable to each company's unique culture, industry focus, and objectives. Certain expressions are missing or not widely used in Turkish IT companies. For example, expressions such as "creating global impact" or "ensuring social transformation", which can be frequently seen in the missions of international companies, are less common in Turkish IT companies. In addition, while concepts such as "diversity and inclusion", "social responsibility" or "commitment to ethical values" are frequently included in the value statements of international companies, it is observed that these expressions are missing or less emphasized in Turkish IT companies. However, the IT sector in Türkiye is gradually adapting to international standards, and companies' mission, vision and value expressions of companies are developing accordingly. Therefore, over time, expressions that are more consistent with international standards are likely to become more common in Turkish IT companies.

5.2.4. Strengths

Each company possesses a clearly articulated vision delineating its future growth and development strategies. Customer focus is a paramount principle across all companies, with an unwavering commitment to prioritizing customer needs above all else. The pursuit of excellence is a universal goal shared by these companies, as they strive to innovate and refine their solutions. Emphasizing innovation, all companies remain vigilant in monitoring and adopting new technologies and trends to remain competitive. Teamwork is deeply ingrained within organizational cultures, with an emphasis on fostering collaborative environments and encouraging employee cooperation. Sustainability is a core value embraced by all companies, reflecting their dedication to operating in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. A commitment to openness and transparency underscores the importance of clear and honest communication with stakeholders, serving as a foundational principle across all organizations.

5.2.5. Shortcomings

Certain statements in company documents exhibit a tendency toward generalization and repetition. For instance, terms like "customer focus," "excellence," and "innovation" are recurrent across various companies' statements, lacking specificity and distinctiveness. In addition, some assertions lack substantiation through concrete examples. For instance, while companies proclaim investments in technology and innovation, specific areas of investment remain unspecified, diminishing the clarity and impact of such statements. Furthermore, clarity regarding the services and solutions provided by certain companies is lacking, resulting in ambiguity regarding their offerings and capabilities.

5.2.6. Points That Need Further Expression

- What are the special aspects of each company that distinguish from others?
- Which sectors and companies do these companies serve?
- What are the companies' references and success stories?
- Do companies undertake social responsibility projects?

In general, the strategic statements of 10 Turkish IT companies clearly reveal their future plans and goals. It is also admirable for companies to attach importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation.

However, the fact that some statements are too general and repetitive and are not supported by concrete examples makes it difficult to obtain a clear understanding of the services and solutions offered by companies.

The strategic statements of all companies include statements such as "contributing to Türkiye's digital transformation". This shows that companies are willing to contribute to Türkiye's digitalization.

Some companies' strategic statements include goals such as "Being Türkiye's leading IT company." This enables companies to achieve leadership positions in the industry.

All 10 Turkish IT companies have a clear vision and attach importance to values such as customer focus, excellence, and innovation. However, some statements are too general and repetitive and are not supported by concrete examples, making it difficult to obtain a clear understanding of the services and solutions offered by companies.

6. Conclusion and Evaluation

In this study, a comprehensive review and evaluation of the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye are presented. Research findings show that IT companies in Türkiye generally have similar priorities. Common values such as a clear vision, customer focus, pursuit of excellence, innovation, teamwork, responsibility, and honesty stand out in each company. However, some shortcomings were also observed. Issues such as the fact that strategic statements are general and repetitive, they are not supported by concrete examples, and the services and solutions they offer are not clearly expressed are noteworthy. In addition, details such as the special aspects of each company that distinguish it from others, the sectors and companies it serves, references, and success stories should be further clarified. The research findings provide important information about the strengths and weaknesses of IT companies in Türkiye. Strengths include a clear vision, customer focus, pursuit of excellence, innovation, and teamwork. The weaknesses can be summarized as the lack of concreteness and detail in strategic statements, the services and solutions they offer are not clearly expressed, and the special aspects that distinguish each company from others are not sufficiently emphasized. In order to achieve further development and the competitive advantage, IT companies in Türkiye need to make their strategic statements more concrete and detailed. This can be achieved through the following steps:

Supporting concrete examples: Strategic statements should be supported with concrete examples to make them more convincing. This involves presenting examples of companies' past successes and the tangible benefits of their services. Clear statement of services and solutions: Strategic statements should include a clear description of the services and solutions that companies offer. This will ensure that the audience can easily understand what companies are doing and what value they offer. Highlighting the special aspects that distinguish each company: Strategic statements should highlight the special aspects that distinguish each company from others. This will reveal companies' differences and competitive advantages in the industry.

In addition, a more comprehensive analysis can be made by taking into account factors such as social responsibility projects, sectoral focus, customer satisfaction, as well as mission, vision, and value statements. Such analyses can contribute to the development of IT companies in Türkiye and increase the competitiveness of the sector. As a result, IT companies in Türkiye have significant potential. By making their strategic statements more effective, they can achieve further industrial development. A more detailed analysis and concrete actions are required to achieve these goals. This study also provides a comprehensive review of the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye, important information about the strengths and weaknesses of IT companies in Türkiye in their strategic statements, and suggestions for improving their strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye.

This study can be expected to assist researchers in their research for the following reasons:

- A detailed analysis of the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye can be made according to specific sectors or businesses.
- The impact of strategic statements on company performance can be investigated.

In this study, the strategic statements of IT companies in Türkiye were examined through a limited number of examples. More companies need to be examined for a more comprehensive analysis. Additionally, only information on companies' websites was analyzed in this study. An analysis of companies' internal documents and the opinions of their employees can provide a deeper perspective.

Suggestions;

In enhancing the effectiveness of their strategic statements, IT companies in Türkiye would benefit from enhancing the level of specificity and detail therein. A more exhaustive analysis could be conducted by incorporating various factors, including but not limited to social responsibility initiatives, sectoral emphasis and measures of customer satisfaction, alongside scrutiny of companies' mission, vision and value statements. Such comprehensive analyses have the potential to foster the advancement of IT enterprises in Türkiye while simultaneously strengthening the competitiveness of the sector. By elucidating the intricacies of their strategic frameworks and operational paradigms, companies can fortify their positioning within the industry landscape and cultivate a more robust foundation for sustainable growth and innovation. IT companies in Türkiye have significant potential. By making their strategic statements more effective, they can achieve further industrial development. A more detailed analysis and concrete actions are required to achieve these goals.

ORCID :

Mesut ATASEVER   0000-0002-7189-7551

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The Working Class Culture in Bursa

Kemal TEMEL[1] , Şenol BAŞTÜRK[2]

[1]Dr., Bursa Uludag University, Vocational School of Social Sciences, Bursa, Türkiye
[2]Assoc. Prof. Dr., Bursa Uludag University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Bursa, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Kemal TEMEL
E-mail : kemaltemel@uludag.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

The steady increase in the number of wage earners in Turkey during the last 20 years has brought social expansion of middle-class and working-class groups to the agenda. In the relevant period, forms of labor market stratification became more visible. Widespread flexibility practices, such as subcontracting, have diminished secure employment. The emergence of new types of employment, especially the expansion of employment in the service sector, has also significantly affected social structure transformations. Studies that addressed developments in social transformation from class-cultural perspective have focused more on middle-class groups. This study examines Turkish working-class culture from a class-cultural perspective. Adopting a neo-Bourdieusian class approach, this study analyses the transformations in lifestyles, tastes and voting behaviors of the working class in three different regions of Bursa. The study claims that different social and material conditions of existence spatially differentiate working-class culture. The results of the survey research conducted in Bursa in 2022 were analyzed by multiple correspondence (MCA) analysis. The results of this research show that independent variables such as workers' social background, education level, material earnings and differences in property relations construct spatial and cultural differentiation.

Keywords: Working Class Culture, Cultural Class Analysis, Tastes, Lifestyle, Bursa

1. Introduction

Studies of the first generation, which integrated the concept of culture into the exploration of class relationships, predominantly concentrated on the perpetuation of social inequalities and practices of resistance (Williams, 1960; Dunk, 1991; Foley, 2007; Willis, 2016; Hoggart, 2021). These studies, which were rooted in the framework of cultural Marxism, focused exclusively on the conflict dynamics within working-class culture. The study of working-class culture placed significant emphasis on class practices, which formed the basis for many intellectual myths, such as pure class consciousness, solidaristic values, and collective struggle. Nevertheless, the global shift in labor-capital dynamics hindered the collectivist inclinations observed in subsequent studies from the late 1970s onwards. The diverse consequences of flexible organizational structures in labor markets have had a transformative impact on the material and social circumstances of the working class. Subsequently, the appearance of novel precarious positions in labor markets has resulted in heterogeneous social roles within the working class (Entin, 2021). The employment prospects for workers in blue-collar occupations have experienced a decline; there has been a noticeable divergence in the experiences of low, middle, and high categories within the service sector; and the emergence of new forms of precarious employment has led to a transformation in class relations. The concept of culture in working-class studies has experienced a retreat due to this profound transformation.

Nonetheless, research conducted within specific regions over the past few decades (Devine, 1992; Skeggs, 1997; Savage et. al., 2005; Vester, 2005) has revealed that the working-class culture has not vanished entirely but has rather experienced some form of transformation (Flemmen et.al., 2017; Streib, 2021). A group of researchers known as new-generation class theorists (Botero, 2004) have admitted a transformation in the collective relations within the social conditions of workers. Additionally, they maintained the viewpoint that the unique social presence of class cultures has not disappeared (Savage, 2016). Researchers who adhere to culturalist approaches in class studies, heavily influenced by the ideas of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, tend to focus their analysis of class culture on the concepts of lifestyle and tastes.

Likewise, there has been a surge in the number of studies dedicated to the culturalist approach in class studies conducted within the context of Turkey (Üstüner & Hold, 2010; Rankin et.al., 2014; Karademir Hazır, 2014a; 2016). However, the primary focus of these studies was on the middle class and its practices of distinction[1]. Limited studies have been conducted on class-cultural distinctions among workers and how spatial differences are manifested (Alemdaroğlu, 2017). Studies have infrequently recognized spatial disparities among workers and the social mechanisms that shape them (Temel, 2023). However, an examination of the socio-spatial variances in working-class culture could offer insights into the emergence of developments within each class culture characterized by distinct spatial attributes. For example, stating that responses to a succession of questions such as "how can local socio-spatial conditions affect class cultures?", "why is a working-class culture in a specific locality different from other working-class cultures in different localities in the same city?" "which social conditions are creating convergences and divergences between spatial?" are established upon the analysis of specific components of class culture. The objective of this study is to explore these types of questions and contribute to the examination of working-class lifestyles and socio-spatial distribution in Turkey by employing the Bursa case as a lens.

As the emblematic city of industrialization in Turkey, Bursa[2] is our focal point for examining working-class culture from a neo-Bourdieusian perspective[3]. The primary focus of this study is to explore the connection between neo-Bourdieusian theory and socio-spatial differences. In addition, in this study, two main hypotheses have been identified. According to the first hypothesis, the working-class culture is not a homogeneous construct and displays heterogeneous attributes. Second, variations within class do not generate cultural disintegration among the working class (Beck, 2019; Giddens, 2019). It is still possible to discern unique cultural characteristics specific to the working class that are distinct from those of other social classes. The primary objective of this study is to examine the socio-spatial distribution of the working-class lifestyle in the three central districts of Bursa (Yıldırım, Osmangazi

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[1] Skeggs (1992, p.66) asserted that research on working-class culture has utilized the working class as a frame of reference to expose discriminatory practices prevalent in the middle class.

[2] There are two crucial factors that play a role in choosing to study Bursa as a research field. A notable feature that sets Bursa apart from other Turkish cities is its historical connection to industrialization and proletarianization. Bursa witnessed significant advancement in the initial stages of the Turkish union movement. For instance, the first legal strike occurred in Bursa in 1963. Additionally, Bursa labor markets exhibit distinct features, such as relatively high union membership rates and the prevalence of secure industrial jobs, distinguishing them from other regions in Turkey. According to official statistics, the total number of union members in Bursa was nearly 120,000 in 2019. This figure corresponds to an almost 17% rate, which is noticeably higher than those of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir.

[3] The study of the working class in Turkey has been heavily influenced by the Marxist tradition. The primary focus of this approach lies in class consciousness and solidarity-oriented organizational practices among working-class communities. This research paradigm consists of two strands. The first set of studies focuses primarily on the erosion of culture within the working class, indicating the rise of an ethnicity-driven cultural environment as opposed to one based on social class. The other arm challenges the thesis that cultural dissolution occurs (Arslan, 2017; Öztürk, 2018). The worker class is interpreted from a substantialist perspective with a belief in the homogenous nature of the working class. For them, it is possible to determine whether the working class has maintained its collectivist inclinations and solidaristic in-group connections (Coşkun, 2013; Gündoğdu, 2023).

and Nilüfer). The first part of this research focuses on the discussions regarding the interdependence of working-class culture, socio-spatial variances, and tastes. The latter section emphasized the emergence of the working class in Bursa and explored the mechanisms through which socio-spatial discrepancies contribute to variations within the working class. Next, the study will outline the hypothesis and provide details pertaining to the research inquiries and survey methodology adopted, which encompassed a total of 15 distinct neighborhoods situated within Bursa during the year 2022. The data obtained from the survey will be analyzed using the methods of multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) in the final section. In conclusion, this study highlights the unique cultural composition of representatives of the Turkish working-class in Bursa.

2. The Working Class and Their Culture

What is the class culture? Is there a culture unique to a particular social class? How can culture change across classes? How can we theorize the relationship between culture and class? These topics have recently been prominent in discussions within social class debates and culture studies recently (Paterson & Kern, 1996; Savage, et al., 2005; Flemmen et al., 2017, Hoggart, 2021; Streib, 2021; Metzgar, 2021; Jensen, 2021; Attfield, 2021; Entin, 2021). The notion of culture pertains to the ideas that individuals conduct in their social existence (Streib, 2021). The inquiry into the nature of social classes reveals that culture is a fundamental factor in distinguishing them. Analyzing class culture involves making sociology to understand the material possessions and daily practices of individuals (Bourdieu, 2019, p.197).

Since its beginings, sociology has emphasized the study of working-class culture (Strangleman, 2021, p.227). Early research on working-class culture primarily focused on income inequality and nonmaterial disadvantages. In the subsequent phase, researchers aimed to elucidate aspects of working-class culture. During this phase, historians, rather than sociologists, demonstrated academic interest in the culture of the working class. The cultural history studies of Thompson, a notable figure among English Marxist historians, have been increasingly recognized. The work of Thompson, specifically titled *The Making of the English Working Class*, has had a significant impact on social scientists as it effectively illustrates the vibrant and dynamic lives of the working class. The contributions of English Marxist historians have played a significant role in expanding our understanding of culture. Concurrently, they have paved the way for defining social classes by integrating cultural elements and practices. Specifically, Thompson defended his work by approaching the notion of class through the inclusivity of culture and prioritizing life experiences in a comprehensive manner (Erbaş, 2017, p.16; Wright, 2017c, p.352), and he attempted to integrate an ontological concept of culture into class theory (Foley, 2007, p.265). In essence, the importance of culture lies in its ability to cultivate common interests among workers or sharpen class consciousness. As an illustration, Williams (1960, p.44) posited in his work "*Culture and Society*" that the culture of the working class should be regarded as an act of resistance against dominant norms.

Cultural analysis was a focal point in class research conducted from 1940 to 1970 (Williams, 1990; Thompson, 2010; Willis, 2016; Hoggart, 2021). However, the increasing attention given to cultural studies was limited to ongoing debates on subjectivity and consciousness, as well as the solidarity types associated with organizing political action aimed at challenging the adverse conditions imposed by capitalist structures (Savage et al., 2005, p.97). There is no doubt that the works of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams were the main focus of attention. The Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, which was initially established by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall, quickly gained recognition and became a significant reference point for studies on class and culture (Webster, 2004; Turner, 2016).

The school has firmly rejected the idea of disconnecting culture from material life and strongly advocated for establishing a connection between society and the economy. Scholars from the Birmingham school integrated Marxist analysis into cultural studies (Kellner, 2016, p.141), asserting that examining class culture would yield insights into the cultural reproduction and cultural resist of economic classes (Foley, 2007, p.272). This comprehension defines class culture on the margins of resistance, specifically targeting the political and economic structures responsible for social inequalities. According to this analysis, the working class exhibits a collective cultural response to the conditions imposed by capitalist social norms (Bennet, 2018, p.54). If working-class culture can generate counter-cultural practices, encompassing food-eating preferences to the development of alternative language as a means to challenge hegemonic cultural practices, it should be acknowledged as a distinct class culture (Coşkun, 2017, p.47). In essence, the importance of culture lies in its ability to cultivate common interests among workers or sharpen class consciousness. As an illustration, Williams (1960, p.44) posited in his work "Culture and Society" that the culture of the working class should be regarded as an act of resistance against dominant norms. He maintained the perspective that the cultural practices of the working class were significantly distinct from the individualistic tendencies of bourgeois culture,

resulting in the formation of solidaristic social ties (Williams, 1960, p.344). The same arguments were espoused in Hoggart's book, *The uses of literacy: Aspects of working-class life* (2021, p.56) maintained that the existence of a unique culture and the tastes of workers represented a clear dissent toward the cultural milieu of the bourgeoisie.

The cultural studies conducted by the Birmingham School did not aim to assess the lifestyles of different social classes and positions. While followers of Hoggart inherited their understanding of cultural projects, their attention soon turned to the influence of popular culture and mass media on the working class and society at large. Nevertheless, Willis's publication, *Learning to Labor: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs, continued* to investigate solidaristic practices within the working class. His main emphasis was on labor markets and the institutional power of the school, with a comprehensive analysis of the role of culture in the reproduction of inequalities. Furthermore, he concluded that ultimately, an optimistic outlook was provided regarding the radical political response within the working-class culture (Skeggs, 1992, p.187). In sum, Marxist theoreticians who made room for culture in class theory defined culture as daily life practices used to resist natural positions within the capitalist social hierarchy.[4]

The working-class culture in literature has received less attention since the Birmingham School. However, the portrayal of working-class culture in literature is often seen as a complex structure. The retreat of working-class culture studies can be attributed to a decrease in the tendency among social actors to define social positions solely based on class. Additionally, there has been an increase in social attitudes that reflect contradictory class locations. The debate surrounding claims of class dissolution has specifically raised uncertainties regarding class as a distinct social entity. This assertion was founded on the rising middle class theory, which posited that the rise in workers' living standards brought about by unionization and a society characterized by "full employment," was observed. In particular, the research conducted by Goldthorpe on the relationship between class culture and the voting preferences of workers in Luton has triggered discussions on the concept of "affluent workers," highlighting the noticeable similarities between workers' lifestyles and bourgeois culture.

Furthermore, these prominent arguments underscored the detrimental consequences of the neoliberal era, encompassing the diminishing presence of manual workers in employment, the decline in real wages, and the deterioration of working conditions. These conditions extended the conceptual uncertainties surrounding the social significance of the working class; beyond these debates, it prompted the questioning of all underlying assumptions related to the concept of class. The decline in industrial employment patterns and the simultaneous improvement in standards of living and education among the salariat in Western capitalism have resulted in a prioritization of research on the "middle classes" (Goldthorpe et al., 1979; Wright, 2016; 2017). The most prominent outcome of the "class crisis" in the social sciences is the evident decline in research on "working-class culture." Postmodern theorists and critics have argued that the concept of class can be undermined by the presence of "cultural" elements. Furthermore, their belief was that societal differentiation was intricately linked to the formation of personal identity (Bauman, 2000; Bell, 2013; Beck, 2019; Giddens, 2019). Certain phenomena, such as the growth of cultural forms in identities or the establishment of lifestyles through cultural objects and symbols from the cultural industry, have contributed to the shift toward the examination of "culture" instead of "class" in sociological analysis of late modernity. Concurrently, the Birmingham school's attention shifted away from the "cultural analysis of class" (Hall, 2017). During this period, the school's studies focused more on gender, race, ethnicity, sex, and national identity than on class (Kellner, 2016; Webster, 2004).

However, starting in the 1990s, particularly in the United Kingdom, there was a resurgence of research on class culture (Wynne, 1990; Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998). It should be acknowledged that only a minor portion of these (Devine, 1992; Skeggs, 1997) endeavors redirected their attention toward the working-class culture. The primary concept shared among these works is the refusal to accept the argument regarding the dissolution of the working class. Furthermore, they persisted in their belief in the functional aptitude of the class concept to measure social differentiation. In addition, they adopted theoretical positions that challenged the conventional interpretation of class analysis. Conventional analysis relies on sets of structure-consciousness-action and the concept of culture viewed as a "dependent variable," as well as the economy seen as an "independent variable." In contrast, new-generation class theorists perceived the "culture" as essential elements in their analysis (Hazır, 2014, p.234). Furthermore, new-generation class theorists have taken into consideration not only economic resources. Their suggestion is to incorporate material conditions of existence into the analysis, considering social resources such as education and cultural consumption. They found the works of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly *Distinction* (2017), highly influential. They believed that Bourdieu's argument played a

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[4] This particular disposition is observable in other neo-Marxist perspectives beyond the Birmingham school (Dunk, 1991). The notion of culture, as examined in these studies, has been characterized as a function that undertakes both a consciousness of social class and the practices of organized collective action. Despite Dunk's (1991, p.22) avoidance of romanticizing the working class, the depiction of the working class in his works assumes a dissident persona, serving as a form of resistance against the dominant culture.

significant role in broadening the understanding of social class. They adhered to the "Distinction" framework in order to formulate a novel class analysis that encompasses the "culture of class," considering tastes, lifestyles, and social spheres. In addition, their arguments extensively drew upon the core concepts of Bourdieu's sociological work, which encompassed habitus and forms of capital.

Following the 2000s, there has been a notable rise in the number of studies examining class culture, specifically with a focus on working-class culture (Devine & Savage, 2000; Devine & Savage, 2005; Savage et al., 2005; Vester, 2005; Skeggs, 2005; Charlesworth, 2007; Meier, 2022). The credit for the burgeoning academic interest in this area goes to Bourdieu's groundbreaking studies on the cultural aspects of social class (Savage, 2016, p.58). Despite this, Bourdieu's analysis only minimally focused on subclasses, specifically the working class (Swartz, 2015, p.120). In *Distinction*, Bourdieu offers a limited argument about the working class. His assertion was limited to the existence of two distinct working classes that became fragmented due to early urbanization, proletarianization, political orientations, lifestyles, and religious practices. According to Bourdieu's perspective, the working-class culture was devoid of intricacy and instead exhibited a uniform class culture influenced by the taste for basic necessities (Bourdieu, 2017, p.179). In addition, working-class culture merely served as a derogatory reference for comparison with the tastes of the upper and middle classes (Bourdieu, 2017, p.93). Despite this, advocates of the culturalist approach have once again incorporated the working class into their social analysis. The culturalist approach has yielded substantial evidence that supports the existence of working-class culture, as exemplified by the influence of class on culture and lifestyle, even in non-class-for-self situations (Flemmen et al., 2017, p.4). For this purpose, the connections between cognitive implements and objective circumstances, specifically the embodiment of habitus as both physical and cognitive expressions of class culture, have been demonstrated (Charlesworth, 2007).

Typically, distinctions based on class culture are revealed through an examination of workers' lifestyles and practices of cultural consumption using qualitative research designs. The choices, including voting preferences, daily practices, and tastes, have been analyzed to understand the existence of class culture (Devine, 1992). In spite of this, the approach has cultivated its analytical vision by giving less priority to institutional and collective factors and instead employing microperspectives (Scott, 2002, p.32). According to their perspective, class relations were believed to occur on an individual level. Furthermore, they hypothesized that stylized, symbolic conflict forms have been the center of class relations (Reay, 2011, p.2). These explanations are characterized by stylized class-based sentiments and experiences, leading to the emergence of antinomy. For example, a sense of inferiority and superiority (Meier, 2021); the discourses that generate contradictory pronoun pairs, wherein notions of "us" or "them" (Skeggs, 1997) are implicitly understood as statements regarding class culture (Bottero, 2004)[5].

The studies conducted by cultural Marxists did not include an examination of workers' tastes and how they were categorized within their lifestyles. Neither Hoggart's (2021) nor Willis's (2016) works focused on the classificatory nature of workers' music preferences, food habits, or cultural consumption practices. In contrast, the culturalist approach views cultural manifestations of taste as powerful indicators of the independent existence of the working-class. Patterns that occur around the lifestyles of workers are the practices of producing and proclaiming their social positions (Wynne, 1990, p.34). The embodiments of tastes enable the generation of cultural practices oriented toward the middle class within the framework of changing practices. Consequently, lifestyle convergence and divergence are made possible (Wacquant, 2017, p.16). Within this context, culture is treated as a social practice embedded in interconnected social spaces and positions.

On the other hand, according to the cultural Marxist perspective, working-class culture is a socially homogeneous entity. Working-class culture is whether it exists or not. Furthermore, new-generation class theorists have rejected the inclination toward substantialism seen in traditional class frameworks, which define cultural practices as solely derived from material circumstances. Instead, they held the belief that class positions correspond to the mutual relationship between the structure of social and lifestyle spaces (Flemmen et al., 2017, p.7). Although working-class culture is distinct from other social classes, its cultural characteristics are not homogenous (Savage et al., 2005; Vester, 2005; Meier, 2021). Moreover, workers' material culture and consumption patterns are also subject to change. Especially, the comprehensive analysis conducted by Savage on the regional working-class culture in Manchester stylized the diversification within the class. Certain working-class households in the suburban area of Cheadle labeled their neighbors' tastes as lowbrow. Flemmen et al.'s (2017, p.15) research, which focused on the analysis of class-cultural differentiation in contemporary Norwegian society, presented similar findings. The working-class culture not only distinguishes itself from the upper and middle classes, but it also exhibits internal variations. The findings of Pereira's

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[5] It should be noted, however, that cultural Marxist research (Willis, 2016; Hoggart, 2021) did not specifically investigate the psycho-social origins of class consciousness; there were some hints of implicit class discourses and an awareness of social class.

(2016) research, which evaluated class cultures based on regional factors, demonstrated the correspondence between class-cultural variations and spatial variations in Porto. Therefore, Temel's (2023) research revealed that the social mechanisms influencing local working-class culture in Bursa were consistent with spatial disparities. Differentiation among workers is based on spatial and cultural strategies, where social-spatial practices are viewed as the hegemonic mechanisms that generate a social hierarchy (Temel, 2023, p.208).

In sum, the new generation of class theorists generally overlooked the social dynamics that lead to fragmentation within a class culture. Culture and differentiation have become their primary focus, while the reasons for structured inequality patterns have been relegated to a secondary role (Crompton & Scott, 2005, p.191). The general tendency to rely on qualitative research design may have resulted in a lack of awareness regarding emerging mechanisms of inequality. In addition, the nature of the classified practices and the extra focus on the existence of class culture may be other reasons[6]. In this case, it might be advantageous to prioritize the quantitative design used in studies that explore class culture from a working-class perspective. Moreover, it could prove practical to discern key categories around which workers are united. Besides, it might offer possibilities for comprehending spatial differentiation and discerning the factors influencing it among the working class. Certainly, this diversity may be linked to the notion of social class through a comparison with spatial differentiation (Erbaş, 2017).

3. Working-class in Bursa and Spatial Differentiation

The historical roots of the working class in Bursa extend beyond the chronology of Turkey's industrialization. In the 1870s, nearly 60 textile plants were established in the city, marking the early efforts toward industrialization in Turkey (Erder, 1975) and the rise of wage labor (Erengezgin, 2007, p.89). The earliest occurrences of proletarization could be found in the residential areas that were established as worker neighborhoods within the plant zone at Gökdere or *Cilimboz Stream*. As an illustration, the majority of workers residing and working around of Gökdere were predominantly Armenian descent. Greek-descent workers were prevalent among the inhabitants surrounding the *Cilimboz Stream* (Kaygalak, 2008). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the early stage of capitalist production did not lead to the dissolution of crafts in Bursa.

The second quarter of the 20th century marked a crucial period of textile production-based industrialization and proletarianization in Bursa. According to the industrial census conducted in 1927, the city had a total of 3209 established workplaces with a workforce of 9886 employees. In addition, 29% of them were employed in the weaving industry. A total of 116 firms received benefits from the implementation of *Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu* (The Industrial Investment Incentive Law) in 1932 in the City (Ciğerci Ulukan, 2008, p.92). The majority, around 90%, were employed as workers in the weaving industry. The opening of the Merinos Plant was a critical milestone in the proletarization and industrialization process in Bursa during the late 1930s. The establishment of the Merinos Plant had a significant impact on the potential for improving textile production and expanding the product range. It served as the gateway to a new phase in textile production. During that same time period, a new factory called *Rayon* was established in the neighboring countryside of *Gemlik*. This development expanded Bursa textile production capabilities, ranging from yarn to ready-to-wear garments. The establishment of these new factories had a significant impact on expanding job opportunities in local labor markets and the emergence of a group of entrepreneurs (Pınarcıoğlu, 1998, p.184). Public factories, in particular, provided valuable skill development opportunities for workers who would later be employed in private textile factories. Furthermore, public factories generate network externalities by disseminating new productive techniques that private entrepreneurs imitate[7].

To provide an example, a Dietrich weaving machine, which The Merinos plant decided to dispose of, was acquired by small weaving entrepreneurs. Subsequently, it was replicated at the Bursa Industry Bazaar, resulting in a surge in entrepreneurs and local employment opportunities within the weaving sector. The number of weaving plants in Bursa saw a significant increase from 429 in the early 1950s to 1060 in the early 1960s (İyibozkurt, 2016, p.89). Production of flatter and silk fabric in Turkey during 1959 was predominantly concentrated in Bursa, with 70% of workplaces in this industry. During this specific period, the industrial sectors had a distribution of regional total production as follows: weaving accounted for 37.89%, shoe and ready-wear accounted for 16.9%, and metal accounted for 9.57%. During the early 1970s, the emerging automotive industry relied on these small factories, which employed labor-intensive production methods, as essential infrastructure (Ciğerci Ulukan, 2008, p.97).

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[6] Flemmen et al.'s (2017) study on the constitutive categories of class culture in contemporary Norwegian society, while relying on quantitative data, perceives working class culture as a form of differentiation from other groups and is condemned for its taste of necessities.

[7] In 1943, a total of 2200 workers, consisting of 1200 men and 1000 women, were employed solely at the Merinos Plant.

The industrial structure in Bursa experienced a series of new developments that led to changes in the working-class structure since the third quarter of the twentieth century[8]. The emergence of segmentation in local labor markets was triggered by various developments, including changes in value structures, differentiation of wage levels based on sector distribution diversity and growth of stratification within the textile production hierarchy. Additionally, the working class has undergone material and existential changes due to the growing demographic diversity resulting from migration from the Balkans and internal migration[9]. Migrants from the Balkan Turks with prior urban living experience and industrial work possessed preferable skills, making them "palatable" workers in the eyes of their employers. These workers concentrated in secure jobs in the primary sector. Conversely, internal migrant groups without prior industrial worker experience predominantly occupied less-skilled positions in the secondary sector, specifically in the textile and service sectors. The low-wage textile industry experienced a significant rise in job segmentation, particularly when compared with the relatively uniform wage differentiation in the automotive sector. These developments in proletarianiazation experiences resulted in differentiation across different aspects, including residential choices and social practices within the working class.

Governments decided to designate Bursa as a pilot region for industrial development in the late 1960s. The establishment of the Bursa Organized Industrial Zone in Turkey has resulted in a distinct spatial division between large- and small-scale industries (Aktar, 1996, p.141). Subsequently, despite the relocation of certain small industry firms from northern Osmangazi to organized industrial zones, textile weaving workshops, which were primarily concentrated in the lower segment of textile production, expanded across the Yıldırım and Osmangazi districts. The industrial structure of Bursa can be regarded as a successful illustration of the import substitution logic during this period. Owing to the escalating demand for synthetic yarns in the domestic market, new facilities were established within the Merinos plant. Then, three additional plants were established, each dedicated to the production of polyester and nylon thread. More importantly, new multinational corporations began production operations in the metal and machine industry. Furthermore, there was a significant development as several new multinational corporations began production operations, specifically in the metal and machine industry (Ciğerci Ulukan, 2008, p.98). As an illustration, the automotive sub-industry had a mere 9 plants in 1973; It peaked at 27 in 1979. Again, the total amount of weaving manufacturers in 1960 exceeded one thousand; this number peaked at almost one thousand and five hundred. In 1982, the amount of weaving factories in Bursa reached up to 1800 (Aktar, 1989, p.236).

The demarcation between large and small firms became noticeable during the mid-1970s. In 1975, Bursa established approximately 600 large-scale firms, resulting in the employment of nearly 30,000 workers. However, textiles remained the most significant sector in terms of job creation. The year 1976 saw almost 700 textile plants in Bursa (İyibozkurt, 2016, p.147), which led to a significant rise in the employment rate by nearly 14%, resulting in the creation of almost 35,000 jobs. During the 1970s, the city accommodated more than one thousand firms, employing nearly 50,000 workers. During the 1970s, approximately 30% of the population was employed as workers. The percentage exceeded almost 40% in 1980 and reached 50% in 1990. At the start of the 2000s, the city's workforce accounted for 70% of its population (Temel, 2023, p.108).

A divergence in production focal points occurred in the late 1970s, driven by variations in labor processes and production methods (Erenzengin, 2007, p.87). On the one hand, a growing number of large-scale factories depend on mass production. Conversely, there was a steady increase in the number of small-scale enterprises. The edged pyramidal internal hierarchy of textile production (Pınarcıoğlu, 1998) has given spatial differentiation within the urban area. Large-scale yarn factories have occupied the highest tier of the pyramid. In addition, merchants who established domestic and international trade networks and arranged subcontract relations also occupied intermediate positions. Weaving shops on a smaller scale occupied the lower tier of this intricate production hierarchy. Variations in organizational structures and wage disparities among employed individuals have influenced residential areas' characteristics. Hierarchical and functional differentiations have arisen from the construction of polarizations based on the spatial distribution of production. These polarization zones include small weaving shops in Yıldırım and Osmangazi, as well as large-scale plants in Nilüfer.

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[8] The evolution of industrial production brought about social change. For example, female labor force participation in the textile industry elicited strong responses from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the public (Kaygalak, 2008). Nonetheless, in the latter part of the 20th century, female employees accounted for 40% of the local workforce (Pınarcıoğlu, 1998). This may be perceived as a significant sign of proletarianization and social change.

[9] In 1945, a significant proportion (approximately 45%) of Bursa's population consisted of individuals born outside the country. The impact of migration on the local population from 1960 to 1965 was 79%. Additionally, the percentage stands at 71% for the period of 1965-70 (Aktar, 1989, p.252). 25.7 % of workers who migrated during the period of 1960-65 were employed in the manufacturing sector. In Dülgeroğlu et al.'s study (1993) on the manufacturing industry in Bursa, Dülgerolu et al. determined that 73.4% of workers employed in this sector during the 1990s hailed from locations outside Bursa. After 1986, 25.8% of workers in the manufacturing industry originated in regions outside Bursa, whereas 39.3% came from abroad, particularly the Turkish minority in Bulgaria.

As an illustration, the operation of looms that produce excessive noise and the requirement for spacious areas for installation have compelled employers to seek inexpensive land in the outskirts of the Yıldırım district for their location decisions. In light of its status as the most polluting step in textile production, the paint manufacturing sector has compelled paint producer companies to identify alternative factory sites outside the adjacent areas of municipalities. Entrepreneurs from these low-tier production areas often acquired new land that they could obtain permission from village mukhtars (Aktar, 1989). As a result of these patterns, a notable concentration of workers were employed in secondary sector jobs within the Yıldırım district, particularly in the field of textile production. Accordingly, Yıldırım has emerged as a desired destination for internal migrants. The migrant workers with lower skill levels who were employed on small-scale shop floors had a motivation to reside in houses situated near their workplaces. Insufficient transportation provisions for company employees have led to the prevalence of slum-style dwellings in Yıldırım (Fidan, 1999), which is attributable to inadequate urban transportation infrastructure.

The spatial distribution of workers was also influenced by the differentiation patterns of large-scale industrial firms. To put it another way, the boundaries of spatial hierarchies are determined by the differentiation of organizational structure and wage levels. Sectoral disparities contribute to variations in wage levels among full-time workers in large-scale factories. On the other hand, observable disparities in wage rates are apparent within the textile industry, particularly among public firms, private firms, and small-scale weaving shop floors. The differential in wage levels among textile and automotive industries is particularly evident. For instance, the average wage of a worker at a private textile firm was found to be fifty percent lower than that of a worker at a private automotive firm. Within the textile production industry, wage levels are indicative of the internal production hierarchy. In the Bursa textile industry in 1993, the real wages of employees in public firms exceeded those of employees in private firms by 59%. Despite a 1.5-fold increase in the average wage levels of Merinos plant workers between 1987 and 1991, these levels remained considerably lower than those in the automotive and metal industry in Bursa (Pınarcıoğlu, 1998, p.238). Additionally, the piece rate system determined the wage levels of unregistered workers on weaving shop floors.

Another contributing factor to the spatial distribution of the working class in Bursa is the residential choices made by insecure workers in weaving shops and other lower-segmented jobs in the textile sector. The overlap between labor and housing markets has played a crucial role in shaping the social topography of urban areas. Affordable land areas in the Northern part of Yıldırım offer convenient slum construction options, thus providing opportunities for workers engaged in precarious and low-paying employment (Kaplanoğlu, 2015, p.84). Furthermore, the role of being a slum owner has been functional in elevating the property status of disadvantaged migrant workers in this locality. By operating in this manner, the system effectively established a means of redistributing income to lower socioeconomic groups in Bursa (Taşan-Kok, 2016, p.238). The weaving shop floors, which have produced irregular employment concentrated in this district and the neighboring areas, have been regarded as the first stop for migrants arriving in Bursa. Additionally, skilled workers[10] who belong to the native population or those who have migrated from the Balkans and have successfully integrated into urban settings, bringing with them industrial job experiences, demonstrate congruence with the formal expectations of housing markets owing to their considerable social capital stocks. The founding of housing cooperatives, primarily by Merinos workers, on limited urban lands in the Osmangazi and Nilüfer districts has resulted in the establishment of worker-class suburbs. According to the findings of Erez's (2020) study, worker cooperatives formed by organized and regular-income workers in the Ataevler neighborhood of Nilüfer constructed nearly one thousand residences. In addition, Erenzengin's (2007) research, which primarily examined workers in the Bursa Organized Industrial Zone, revealed that workers tend to reside in houses built by worker cooperatives in the Akpınar neighborhood in Northern Osmangazi. Since the latter half of the 2010s, workers who were excluded from urban regeneration opportunities have lived in inexpensive residences situated in different areas of the Nilüfer and Osmangazi districts. These residences were constructed by TOKI. Conversely, the eastern part of Yıldırım has become a compulsory destination for low-income workers who construct homes on affordable plots of land (Temel, 2023, p.165). The disparity in housing access has intensified the stark contrast between the three districts in the city, particularly due to the absence of a social housing model that promotes equal opportunities.

Spatial differentiation patterns among Bursa workers have become more difficult since the late 2000s as a result of developments in organizing production structures and transforming the volume of capital and products. The transformation of material and social existence conditions among native and late internal migrant workers should also be considered. To summarize, there are currently two separate factions within the working class in Bursa that can be distinguished by their spatial and social characteristics. On the one hand, Osmangazi and Nilüfer have workers who

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[10]   According to the research conducted by Ulukan Ciğerci (2008), who examined the influence of social capital on employment relations among Balkan migrants in Bursa, a majority of migrant workers (51.6%) found their first jobs with the help of relatives.

belong to the second or third generation and have greater access to urban opportunities. On the opposite end (Yıldırım), there exist migrant workers who have recently arrived and belong to the first generation, consequently experiencing distinct disadvantages in urban social settlements.

4. Data and Analytical Strategy

In our study on the working-class culture in Bursa, we adopted the modeling class social space approach, drawing from studies such as Bennett et al. (2009), Flemmen et al. (2017) and Hjellbrekke and Jarness (2022). At the core of this approach is the heavy influence of Bourdieusian class analysis, which seeks to reveal variations in social preferences among different classes. Typically, this means employing MCA analysis to simulate the hierarchical and relational distribution of preferences among social classes in a social sphere that Bourdieu asserted accurately corresponds to the reality of the social world. MCA can potentially establish analytical constructs that redefine logical connections between individual attributes, preferences, and structured social fields. The generation of a simulated social space requires the utilization of position-taking data derived from individual preferences and taste-based rankings. We have adjusted our methodology to meet the analytical requirements. The methodology involved adopting the Bourdieusian class approach and developing a survey to assess individual preferences and tastes in Bursa's class culture.

We conducted a survey consisting of four different types of questions to assess class-related cultural dynamics in Bursa. The first of these can be referred to as economic capital. The assessment of individual economic capital in the survey is based on three variables. The variables comprise the individual's monthly income, the car's value (if any), and the house's value (if any). Using these three individual-level financial situations, economic capital variables are computed. Within the acceptable range, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.765$) was identified as a reliable indicator of the internal consistency of this computed variable. Another type of question pertains to cultural capital. In order to measure cultural capital, I used two factors from the "family cultural capital scale" that was developed by Chiu et al. (2015). The first factor of scale, consisting of four items, focuses on cultural activities within family relationships on a daily basis. These items include the number of books in the household and the frequency of family visits to museums. The second factor of the scale was associated with family ownership of high-brow cultural commodities, such as musical instruments and art objects. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient suggests that this variable ($\alpha = 0.817$) demonstrates strong internal consistency. The financial and cultural capital variables were used to determine the axes of the multiple-correspondence analysis. In addition, there were two other types of variables included in the survey, namely, the datasets needed to construct categories in MCA. The initial dataset incorporated several structural variables that were also crucial for classical-class analysis, primarily pertaining to social positions within production relations, including occupation, educational attainment, workplace size, industry sectors, and voting preferences. Lastly, we constructed variables that focused on lifestyles, aesthetic preferences, and consumption habits, which were utilized as part of the investigation to analyze interconnectedness in social spaces via MCA. The variables included in the study encompassed eating tastes and habits, musical preferences, physical activity habits, book preferences, newspaper topics, holiday habits, and home appliance consumption. We made an effort to reflect the cultural practices of Turkish urban daily life, considering both highbrow and lowbrow elements, to select variables relevant to this data. In addition, we tried to create distinct categories for high-status and ordinary preference rankings based on research on taste and consumption patterns in urban Turkish life during the 21st century, which, as some other studies (Bali, 2002; Karademir-Hazır, 2014; 2017; Rankin & Ergin, 2017) emphasize. All variables in this category were constructed to have traits that adjust with the typical characteristics of nominal categorical data.

To explore class culture through lifestyles, aesthetic preferences, and consumption habits, it is necessary to obtain extensive data that includes various indicators of different forms of capital. In order to meet this requirement, some studies in the literature (Flemmen et al., 2018) have utilized wide-scope secondary data sources. However, the scope of class culture of the Bursa too local for the collection of this type of wide-range data in secondary data sources in Turkey. Considering the restrictions associated with secondary data sources, we needed to employ primary data collected through a specifically devised survey. Our survey was carried out using a representative sample that was generated through quota sampling and had a cross-sectional design. The quotas in the sample were designed to synchronize with the employment status of the Bursa sample space, which is derived from local employment records. In addition, the quotas were designed to ensure an equitable distribution of Bursa residents, taking into consideration the educational achievements specific to each neighborhood and giving particular importance to cultural capital. When assessing quotas based on economic capital levels across neighborhoods, we factor in seasonally adjusted monthly electric consumption and social assistance payment distribution within each neighborhood. Based on these quotas, we decided to sample five neighborhoods that exhibit a hierarchical distribution of high-middle and low-accumulated financial and cultural

capital in each central district in Bursa, and our sample size of 788 was deemed acceptable at the 95% confidence level. The table.1 represents the demographic distribution and characteristics of the sample[11].

Table 1. Demographic distribution of the sample

Variables	general	Working class	variables	general	Working class
(18-24 ages)	(%) 3,0	(%) 4,9	Father (elementary-school)	(%) 27,9	(%) 43,8
(25-34 ages)	(%)14,7	(%) 21,9	Father (middle-school)	(%) 29,6	(%) 38,1
(35-44 ages)	(%) 31,7	(%) 36,9	Father (high-school)	(%) 22,1	(%) 15,2
(45-54 ages)	(%) 31,5	(%) 29,1	Father (graduate)	(%) 18,9	(%) 1,5
(55-64 ages)	(%) 16,1	(%) 7,2	cultural capital	(%) 1,47	(%) 1,18
(65 + age)	(%) 2,9	-	Wage (0 - 5k ₺)	(%) 4,3	(%) 8,2
men	(%) 63,3	(%) 54,6	Wage (5k₺ - 10k ₺)	(%) 60,2	(%) 83,8
women	(%) 36,7	(%) 45,4	Wage (10k₺ - 15k ₺)	(%) 27,9	(%) 7,0
employer	(%) 6,5	-	Value of the car (no car)	(%) 37,2	(%) 69,3
self-employment	(%) 12,2	-	Value of the car (under 150k ₺)	(%) 11,7	(%) 12,6
white-collars	(%) 32,1	-	Value of car (150k - 349k)	(%) 37,7	(%) 16,8
workers	(%) 49,2	(%) 100	Value of car (350k - 549k)	(%) 13,6	(%) 1,3
Sector (manufacturing)	(%) 50,0	(%) 80,7	Value of car (550k - 749k)	(%) 0,4	-
Sector(service)	(%) 46,3	(%) 12,3	Value of the car (750k +)	(%) 0,1	-
Sector (construction)	(%) 3,7	(%) 7,0	value of the home (500k₺ - 999k₺)	(%) 23,9	(%) 14,7
District (Osmangazi)	(%) 27,5	(%) 36,1	value of the home (1000k₺ - 1499k₺)	(%) 15,4	(%) 3,6
District (Yıldırım)	(%) 35,9	(%) 50,5	value of the home (1500k₺ - 1999k₺)	(%) 1,9	-
District (Nilüfer)	(%) 36,5	(%) 13,4	value of the home (2000k ₺ +)	(%) 1,1	-
Workplace (micro)	(%) 17,1	(%) 14,7	Voting (AKParti)	(%) 35,2	(%) 50,2
Workplace (small)	(%) 25,4	(%) 21,6	Voting (CHP)	(%) 45,7	(%) 23,5
Workplace (middle)	(%) 36,0	(%) 22,4	Voting (MHP)	(%) 9,4	(%) 16,5
Workplace (big)	(%) 21,4	(%) 41,2	Voting (İYİParti)	(%) 7,7	(%) 7,2
el ementary- school	(%) 4,8	(%) 6,4	Voting (HDP)	(%) 0,3	(%) 0,3
middle-school	(%) 12,7	(%) 20,1	Voting (no vote)	(%) 1,8	(%) 2,1
high-school	(%) 45,4	(%) 65,2	N	788	388
graduate	(%) 37,1	(%) 8,2			
Couple (no couple)	(%) 6,7	(%) 7,5			
Couple (literate)	(%) 0,6	(%) 1,0			
Couple (elementary-school)	(%) 7,9	(%) 10,1			
Couple (middle-school)	(%) 13,1	(%) 16,2			
Couple (high-school)	(%) 37,8	(%) 56,7			
Couple (graduate)	(%) 33,9	(%) 8,5			
Father (illiterate)	(%) 0,1	-			
Father (literate)	(%) 1,4	(%) 1,3			

5. Is There a Unique Working-Class Culture in Bursa?

The initial focus of our analytical methodology will be on evaluating our primary research question, which seeks to ascertain the existence of a working-class culture in Bursa. This was achieved through an analysis of their lifestyles,

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[11] The survey took place during the summer of 2022, and it reflected real income, car values, and home prices during that period.

aesthetic preferences, and consumption patterns using the data gathered from our survey. In fact, by examining table.1, it is possible to obtain a preliminary understanding of the variations in working-class culture in Bursa. According to the data presented in Table 1, the educational attainment of the working class in Bursa is notably lower than that of the general population, as well as their partners' and fathers' educational levels. Similarly, when measured to other segments of the sample, it is evident that their cultural capital levels are considerably lower. The survey items on financial sources further underscore the significantly disadvantaged position of the working class in Bursa compared to the overall population.

The working class in Bursa also exhibits discernible positional distinctions due to structural variables. First, the items displayed in Table 1 demonstrate significant variations in the employment conditions of the working-class in Bursa when compared to both the general population in the sample and the overall working-class in Turkey. Manufacturing jobs do not hold the highest position in Turkey's sectoral distribution of employment, with service jobs taking precedence over both the working class and other waged jobs (TUIK, 2024). In Bursa, the majority of working-class jobs are in the manufacturing sector. Moreover, when comparing the scale of working-class jobs in Bursa to that of manufacturing firms in Turkey, there is another notable difference. Regarding the workplace scale in Turkey, including the manufacturing sector, it is largely characterized by small or medium-sized enterprises. Nonetheless, as previously stated, the manufacturing sector in Bursa is distinguished by a large-scale organizational framework, particularly within multinational corporations. As a result of this production structure, there is a notable concentration of working-class jobs in large-scale firms. Their concentration was primarily on Yıldırım and Osmangazi as indicated Table.1, with only a small fraction of workers engaged in high-added manufacturing, specifically automotive production. Workers of these plants' propensity for settlement was particularly pronounced in neighborhoods in Nilüfer.

The voting preferences of the working class in Bursa also displayed disparities in structural positions relative to other social classes. The political right tendencies of the working class in Turkey are a lively topic in literature and public discussions (Yıldırım, 2010; Ganioğlu, 2013; Ocaklı, 2015). While the majority in our sample voted for the CHP, the working class represented a massive proportion of the sample's voting preferences for right-wing parties, especially the AK Party, as in other industrial districts where the working class is concentrated in Turkey, such as Gebze.

Our efforts were focused on establishing analytic connections between these structural differences observed within the working class in Bursa and the dimensions of lifestyle preferences, encompassing esthetics, consumer habits, and tastes. By engaging in this process, we separate ourselves from the two different but prevailing assumptions often found in recent studies on working-class culture. One involves comprehending working-class culture as a counter-culture to mass culture in capitalist society, drawing upon neo-Marxist traditions. Based on their perspective, it is plausible to identify a unique working-class culture within the framework of a capitalist society. This particular culture can be characterized by distinct sets of values that facilitate the emergence of alternative forms of solidarity and may be regarded as having significant potential for social transformation. Their understanding of culture is independent of daily life practices and aesthetic. In their imagination, means of culture involve pursuing solidarity patterns and counter-movements within capitalist mass culture, which are not directly linked to habits or aesthetic dimensions. Although we may not fully agree on these presumptions of Neo-Marxist tradition, our opinions overlap in certain areas. Our analysis shares similarities with the neo-Marxist tradition because we acknowledge the potential to identify a unique working-class culture within a capitalist society. Nevertheless, our analytical perspectives diverge from those of neo-Marxist class analyses, and we interpret the concept of culture through a fully Bourdieusian perspective, emphasizing the significance of habits, preferences, and aesthetic within a specific social field characterized by relational terms.

Second, a number of studies inspired by Bourdieu have devoted their analysis to examining the working class perspective in his works, including *Reflexive Anthropology* (co-authored with Wacquant) and *The Weight of the World*. Within these works, Bourdieu characterized the culture of the working class as passive and constrained to follower strategies derived from dominant cultures in the field. Nevertheless, we hold a different perspective from the prevailing presumption in the new class analysis strand rooted in Bourdieu, which characterizes working-class culture as a state of deprivation. Instead, we argue that working-class culture is not solely determined by necessities. The distribution of variables in Table 1 implies a state of deprivation among the working class, particularly regarding financial situations and cultural capital levels. Nonetheless, our understanding is that the culture of the working class includes specific aesthetic elements, and it is possible to recognize specific tastes within the working class that transcend necessities. Furthermore, the comprehension of the working class as a subject is made possible by this presumption.

In an effort to examine our nuanced arguments pertaining to the unique culture of the working class, we employed the MCA. Our hypothesis suggests that the working class in Bursa possesses a unique cultural realm that differs from other classes. This distinction is characterized by distinct tastes and aesthetic dimensions.
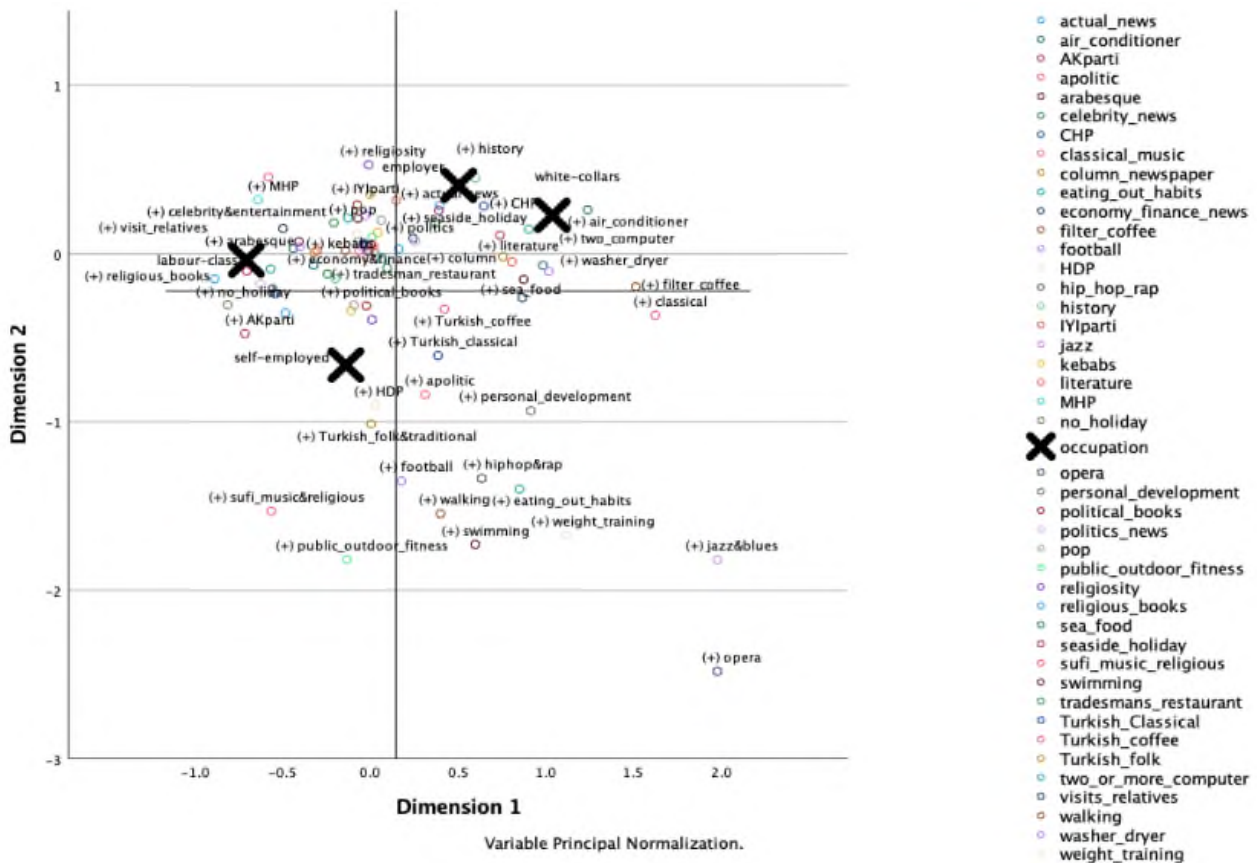
Figure 1. Cultural world of the working class in Bursa

The horizontal axis (accounts for 23,8 per cent α = ,874) in the figure.1 illustrates changes in cultural capital volume, quantified using the cultural capital scale utilized in the survey. Wherewithal, the vertical axis (accounts for 11,9 per cent α = ,741 and the dimension 1 and the dimension 2 express 35,7 per cent of total variance) represents fluctuations in economic capital volume, determined by the computed economic capital variable. Our analysis incorporated structural variables, as outlined in Table 1, along with variables that captured aesthetic elements, tastes, consumer habits, and lifestyle preferences, as detailed in the right panel of Figure 1. The portrait depicted in Figure 1 can be interpreted as evidence of a separate cultural world that exists solely within the working-class community in Bursa, setting it apart from the cultural experiences of other social classes. As observed in the top-left section of the graph, individuals from the working class possess less economic and cultural capital than employers and white-collar workers. Furthermore, there is a certain degree of proximity to self-employment in cultural capital, coupled with a slightly higher level of economic capital in comparison to the other areas.

A distinctive aspect of Bursa working-class culture is the appreciation for arabesque music, the reading of religious books, and the tendency not to be able to go on holidays. Similar to Hoggart's (2021) observation of English workers in the 1950s, Bursa workers tend to prioritize visiting relatives when they have the opportunity to take a vacation. This can be attributed to their internal migration background, strong desire for close family ties, and preference for cost-effective choices. Additionally, religion has emerged as a significant social factor within working-class culture, particularly amongst internal migrant backgrounds. Several studies (White, 2002; Tuğal, 2009;) have specifically highlighted the impact of religion-based solidarity networks on the adaptation of rural migrants to urban culture in worker-concentrated neighborhoods. Hence, it is unsurprising that religion holds great importance in the daily cultural practices of the working class. The reading preferences of the working class in Bursa seem to be influenced by their priority in religious daily practices, as depicted in Figure 1.

There has been substantial scholarly interest in exploring the social construction of arabesque music in literature. This genre was recognized in the early 1970s as a cultural manifestation of the increasing trend of rural-to-urban migration. In the beginning, elements of the embedded musical culture were viewed as undergoing the deterioration of aesthetic aspects of Turkish culture. Subsequently, some studies have acknowledged the alternative aesthetic aspects of the arabesque, which are regarded as a significant element of lowbrow culture that has been socially constructed in the context of Turkish urbanization (Işık & Erol, 2002; Özbek, 2006; Özgür, 2006). In recent times, there has been a growing

understanding that certain debates surrounding the social construction of arabesque music in everyday life can be seen in a manner akin to the cultural omnivorousness theory (Karademir-Hazır & Warde, 2015; Rankin & Ergin, 2017). Numerous renowned music icons have performed renditions of cult Arabesque songs, and these gentrified versions have gained popularity among the general public, including middle and upper socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, the listening trends observed in Spotify indicate that arabesque music is acquiring popularity among the younger generations across all social classes (Gazete oksijen, 2022; Işık, 2018). Notwithstanding, our findings demonstrate that listening to arabesque music continues to be strongly influenced by social class, serving as a definitive cultural tradition primarily embraced by the working class, which sharply contrasts with the preferences of Bursa's middle and upper classes. The scatter plot in Figure.1 reveals that listening to classical music is associated with the white collar and the cultural milieu of employers, while it is almost asymmetrical to the arabesque music in the working-class culture of Bursa.

It can be detected that the eating preferences of the classes in Bursa exhibit a similar pattern. The consideration of eating preferences as a differentiating element in Bourdieusian class perspectives has been present since the "Distinction". When viewed from a cultural perspective, the assignment of certain eating practices as indicative of highbrow is intertwined with their degree of arbitrariness. When eating taste closely aligns with the pure means of necessity, it is commonly regarded as a preference among those with less refined, lowbrow tastes. Due to its high-calorie content, red meat consumption is commonly regarded as indicative of a lower cultural status. Nevertheless, intricate, uncommon, and challenging culinary delights, such as seafood, are regarded as hallmarks of refined, high-brow cuisine. Undoubtedly, recognizing local mores is essential in analyzing how cultural hierarchies of gastronomic preferences are constructed. In this regard, the presence of a cosmopolitan palate is considered a defining characteristic of sophisticated culture, as opposed to taste preferences rooted in local mores. Kebabs hold significant significance in Turkish cuisine because they predominantly symbolize the local culture. Despite the presence of authentic regional kebabs throughout Anatolia, the proliferation of kebab cuisine is primarily influenced by the rural-urban migration phenomenon that emerged in the 1960s and is generally associated with lowbrow cultural practices. Additionally, the popularity of "*esnaf-lokantası*" is closely associated with the rural-urban migration background of Turkish cities (Samancı, 2020).

Nevertheless, particularly since the late 1990s, the consumption of kebabs and dining at old "esnaf lokantası" establishments has become a gentrified cultural phenomenon among the middle and upper classes in Turkey (Karaosmanoğlu, 2009). Our findings indicate that the eating preferences regarding kebabs or "*esnaf lokantası*" in Bursa are still strongly linked to cultural practices that are dependent on social class, similar to the listening habits of arabesque music. In other words, consuming kebabs or having a preference for the traditional "esnaf lokantası" dishes continues to represent the working-class culture, even though they have acquired more gentrified connotations. In contrast, it appears that the highbrow culture in Bursa has a particular preference for seafood, and this distinctive characteristic could be seen as one of the most class-specific and distinguishing cultural practices in the city.

Figure 1 provides insights into the political culture prevalent among workers in Bursa. The scatter plots in Figure 1 validate the fundamental frequency distribution outlined in Table 1, indicating a significant preference among workers in Bursa for right-wing political parties. It is observed that workers exhibit a higher inclination toward voting for the AK Party or the MHP, with a slightly lower tendency toward the İYİ Party. Furthermore, it reveals a significant disparity of nearly 180 degrees between white-collar workers' and employers' inclinations in relation to their proximity to the CHP. The conclusions drawn from the scatter graphs are consistent with other research on the voting behavior of the working-class (Yıldırım, 2010; Ganioğlu, 2013). The political attitudes of the working class in Bursa are not shown to diverge from those observed in other industrial districts of Turkey. The daily political habits of the working class exhibit contrasting tones with those of other classes, particularly employers and white collars. Despite the working-class culture not exhibiting political apathy, certain habits indicative of political awareness, such as staying updated with political news through media sources or engaging with political books, appear to be more closely associated with the white-collar or employer cultural sphere. Instead of political awareness in daily life practices, the working-class culture in Bursa followed celebrity and entertainment news and, less likely, economic and financial news from media sources.

The consumption preferences of the working class in Bursa, as shown in Figure 1, appear to closely align with perspectives of deprivation. The ownership of home appliances is primarily associated with white collars and employers. The possession of a filter coffee machine, washer dryer, air conditioner, and two or more computers is deemed indicative of belonging to the middle-upper class in our sample. Owning these household appliances represents an extension of the current consumption patterns of the middle class. For example, the possession of a filter coffee machine is inherently linked to the adoption of "third wave"-"artisanal" coffee consumption practices, a prevalent trend among the middle classes. Despite this, it appears that there is no definitive link between working-class status in Bursa and the ownership of home appliances. Although culturally, it is not possible to evaluate the working class culture as a deprivation; in terms

of materiality, there may be notable dynamics of scarcity in working class daily practices regarding the consumption of household appliances.

In summary, the first stage of our analysis, as illustrated in Figure 1, presents some evidence supporting our hypothesis regarding the working-class system in Bursa. Initially, it is evident that a unique working-class culture exists, exhibiting its own unique dynamics. These dynamics indicate that an inadequate understanding of working-class culture arises when it is viewed solely through the lens of deprivation. Moreover, it encompasses more than just counter-cultural practices, incorporating aesthetic and tastes that have deviated from those of other social classes. The cultural trends identified among the working class in Bursa through our analysis provide a completely different perspective than the argument labeling working class culture as absent and undesirable.

6. Fragmentation of the Working-Class Culture in Bursa

Once we presented evidence indicating the existence of a unique working-class culture that differed from practices observed in other social classes in Bursa, our subsequent endeavor involved testing our hypothesis concerning heterogeneity. Our claim is that while it is conceivable to discern a unique working class culture in opposition to the practices of other classes, the working class culture itself is characterized by hierarchical sub-divisions that are organized according to the same principles that differentiate classes. It is our belief that the fragmentation within the working-class culture is a direct result of the socio-spatial relations that drive and structure it. The urban social environment encompasses power dynamics that cut across social classes. The spatial differentiation of class structures typically reflects these power relations. This means that the fragmentation logic behind the working-class culture is influenced by socio-spatial power dynamics, thereby giving rise to this cleavage.

Our assertion is that the validation of the comparable logic can be valid for Bursa, as the impact of neighborhood-based indicators as a socio-spatial factor has concomitantly shaped class culture alongside variables related to the division of labor in production. Practically, according to our hypothesis, the three separate center districts of the Bursa each manifest distinct cultural practices observed among the working class. We anticipate the prevalence of lowbrow cultural and economic capital in neighborhoods of Yıldırım (the eastern part of the center district of Bursa). The embodiment of class character can be influenced by various relational factors, including the predominance of Yıldırım resident workers in low-added-value manufacturing firms and a significant proportion of them having social backgrounds related to internal migration, according to our foreseen. The prevailing class culture among workers residing in the neighborhoods of Nilüfer (the western part of the center district of Bursa) can be defined by their proximity to the high-brow cultural practices in Bursa, as predicted. We expect that certain structural elements, such as employment in well-structured sectors driven by foreign investment and high-added value (for example automotive), could impact similarities observed in the cultural climate of the middle class. Moreover, there is a significantly higher ratio of non-migrant workers (born in Bursa) within the resident worker population of Nilüfer. This implied a more seamless assimilation into the cultural landscape that diverged from the emphasis on basic material and social necessities in urban interactions. Given the prevailing cultural readiness patterns among workers in Nilüfer, we anticipate finding an evident prevalence of more adaptive working-class cultural practices in relation to the hegemonic upper and middle class lifestyles. In summary, we anticipate certain outcomes regarding the fragmented nature of working-class culture, which is characterized by its proximity to lowbrow elements in Yıldırım and its proximity to highbrow elements in Nilüfer. Our hypothesis suggests that the neighborhoods of the Osmangazi district, like their geographic location, occupie a central position along the 180-degree line between the pole of Yıldırım and the other pole of Nilüfer.

In order to test our hypothesis, we employed data on structural variables, preferences, and tastes among individuals belonging to the working class. The aim of this project is to create lifestyle maps to establish distinctions among workers based on district. The identification of highbrow and lowbrow cultural elements among workers in the sample was based on the use of specific tastes and practices. Similar to the concept of class differentiation demonstrated in Figure 1, the vertical axis represents cultural capital, while the horizontal axis represents economic capital. Figure 2 shows the distinction among workers based on certain structural variables. The scatter plot depicted in Figure 2 (dimension 1 accounts for 28,9 per cent α = ,825 and the dimension 2 accounts for 16,0 per cent α = ,624 express 44,9 per cent of total variance) provides some evidence that supports our hypothesis on the socio-spatial differentiation among worker classes. The resident workers of Yıldırım neighborhoods demonstrate limited cultural and economic resources. Furthermore, the educational attainment levels of both individuals and their partners and fathers is comparatively lower in comparison to workers in other districts. Furthermore, they exhibit closeness with the voting preferences of the AK party and are more inclined to be employed in the manufacturing industry. The level of religiosity exhibited by workers in this district is stronger than that of workers in other districts.
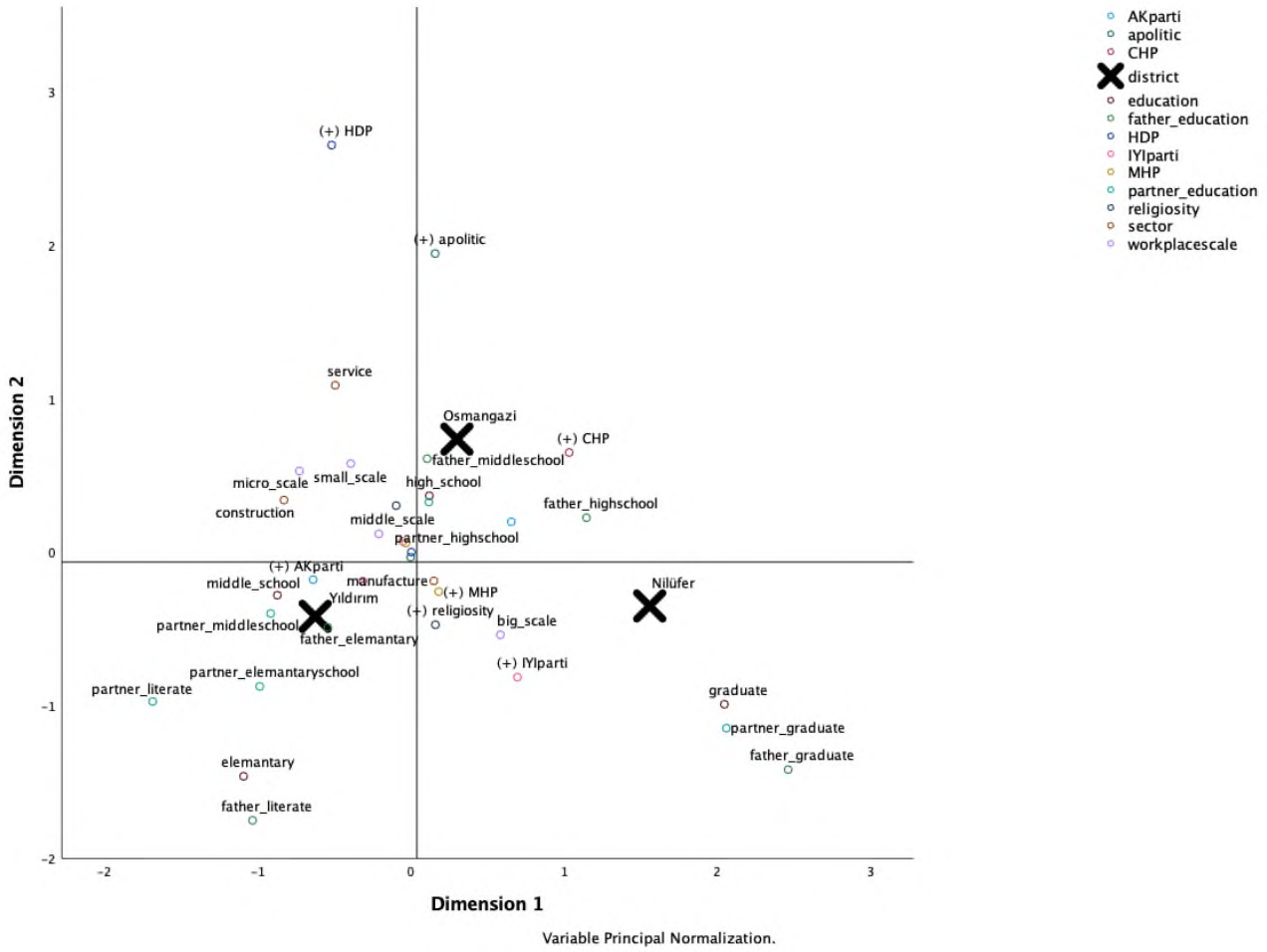
Figure 2. General characteristics of the working class spatial differentation in Bursa

The scatter plot depicting the structural variables of workers residing in Nilüfer exhibits a complete reverse in comparison to Yıldırım, thus confirming our hypothesis. Workers in the Nilüfer district can be distinguished by their significant levels of cultural and economic capital, distinguishing them from workers in other districts. Their proximity to attaining high educational attainment is noteworthy, and it is interesting to observe that their partners and fathers possess comparable qualities. They have a higher likelihood of being employed in large-scale workplaces. Their voting preferences deviate considerably from those of the AK party, indicating a greater inclination toward the MHP or İYİ party and a lesser inclination toward the CHP. As we expected, the workers of Osmangazi have mild character compared to the other two districts' workers by cultural and economic capital level. Both parents and their partners and fathers have educational attainment levels that are close to high school. In general, Osmangazi workers tend to be employed in middle-scale jobs more often. Furthermore, their voting preferences demonstrate a noteworthy inclination toward the CHP, distinguishing them from other political parties[12].

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[12] The survey was conducted in 2022, during which the AK party maintained its lead in the Osmangazi local elections. Following the implementation of the survey, the CHP made significant progress toward the AK party and emerged victorious in subsequent 2024 local elections. The strong Osmangazi workers' tendency to vote for the CHP may have played a significant role in this political shift. Hence, this analysis outcome can be considered a prominent signal.
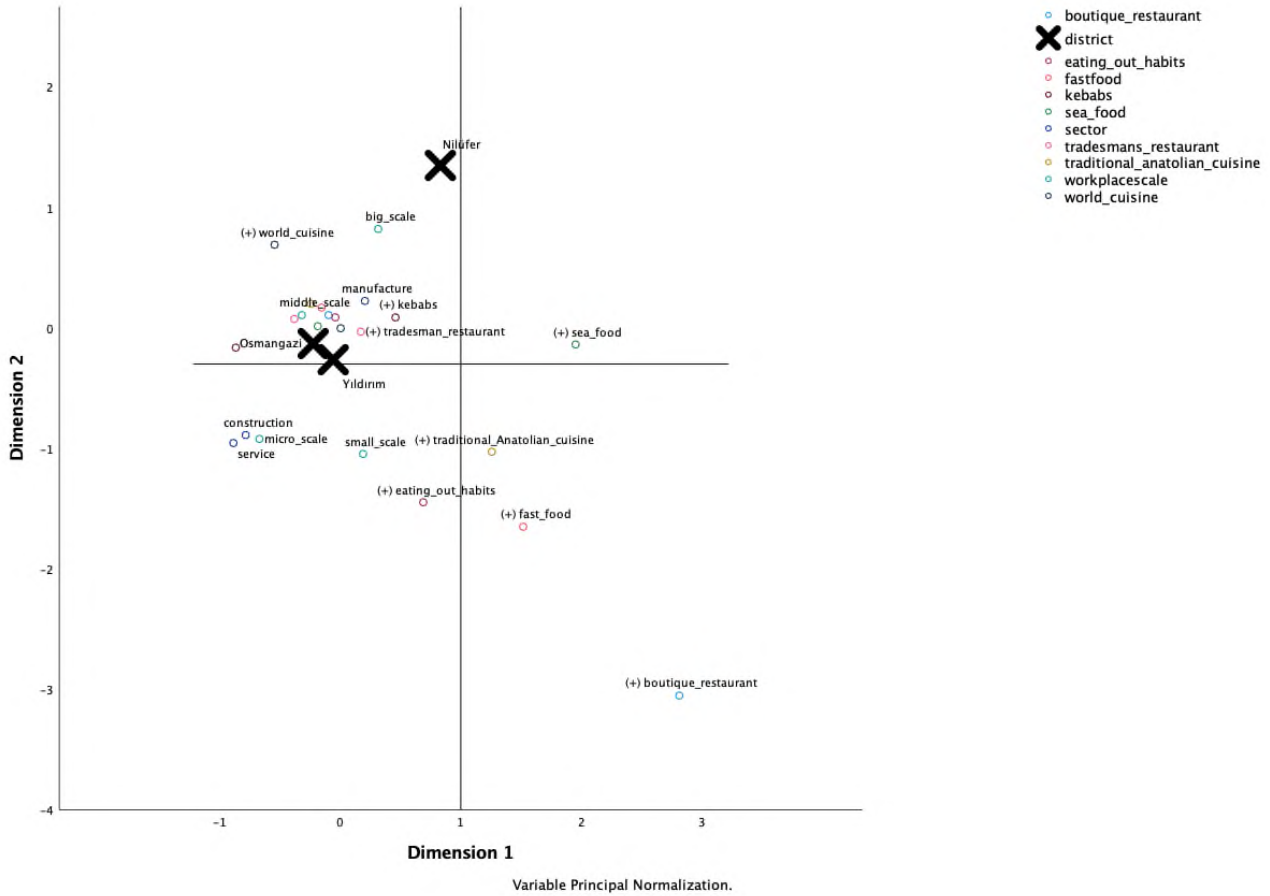
Figure 3. Spatial differentiation on food culture among the working class in Bursa

To begin with, our study involves the evaluation of food preferences and habits within the working-class in Bursa, with spatial differentiations in Figure 3 (dimension 1 accounts for 23,2 per cent α = ,669 and the dimension 2 accounts for 21,2 per cent α = ,662 express 44,4 per cent of total variance). As noted above, the study of working-class food habits typically employs the basic necessities criteria of class culture research. It was previously observed (as depicted in Figure 1) that the preference for kebabs and tradesmen restaurant cuisine is a distinctive cultural phenomenon among the working class in Bursa. In the analysis of spatial disparities within the working class in Bursa, it has been observed that these particular food preferences are predominant among workers in Yıldırım and Osmangazi. The implementation of this pattern is often seen in manufacturing jobs within middle-sized or small-scale workplaces. Likewise, as depicted in Figure 1 for interclass scatter plots, the inclination toward seafood is completely in contrast to individuals residing in Yıldırım or Osmangazi. Nevertheless, the preferences of Nilüfer's workers reside at an almost equal distance from both typical working-class preferences and highbrow preferences.

Although the proximity is not high, it is worth noting the potential significance of world cuisine, particularly for individuals working in large-scale enterprises. These findings provide evidence that spatial characteristics affect class-specific cultural practices, as we had assumed. Furthermore, it is apparent that the esthetic choices of working-class residents in Nilufer mirror the prevailing high-brow cultural differentiation in this locality. The tastes of the workers in Nilüfer gradually distance themselves from the idiosyncratic, necessity-driven habits of the working class and move closer to the distinctive preferences associated with the refined palate of the highbrow.
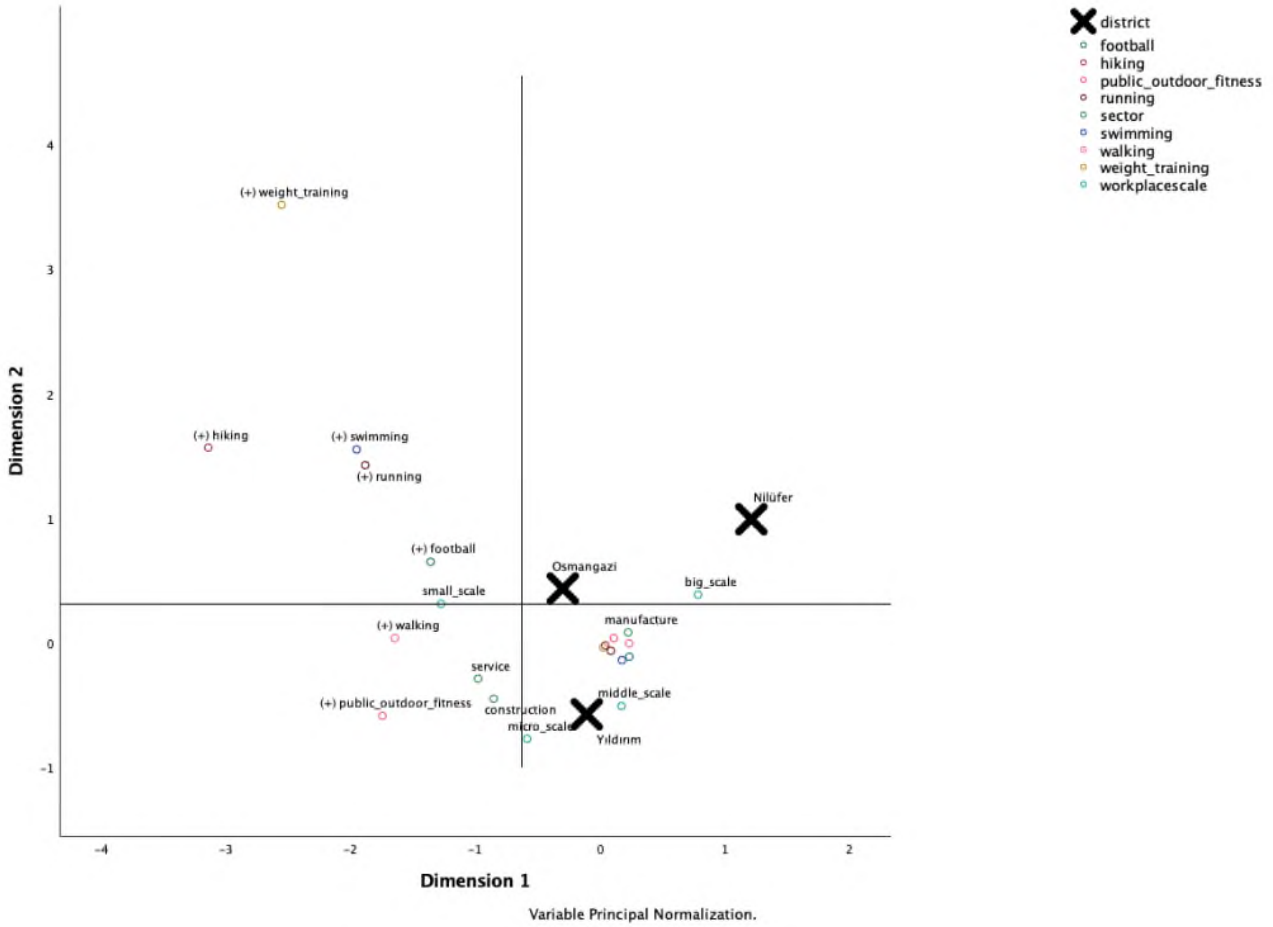
Figure 4. Spatial differentiation in sports/exercise culture among the working class in Bursa

Sports and exercise practices among the working class in different districts are visually represented in Figure 4 (dimension 1 accounts for 32,7 per cent α = ,706 and the dimension 2 accounts for 21,2 per cent α = ,469 express 53,9 per cent of total variance). To begin with, it should be noted that the "exercise culture" (Warde, 2006) in Bursa is not widespread, and every class is equal in distance to any exercise. Engaging in routine exercises, such as attending a fitness center, is perceived as being of low significance across all classes. Furthermore, the results indicated that certain sports activities assumed to be exclusive to certain social classes (Gemar, 2020; Uz, 2017) were not distinctive among the social classes in Bursa. In this context, the sports culture in Bursa can be observed as a category of absence. However, the scatter plots in Figure 4 may establish tenuous links between Osmangazi workers engaging in football and Yldrm workers participating in outdoor fitness exercises among Yıldırım workers, particularly those employed in the construction sector.
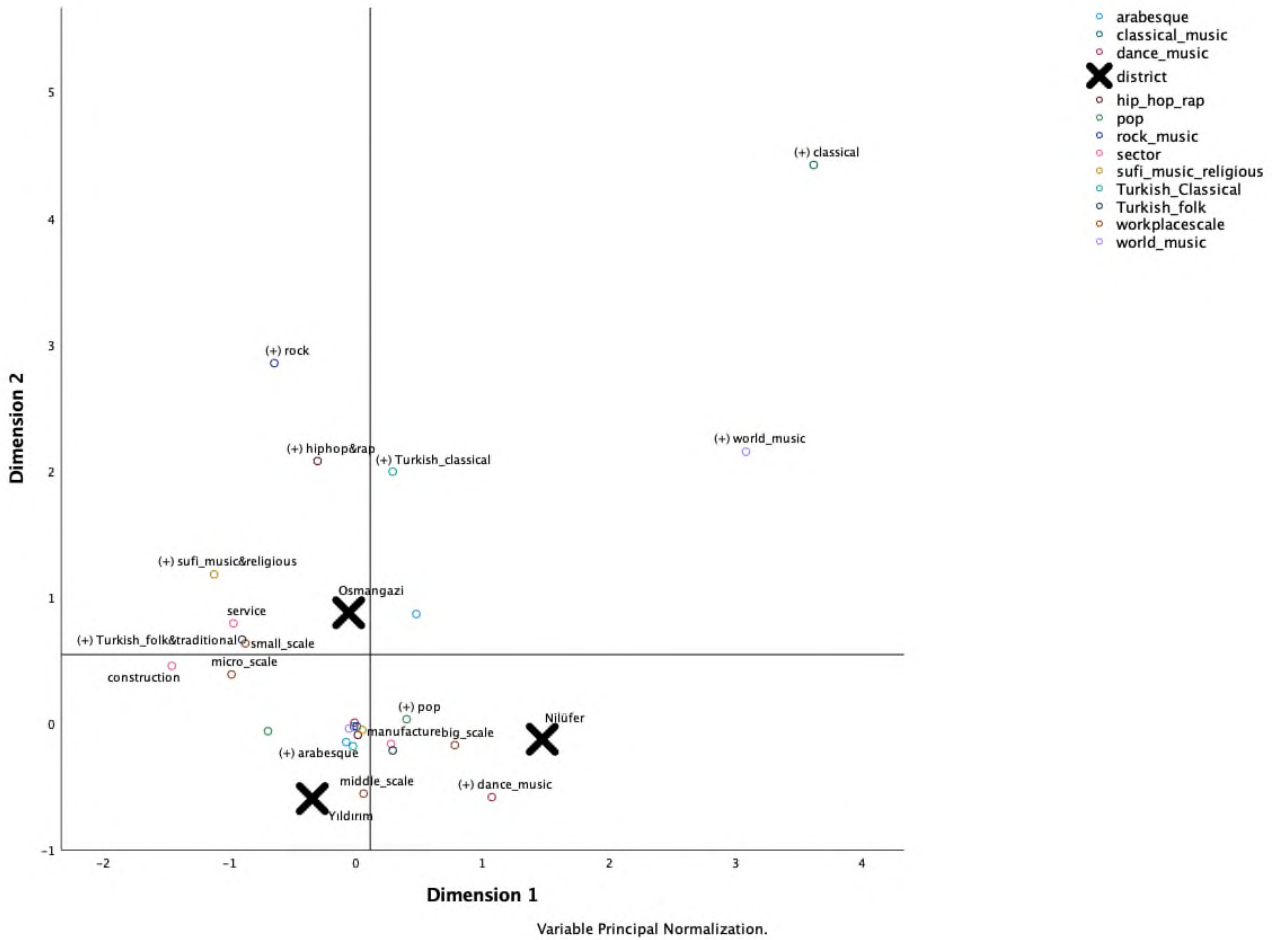
Figure 5. Spatial differentiation in music taste/genre among the working class in Bursa

Figure 5 (dimension 1 accounts for 23,2 per cent α = ,669 and the dimension 2 accounts for 16,0 per cent α = ,523 express 39,2 per cent of total variance) illustrates the prevalent music genres among the working class in Bursa based on place of residence. As previously stated, listening to Bursa's classical music is a distinctive working-class practice. It was our anticipation that the distinctive features of arabesque music would continue to create spatial differentiation among the working class. We expect that the emphasis on the inclination of Yldrm's music should be further emphasized in workers from Yıldırım. Nonetheless, based on our prediction, workers in Nilüfer are expected to exhibit greater affinity toward cosmopolitan listening practices similar to their food preferences. The scatter plots depicted in Figure 5 confirm our expectations regarding music genre differentiation among the working-class population in Bursa. Based on the scatter plots, it can be observed that workers from Yıldırım and employees in middle-scale firms are more inclined to listening to arabesque music. In addition, Osmangazi workers may align themselves closely with arabesque music; but, they are more accurately defined by neighboring genres, such as Turkish folk and traditional music. As predicted, individuals employed in Nilufer and those working in large-scale firms tend to gravitate toward cosmopolitan music genres like dance or pop.
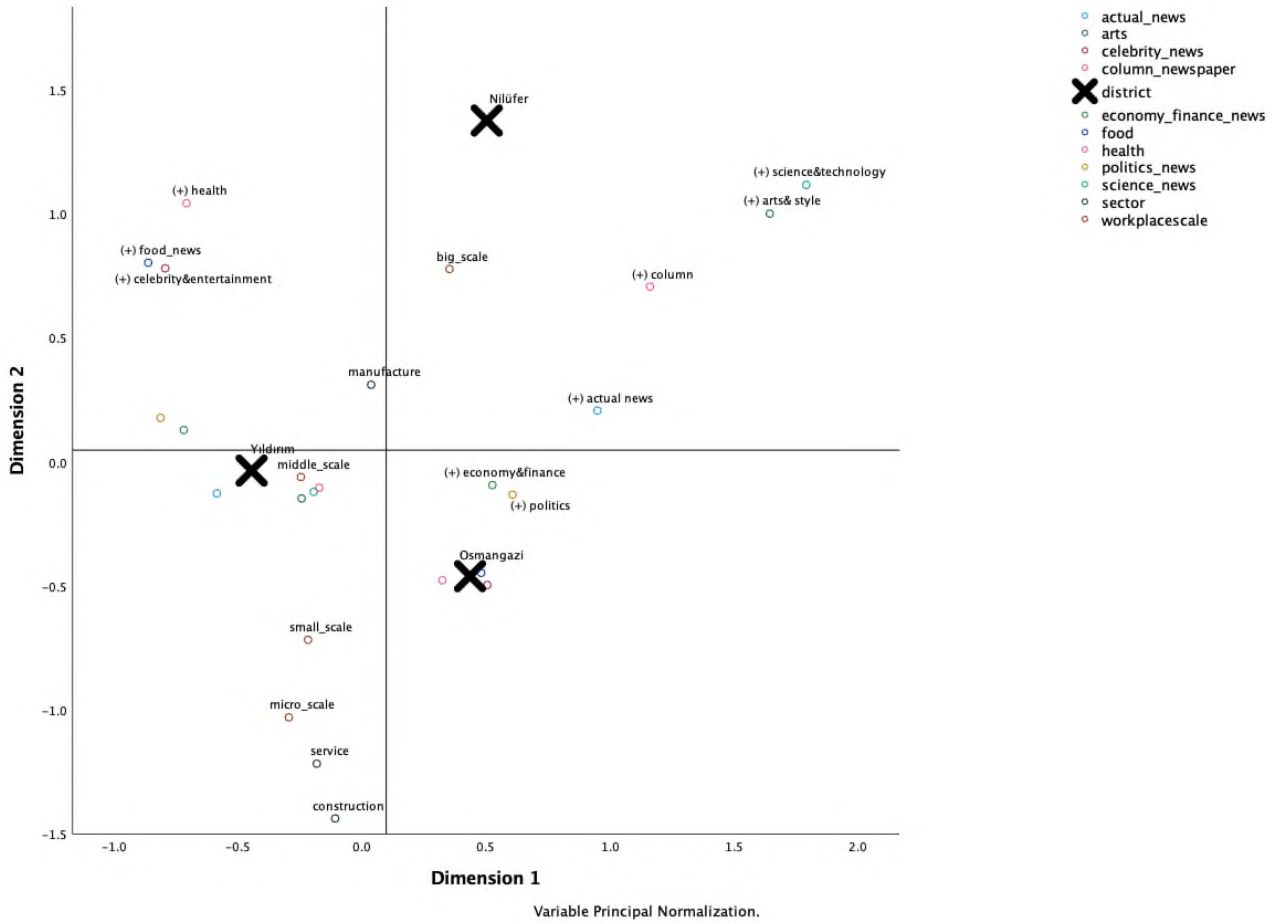
Figure 6. Spatial differentiation in news reading habits among working-class individuals in Bursa

The structures of news consumption patterns among workers in Bursa display remarkable dissimilarities when compared with other working-class habits, as illustrated in Figure 6 (dimension 1 accounts for 31,0 per cent α = ,829 and the dimension 2 accounts for 24,0 per cent α = ,756 express 55,0 per cent of total variance). We asserted a complete dichotomy in cultural practices between the workers of Yıldırım and Nilüfer, with the workers of Osmangazi expected to occupy an intermediate position. However, regarding news consumption habits, a pole distinction has emerged between Yıldırım and Osmangazi. The distribution of workers in Yıldırım is not easily associated with any specific reading habits. In spite of this, workers from Osmangazi exhibit a closer affinity toward reading news pertaining to the economy, finance, or politics. Furthermore, the workers from Nilüfer display strikingly dissimilar habits when compared with those from the other two districts. They have a tendency to engage with news articles focused on science, technology, arts, and style, which are often associated with the habits of the middle-upper class. This evidence supports our hypothesis, which suggests that the cultural maps of Nilüfer's workers tend to resemble high-brow practices.
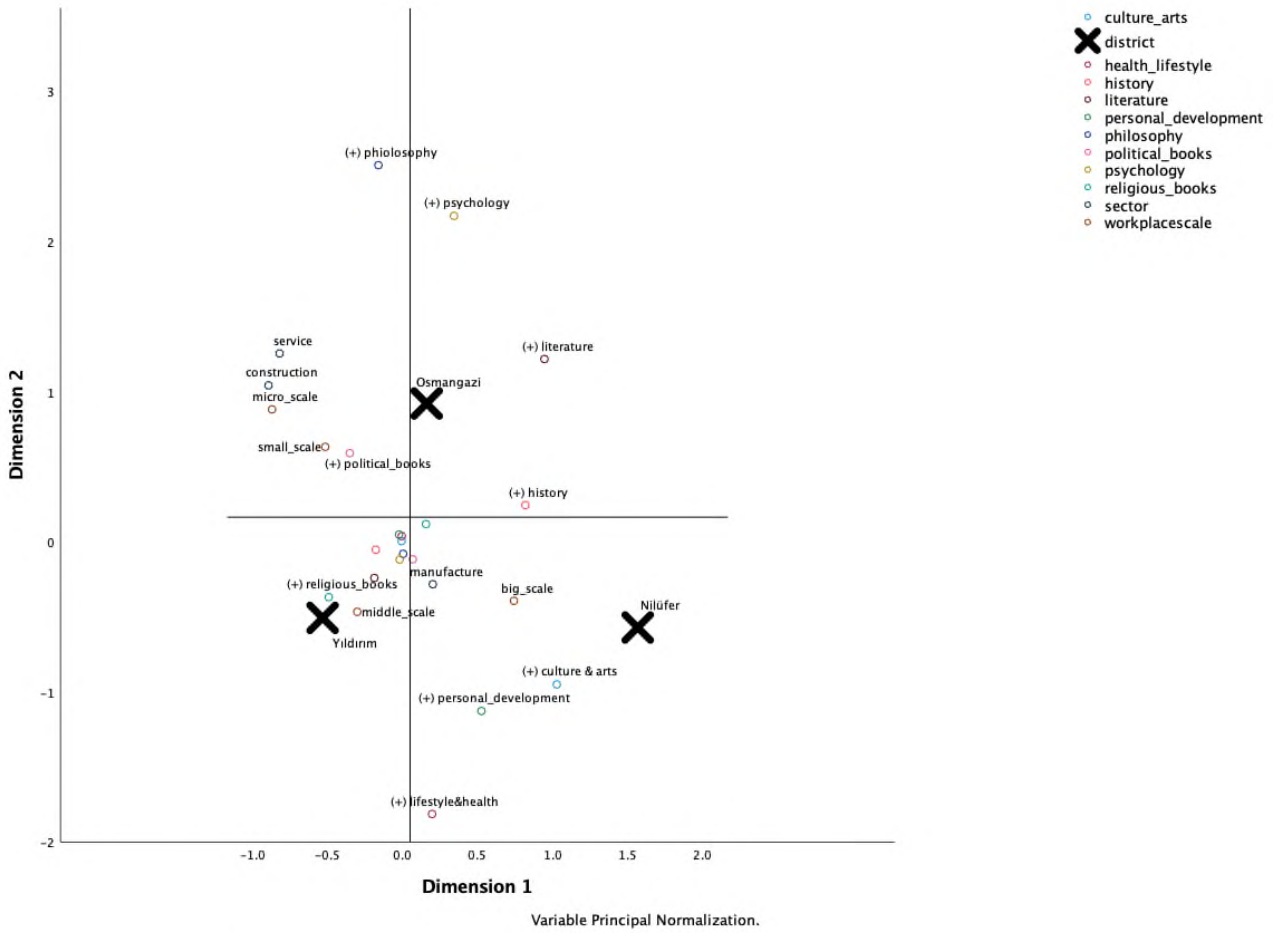
Figure 7. Spatial differentiation in book reading among working class in Bursa

When analyzing book reading preferences among working class in Bursa, a striking trend is observed, specifically among workers from Yıldırım and those employed in middle-scale workplaces or in manufacturing, who demonstrate a significant preference for regularly reading religious books. As stated above, there is a distinct adherence to religious practices among the working class in Bursa, which is particularly reflected in the reading preferences of workers from Yıldırım, as shown in Figure 7 (dimension 1 accounts for 19,1 per cent α = ,674 and the dimension 2 accounts for 15,9 per cent α = ,593 express 35,0 per cent of total variance). Conversely, the practices of workers from Nilüfer demonstrate a markedly divergent viewpoint. Resembling their associations with the upper- and middle-class cultural milieu, workers of Nilüfer exhibit a preference for books encompassing culture, the arts, personal development, and even history. In addition, Osmangazi workers display an affinity for reading political books.
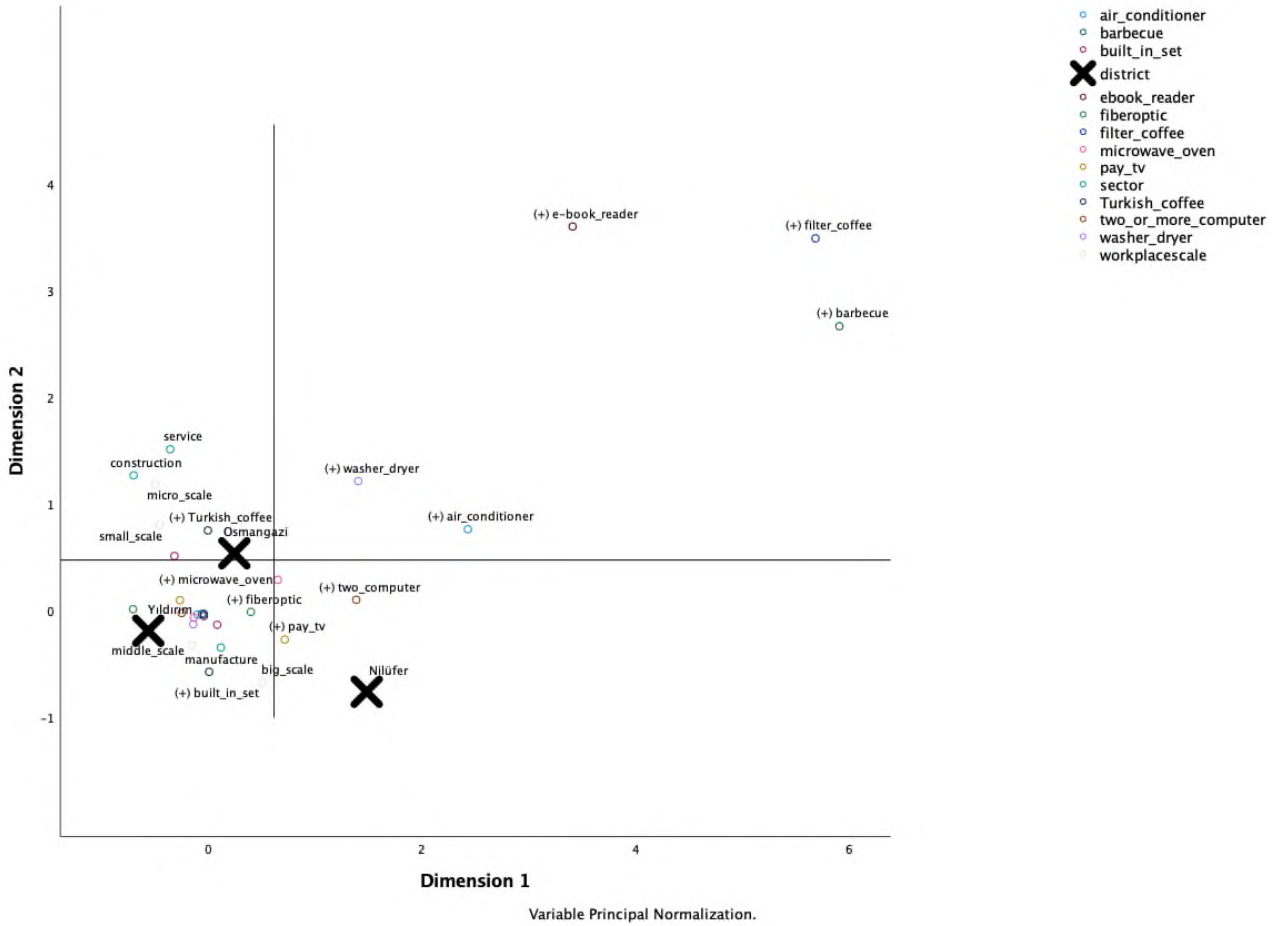
Figure 8. Spatial differentiation in home appliances among the working class in Bursa

As previously indicated, although there is indeed a clear correlation between the utilization of household appliances and economic capital, class-based practices (such as coffee habits) also significantly influence the demand for such products. It is probable that necessity-driven demands for home appliances have arisen among the workers of Yıldırım as seen in Figure 8 (dimension 1 accounts for 22,7 per cent α = ,773 and the dimension 2 accounts for 16,2 per cent α = ,654 express 38,9 per cent of total variance). Among them, there is a higher prevalence of basic kitchen equipment designed for quick meal preparation, such as built-in sets or microwave ovens. Conversely, the utilization of household appliances among Nilüfer workers demonstrated a greater inclination toward ICT technologies, resembling that of the upper and middle classes, and a stronger preference for domestic comfort rather than mere necessities. The apparent affiliations to own two or more computers and pay TV subscriptions reflect this situation. Despite the similarities among Nilüfer workers, consumption practices such as e-book readers and filter coffee machines, which are typically associated with the upper and middle class, are noticeably absent in working-class communities across all districts. However, it is quite interesting to observe a greater degree of closeness between being a Osmangazi worker and owning a Turkish coffee machine. This suggests that Osmangazi workers tend to have working-class habits, which include a preference for the traditional taste of Turkish coffee, as opposed to the middle-class habits of consuming Western-style coffee.
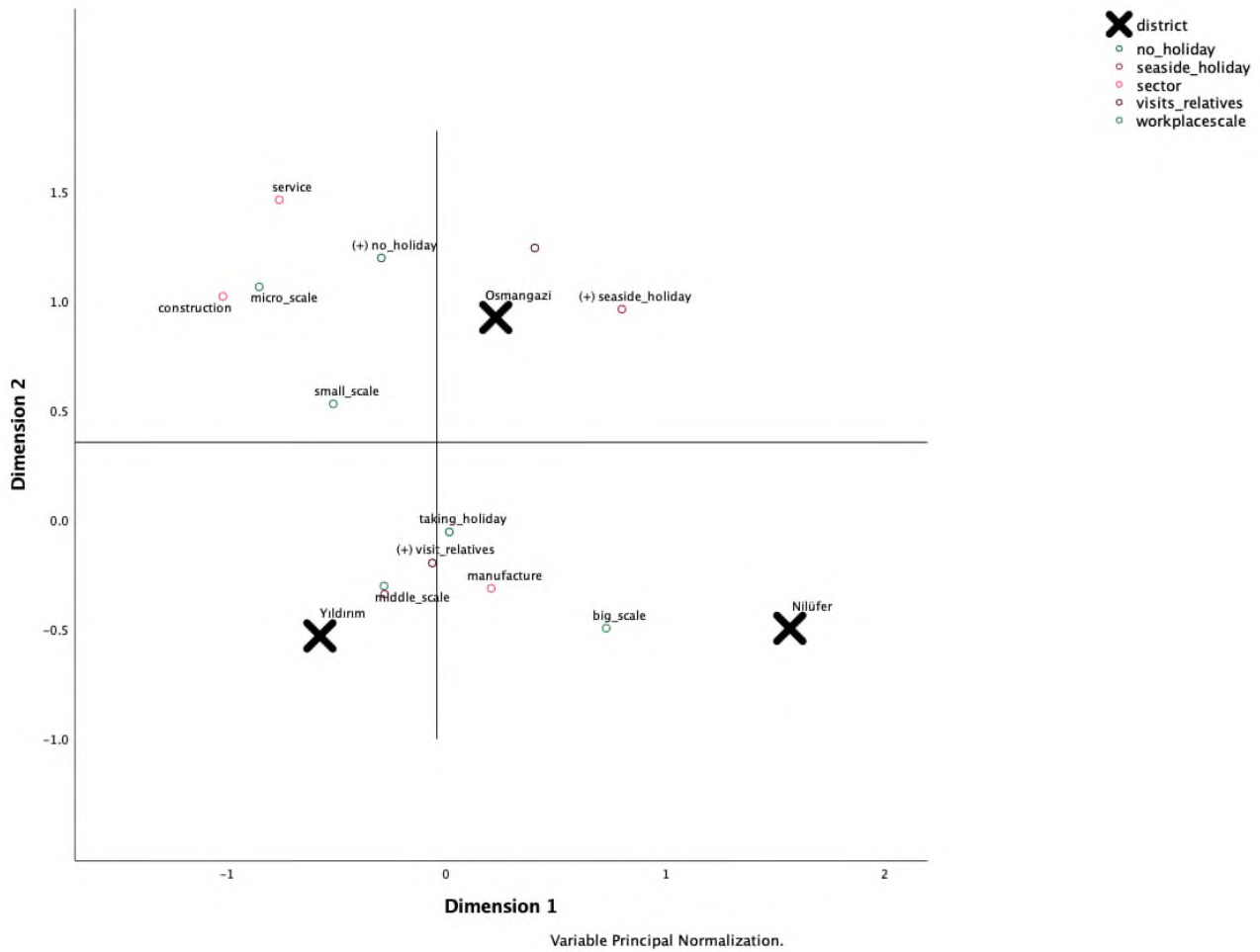
Figure 9. Spatial differentiation in holiday preferences among working-class individuals in Bursa

Lastly, we have conducted an analysis of the holiday preferences of workers in Bursa, which is presented in Figure 9 (dimension 1 accounts for 31,8 per cent α = ,694 and the dimension 2 accounts for 26,1 per cent α = ,595 express 57,9 per cent of total variance). The inclination of Yıldırım workers to mirror the overall working-class characteristics in Bursa also extends to their holiday preferences. As previously noted, our earlier indication supports Hoggart's (2021) findings, which reveal the pervasive inclination among the working class to prioritize visiting relatives when presented with the opportunity to go on vacation. The workers from Yıldırım serve as typical exemplars of this phenomenon. The workers from Yıldırım and workers who are employed in middle-scale workplaces serve as typical examples of this phenomenon. However, the practices of Nilüfer workers clearly diverge from these tendencies. It is interesting to observe that workers in Osmangazi have distinct holiday preferences when compared to others. Their preferences seem to be inclined toward spending their vacations at the sea. However, the sea-side vacation preferences of workers in Osmangazi may differ from those of upper-middle-class workers who opt for luxury hotels or villas in the highly sought-after south Turkey Riviera for their vacations. Just like the sequences in the story of the popular movie "Bursa Bülbülü", which chronicles the recent history of Bursa (Albayrak, 2023), it could be said that" the continued tradition of workers from non-migrant backgrounds spending their summer holidays in nearby coastal towns has been a prevailing trend since the late 1970s.

To summarize, our claim is that the working-class culture in Bursa is not uniform and that the division of class culture is directly influenced by socio-spatial relations. According to our understanding, the working-class culture establishes sub-divisions in a way that mirrors the principles used to differentiate between classes. We conducted a test and compared the MCA outcomes shown in from figure-3 to the figure-9. We predicted that general tendencies related to tastes and aesthetic preferences would conform to the same fundamental principles. It can be presumed that workers from Yıldırım would have a preference for cultural practices. However, Nilüfer workers would be driven to move in opposite directions and exhibit more similarities to a high-brow cultural milieu. As per our expectation, Osmangazi workers are likely to exhibit a milder character. The findings of the analysis greatly support our hypothesis. Evidence

was presented indicating that the cultural practices of Yıldırım workers, encompassing aspects such as food habits, music listening practices, book reading habits, ownership of home appliances, and holiday preferences, tended to reflect the overall characteristics of the working-class culture in Bursa. Additionally, we came across evident indications of a prevalence that resembled the highbrow cultural practices among the workers of Nilüfer, just as we had expected. The analysis provided evidence of mild cultural predispositions among the workers of Osmangazi. Nonetheless, a slight departure was noted in the reading patterns and holiday preferences among workers from Osmganzi, despite their mild positions.

7. Conclusion

One of the primary challenges in class studies is to articulate the complex correlation between class and culture (Devine & Savage, 2000). According to Williams (1960, p.344), in Culture and Society, the identification of the differentiating factors between two concepts should involve an examination of lifestyles, although it should not be restricted solely to that aspect. According to this perspective, it was believed that the distinction between workers and other social classes should be identified in the alternative ideas and practices that are naturally present in ordinary social relationships. The key to accomplishing this lies in directing attention toward distinctive social practices among the working class, thereby separating them from other classes. Spatial practices can be used as a convenient element to illustrate and formulate distinctions.

In Bourdieu's monumental work Distinction, which includes class theory, the cultural practices of the working class are given a very limited place. The cultural tendencies of workers are subject to compulsory choices made by material social conditions. In Distinction, it is pointed out that the working-class habitus will only transform depending on the urban experience (Bourdieu, 2017, p.179). However, the limited amount of research that extends Bourdieu's theoretical boundaries to working-class culture suggests that workers' class culture is not subject to the taste for necessity (Flemmen et al., 2017). As a matter of fact, the results of this study show that the class culture of workers in the space of consumer preferences (including place) is not singular but rather fragmented. However, this does not mean that workers do not have specific lifestyle patterns.

The working class is divided into factions with distinct predispositions and cultural consumption practices because of their exposure to diverse experiential social filters in Bursa. The representation of the working class has not been actualized, as demonstrated through the mechanical categorizations of proletariat and lumpen-proletariat, or class-itself and class-for-self. Unlike, the multidimensional effects of the transformations in social and material conditions lead to their segregation into separate fragments. These outcomes suggest that despite together work experiences within a factory as a "total institution," there are clear indications of separate social and cultural spheres associated with two distinct social groups, with less penetration between them. The utilization of spatial differentiation to classify class culture has enabled the attainment of a nuanced social structure. Consequently, the alteration of the working-class habitus is intertwined with cultural boundaries and circumstances of social existence, encompassing spatial aspects.

ORCID :

Kemal TEMEL   0000-0001-6604-205X
Şenol BAŞTÜRK   0000-0001-8623-709X

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Research Article

The Shadow of Crime: Impact on Prison Experiences and Recidivism Tendency

Roza SÜLEYMANOĞLU[1]

[1]Asst. Prof. Dr., Doğuş University, Vocational School-Social Services, Istanbul, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Roza Süleymanoğlu
E-mail : rsuleymanoglu@dogus.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the impact of prison experiences on recidivism. A phenomenological approach was adopted, total of 15 people were interviewed and a semi-structured interview form was used. Network connections and snowball sampling were used to reach the participants. For this reason, we first attempted to understand the meanings attributed by the participants to concepts such as crime, criminality, and guilt. Prison experiences included daily functioning, adaptation processes and communication with inmates and staff. The impact of the participants' prison experiences on their post-release lives and recidivism was analyzed. It was observed that the process of adaptation to prison differed according to the types of crimes, length of sentence and experiences. Prison experiences are not a reason for reoffending in themselves. Individual differences, familial reasons, criminal motivation and external factors related to post-prison conditions such as labeling and poverty, also play key roles in recidivism. The effect of the criminal subculture in prison on recidivism has also been observed. Prison experiences can trigger psychological problems, and after release, factors related to stigmatization, poverty, housing, employment, financial income, exclusion and official supervision make it difficult to adapt to social life.

Keywords: Sociology of Crime, Prison, Prison Experiences, Community Edaptation, Recidivism

1. Introduction

The penal system and prison experiences play a crucial role in ensuring the security and order of societal life. However, it is essential to examine the long-term effects of these experiences on incarcerated individuals and convicts, as well as their reintegration into society, or in other words, their re-entry into society, with a deep understanding. This is because the time spent in these institutions, built upon the punishment of individuals deemed a threat to society, not only influences the objectives of punishment but can also lead to traumatic experiences and psychological difficulties, especially among prisoners. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of prison experiences on inmates and comprehend their effects on recidivism. To achieve this aim, themes such as living conditions in prison, communication with staff and other inmates, the utilization of leisure time in prison, and everyday life experiences after release have been identified.

Prisons are places where individuals with a connection to crime are separated from society, and justice is administered, reflecting the classical perception of punishment. Those who are punished through incarceration and isolated from society lead a limited life in confined spaces. These institutions have the power to fundamentally alter individuals' lives and shape their futures. Therefore, do these establishments, which hold such importance over human life, prevent individuals from committing crimes again? In other words, do these institutions have any deterrent features that prompt individuals to reassess their relationship with crime, or have they become schools where different types of crimes are taught?

Undoubtedly, these questions constitute an important area of concern. While there is a rich body of literature abroad discussing these issues, focusing on topics such as recidivism, the functions of prisons, and deterrence, research on prisons in Turkey is limited (Kızmaz, 2007). This study contributes to this body of research under the title "Prison Experiences".

This qualitative study was conducted with a total of 15 participants using snowball sampling. The interview technique was used for data collection. The interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded after the participants provided consent. Two of the participants were female and 13 were male. A phenomenological design was used, and descriptive analysis technique was employed. The main findings of this research are as follows: The process of adaptation to prison varies according to the types of offenses, sentence durations and experiences. Although prison experiences are not the only reasons for recidivism, individual differences (personality traits such as impulsivity), familial reasons, criminal motivation and post-prison conditions such as labeling and poverty also play an important role in this process. The effect of prison criminal subculture on subsequent criminal behaviors was also observed. While prison experiences can trigger psychological problems; however, factors such as stigmatization, poverty, housing, employment and exclusion after release make it difficult to re-adapt to society.

2. Methodology

Rooted in profound philosophical traditions (Wilson, 2015, p. 38) and focusing on human experience and understanding (Van Manen, 2007, p. 12), phenomenology is a qualitative method employed to highlight individuals' feelings, perceptions, and perspectives toward a specific concept or phenomenon and to describe how they experience this phenomenon (Rose, Beeby & Parker, 1995, p. 1124). Considering the main theme of the study, it is believed necessary to include participants' experiences, perceptions, and emotional states to comprehend the significance of the topic. Specifically, for subjects like prison experiences and the tendency to reoffend, which are characterized by personal and emotional dimensions, the phenomenological approach within qualitative methods has been chosen for its ability to provide in-depth understanding. Therefore, the data will be interpreted by taking the phenomenological approach into account, and a descriptive analysis technique will be used.

Interviews were adopted as the research technique. A total of 15 people were interviewed via telephone using a semi-structured form.

Interview questions cover demographic information, first criminal experience, reasons for recidivism, meanings attributed to concepts such as crime, criminal guilt, reactions from peers, family, and social environment after the crime, prison experiences (education received, difficulties experienced, what was felt, etc.), the effect of the time spent in prison on recidivism, and experiences after release.

The participants consist of people who have been in prison for different periods of time , but who have re-established a relationship with crime after their release, in other words, who have committed crimes repeatedly. They were identified through snowball sampling. Due to the difficulty in accessing these individuals, the residence of the participants was not limited to a specific province/region; only the fact that the participants lived in Turkey was considered.

Thirteen participants were male and two were female. Difficulty was encountered in reaching female participants due to the predominance of male offenders and the scarcity of female offenders in their social circles. The age distribution of the participants ranged from 20 to 55 years.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Doğuş University on July 19, 2023, under Protocol Number 47247.

3. Prison Experiences: Concepts and Insights from the Literature

Punishment is a sanction imposed on an individual whose commission of a crime has been definitively established through a judicial decision, within the framework of the law and by judicial decree, with the aim of both rehabilitation (special prevention) and general deterrence" (Öztürk & Erdem, 2006, p. 50). Based on this definition, punishment involves various sanctions imposed by the state in response to a criminal act, ranging from confiscation of assets deprive liberty.

There are three fundamental theories regarding the function and role of punishment: the idea of retribution, general deterrence, and specific deterrence. While the concept of retribution employs "punishment" to impose the consequences of the crime, deterrence theories aim to prevent future occurrences of crime. Prevention actions involve rehabilitation. It is argued that correction, development, education, and rebuilding self-confidence are necessary to prevent reoffending (Esposito, 2014, p. 184).

Today, one of the most common forms of punishment for committing a crime is imprisonment. Therefore, one of the prominent institutions for preventing crime is the prison system. The oldest model of imprisonment dates back to 1596, when the Rasphuis opened in Amsterdam. This prison, which targeted beggars and young offenders, served as an inspiration for others as well (Foucault, 2015, p. 189). As seen above, the roots of deterring individuals from committing crimes through imprisonment date back to ancient times.

Foucault attributes the origins of the modern prison system to the restructuring and organization of previous forms of punishment, which date back to the late 16th century. Esposito also emphasized the changing nature of punishment systems throughout history, noting that during the Middle Ages, prisons were merely used as places where the accused awaited trial, transitioning from physical punishments to imprisonment. With the influence of the Enlightenment, punishment became more humane (Esposito, 2014, p. 184).

The number of incarcerations is significantly high both in Turkey and around the world. The high rate of recidivism plays a significant role in these numbers. For instance, in the United States (US), over 50% of prisoners return to prison within three years of release. The recidivism rate is also high in other countries: Scotland has a 50% rate, Japan 43%, Australia 39%, and in Ireland, it rises to 62% (Deady, 2014, pp. 1-2).

In Scandinavian countries, there are practices related to different imprisonment models that are considered successful. For instance, Norway, in particular, has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world, at 20%. Norwegian penal philosophy believes that punitive, traditional prisons are ineffective and that prisoners should be treated humanely to successfully reintegrate into society. Therefore, apart from the loss of freedom, all the rights of prisoners are protected, and prison life resembles the outside world. Additionally, post-release needs such as employment, education, housing, healthcare, and addiction treatment are provided for (Deady, 2014, p. 3). In summary, there is a shift toward focusing less on punishment and instead on rehabilitation.

It is known that factors such as poverty and inequality, which are among the reasons for committing crimes, are less prevalent in Scandinavian countries. Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland are among the top ten countries with the least disparity between rich and poor. Citizens of these countries receive more social services. It is believed that strong social welfare systems reduce poverty and inequality, partially mitigating the driving forces of crime (Deady, 2014, pp. 3-4). Although the United States tends to have a punitive approach toward punishment, rehabilitation efforts are predominant in Scandinavian countries. These different approaches lead to differences in findings as well.

Every prison forms its own subculture, summarizing norms, traditions, modes of communication, relationships, and behaviors that regulate the environment. Walker defined prison subculture as prisoners encouraging solidarity among themselves, learning the intricacies of different crimes, forming alliances for committing future crimes, or being emboldened to commit crimes again (1987, p. 196). This subculture significantly influences and, moreover, determines the social life within the prisons and individuals' thoughts regarding further involvement in criminal activities.

Focusing on the impact of prison subculture on recidivism has highlighted the necessity of examining the relationship between recidivism and re-entry into prison. One of the first studies on this topic was conducted by Green and Winik. A study examining the court records of 1,003 defendants accused of drug-related crimes over a period of 4 years found that randomly assigned changes in incarceration and probation had no discernible effect on re-arrest rates. In

other words, imprisonment and supervision of those facing drug-related charges do not have any deterrent effect on subsequent criminal behavior (Green & Winik, 2010, pp. 357-358).

In a study conducted by Nagin and Snodgrass (2013), the impact of incarceration on post-release offending was examined using convicted offenders from counties with high imprisonment rates in Pennsylvania. However, no evidence indicating that imprisonment influenced re-arrest was found.

Mueller-Smith (2015) revealed that post-release criminal activities increase, with formerly incarcerated individuals continuing to commit more serious crimes and becoming more prone to engaging in new types of offenses. The study also found that the adverse effects on post-release employment and income constitute significant barriers to the reintegration of prisoners, leading to persistent economic vulnerability among former offenders.

In a study conducted by Harding and Harris (2020) on 1,300 males aged 18-25 who were released from prison, it was found that housing was a significant problem after leaving prison, with family support being more pronounced in housing stability. Nearly half of the participants moved in with their parents after being released. Additionally, employment was found to be a determining factor in successful reintegration, alongside housing.

In another study investigating the impact of prison experiences on recidivism, 12 studies from the literature were examined. It was found that the deterrent effect of imprisonment on the likelihood of reoffending was limited. Rehabilitation programs were found to have a reducing effect on recidivism, and in environments where rehabilitation elements were absent, there was a positive change in attitudes toward crime (Loeffler & Nagin, 2022).

One of the studies addressing the impact of social life in prison on subsequent criminal behavior is published under the title "The Prison Community." In his study, Clemmer (1970, pp. 479-483) used the concept of "prisonization" and stated that individuals entering prison adapt to the culture there and internalize the current situation. Individuals who have adopted prison life struggle to adapt to social life after release and may become involved in crime again.

While Livingston (1996) acknowledged that individuals with longer sentences commit fewer crimes compared to those with shorter ones, he argued, based on the findings of the aforementioned studies and his own acceptance, that there is no significant relationship between imprisonment and recidivism.

Taking the literature into account, it can be said that there are disagreements regarding the effect of imprisonment on recidivism.

Therefore, if imprisonment does not reduce recidivism, what should be done? There are different approaches to developing punishment policies to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. These are (Kızmaz, 2007):

1. Intensification of penalties and prison conditions.
2. Improving prison conditions.
3. Create alternative models for imprisonment and developing institutions.
4. Only incarcerating serious and violent offenders in prison.

One remedial point is to increase the number and quality of educational programs provided in prisons, as it has been observed that these programs lead to positive outcomes. According to a study conducted by the University of Missouri in 2011, educating prisoners and preparing them for employment upon their release greatly reduced the rate of recidivism. Inmates who benefit from educational opportunities in prison have higher chances of finding employment (Esposito, 2014, p. 190). It is observed that these educational programs develop individuals, prepare them for market conditions, and thus have a preventive effect on reoffending by attempting to prevent crime due to economic reasons, such as poverty.

Based on the information in the literature and the interviews conducted, this study emphasized that traditional punishment methods do not make a distinctive difference in reducing crime. On the contrary, crime and its derivatives can be learned in prison. This research result supports the widespread view in the literature. Alternative rehabilitation methods, the necessity of identifying and preventing/improving the reasons that lead to crime, and the importance of the post-crime process are revealed.

4. Findings

4.1. Daily Life Experiences in Prison

Daily life experiences in prison have been explored through prison routines, communication between inmates and correctional officers, the process of adapting to prison life, and how leisure time is spent in prison.

4.1.1. *Prison Routines*

These routines were based on activities consistently carried out in prison. Participants highlighted activities such as counts, meals, showers, visits, phone call hours, health services, and religious activities.

Regular counts are observed in prisons. One participant remarked about the counts, stating, "Counts would start at 8:00 in the morning. I would wake up around 7:30-7:40 to make it to count. You cannot attend in shorts and pajamas. We had to dress up. They also counted us in the room at 19:00 p.m. in the evening," while another said, "I don't remember the time, but outside, my mom, and officers on all four walls didn't let me sleep. It was difficult to line up twice a day initially. I played my own games. I also counted in my head and kept counting."

Regarding meals, one participant said, "I learned to eat regularly there." Breakfast will start at around 8:00 am and lunch will be at 12:00. I wish dinner was a little later. It started at 17:00 for us. If you have money, you're lucky here. Otherwise, you will have to make do with what's provided," while another participant commented, "it was a boring place, but I was fed. When I was at home, I was so hungry that I could feel my stomach on my back."

One participant mentioned the shower routine, saying, "Back at home, we had a good time." We'd shower every day, spray on our cologne, and head out. But in prison, there's no going out. You're seeing the same people all the time. But still, I have tried to stay clean. Everyone here had their own shower time. There weren't always hot water available." Another participant commented on showering, saying, "I've never been fond of water. Just as school teaches you things, so does prison. Isn't this place a school? It taught me to love water. Isn't gold valuable because it is rare? The water was scarce here, so it was precious. We'll wait in line. We showered in 5 minutes. And now, after getting out, my showers still last 5 minutes." Another participant expressed that they continued to adhere to a quick shower routine after release with the following words: "No matter what, shower in 5 minutes at the jet speed. It was hard not to rinse out the shampoo, but I got used to it. It was like a duty, and I was completing my duties successfully. I never showered for more than 5 minutes even outside."

One participant expressed his feelings about the visits as follows: "It was my favorite, the thing I missed the most. Both open and closed visits were allowed. I eagerly awaited the visit day, especially the hour. How can one hour be enough? But you say it's better than nothing. You ask them to talk quickly so that you can learn everything." Another participant said "Visitors could come under supervision. It was uncomfortable knowing that you were being watched. But it's a rule." Another participant described the situation as follows: "They always visited us from outside, but once I went out for a visit. My father was very ill. He passed away afterwards. But they allowed me to go out in such an urgent situation, and it made me promise not to misbehave again," referring to the offense as "misbehavior."

One participant regarding phone calls stated: "When you behave well, you can call your mother or your loved one. Whatever the boss says. The administration tells us the hours we should comply. Just let us hear and listen to the words with our ears. My only complaint is the short duration. Even ten minutes is too little for a conversation of fifty words. And there's also the issue of being listened to. That's why we couldn't discuss private matters." Another participant described being able to make phone calls through a reservation system: "It's like a scheduled appointment system at the hospital... We guarantee this by specifying the hours of conversation. But thank God above. They helped in emergencies." Another participant mentioned that the duration and frequency of calls were limited, and the cost of the call was the responsibility of the inmate: "You can't talk extensively as if you were side by side. At most, 10 minutes per week. That too if you have money in your pocket. You can only make calls from inside. The cost is on us." Another participant mentioned that video calls were also possible: "It didn't exist before. This is something new. The last time I was in prison (in 2022), I had a 30-minute video call with my brother once a week."

When it comes to accessing healthcare services in prison, there are different opinions. Access to healthcare services is perceived as being taken to the doctor when necessary. More than two-thirds of the participants stated that they did not feel the need to see a doctor and did not encounter any problems accessing healthcare services whenever they wanted, whereas the remaining participants expressed that they could not easily go to the doctor when they fell ill and faced difficulties accessing healthcare services. One participant expressed their experience by saying, "I kept calling for the doctor, and eventually, they heard my voice." Another participant commented, "Perhaps they think we're joking, requesting it just for the show." Maybe they're holding a grudge against us, or maybe they want us dead. I really don't know." On the other hand, a participant who stated that they could go to the doctor whenever they wanted mentioned, "God forbid. Thankfully, I haven't been very ill. Maybe once or twice I wanted to go. They helped me with that too."

Participants did not heavily demanded or complained about health-related issues. This finding could be attributed to their relatively young age and the absence of chronic illnesses.

Nearly half of the participants mentioned that they were granted facilities to perform their religious activities. However, other participants indicated occasional difficulties in fulfilling religious practices because of factors such as

limited water access at certain times. One participant stated, "I am a devout Muslim. But I don't pray or fast. If I had done so, the environment was suitable." While one participant stated, "Prison does not prevent performing religious worship," another participant emphasized the difficulties they faced in fulfilling their religious practices by saying, "If there were no water cuts, we wouldn't struggle to perform ablution." The predominant view regarding religious activities suggests that religion has a protective effect against the challenging aspects of prison life. One participant expressed this by saying, "Feeling down?" Want to swear, or feel like hitting someone? There's no need for that. Sit down, perform your prayer and relax. Say your prayer fill yourself with peace. Fast, ward off hunger. It's not where we are, but how we feel that matters."

The majority of participants emphasized that they continued to adhere to their beliefs and views before entering prison, with only one stating, "I had no crime, no sin. Why didn't He save me when I fell into prison? What did I do wrong? Why did this happen to me? With so many bad people around, why do I have to? I could not find answers to these questions. If I find them, maybe I'll believe again," indicating that the incident they experienced led to a change in their beliefs.

It can be said that the prison did not cause a significant change in the belief level of the majority of participants. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether religiosity increased or decreased in terms of the belief dimension. Regarding the worship dimension, only one participant mentioned that they performed their religious practices during their time in prison because they had more free time, but they did not engage in any worship activities after release.

The regulations in prison are observed to be aimed at organizing time spent together and ensuring security. Activities such as taking showers, eating meals, meeting visitors, communicating with the outside world, and conducting inmate counts occur on designated days and times, becoming routine.

4.1.2. *Communication with Other Inmates and Correctional Officers*

Communication with other inmates and correctional officers needs to be evaluated separately. This is because although some participants expressed having good relations with other inmates, they may have difficulties communicating with correctional officers. Two-thirds of the participants indicated that their communication with other inmates was good, whereas the same proportion reported having poor communication with correctional officers. One participant expressing their difficulty in getting along with correctional officers stated, "Inmates like me, we've been through a lot. But the officers are not like that. You can't talk to them, share your problems." Another participant mentioned, "We're all in the same boat. We can understand each other without words. Sometimes, we could communicate by just looking. That was my favorite part. But the staff members act like they have created the world. They're stuck-up. If I didn't have to, I wouldn't even look at their faces." Another participant shared their experience, "When I first got here (to the prison), I couldn't get along with anyone. But as time went on, we understood each other's situations. The officers didn't understand us at all. Are they treating us badly? No. But you feel something from them. It's like they don't like you. They don't do anything, but you can tell they don't like you. I felt it every day."

As stated above, two-thirds of the participants indicated good communication with other inmates. One of the participants regarding this issue stated, "There's no one entering prison who doesn't conform. You have to. There is a system. Everyone gets used to it. We learn a lot from each other. For example, when I last entered, some were singing songs, while others were reciting poetry. If your voice is not good, you should narrate your life as a story. Speaking and expressing oneself were relieving. If you don't talk, you go crazy inside. Four walls, a door, and more walls." Another participant expressed the understanding that shared experiences bring forth, saying, "You're a companion in misery, sister. Who else understands the pain, yearning for home, and suffering of imprisonment, if not someone experiencing the same? It's not about the words; it's about sharing the tea, enjoying the moment, and reciting folk songs without tarnishing one's freedom." Another participant, who expressed that communication with other inmates was not good, explained his reasoning as follows: "If you talk to them, you become like them. That's a certainty. Unless necessary, I didn't talk to them."

It has been noted that there are groupings within the ward when communicating with other inmates, and sometimes this grouping has led to conflicts within the ward. When the leader of the ward is embraced by the groups, the leader's ability to ensure unity and togetherness in the ward comes to the forefront. One participant mentioned, "We had an elder brother. We would ask for his permission for even the smallest things. Without him, many people would have clashed with each other. Because he was the most senior there, everyone respected him. Those who were very close to him had their own group, and those who were not close had separate groups. The ward was divided into two, but there was never any fighting." This indicates a peaceful atmosphere in the ward. Another participant remarked on the issue of grouping, saying, "Isn't there division where there are so many people?" Of course, there is. I side with whichever

group I see as close or strong. It's like a game of throes. It could also be like a cockfight. The mentality was that the stronger one wins." Meanwhile, another participant expressed the situation as follows: "The ward was generally divided into two, but it could also be divided into three or four smaller groups. Each group had its own ideas, thoughts, and minds. It was difficult to find common ground."

Incarcerated individuals in correctional facilities can maintain their communication even after being released. One participant mentioned, "I didn't like school. I did not study. I remained uneducated. I learned many things in prison. My first teacher was a fellow inmate who had been through the same thing as me. He was like a walking encyclopedia; he knew everything. I would ask him questions and learn from him. I liked him the most. When I got out, he was the first person I contacted." Another participant stated, "Thank God, there were many good people among us." But I had a special bond with the two of them. First, I got out, and then they did too. We met in a cafe and chatted. In fact, one of them lived with me for four months."

4.1.3. *The Process of Adjusting to Prison Life and Leisure Time Utilization in Prison*

The process of adaptation to prison life was explored in terms of participation in existing programs, adherence to discipline and rules, and social interactions.

Two-thirds of the participants stated that they participated in existing prison programs. One participant stated, "If I were outside, I wouldn't go." There's nothing to do there. We are entering a different field, encountering two different people. Instead of getting bored, I'm pushing myself to improve." Another participant mentioned, "We commemorated Ataturk. We celebrated on October 29. There were courses in painting, woodworking, and ceramics. I attended the painting course. We have exhibited our oil paintings. When I received my discharge papers, I made oil paintings and sold them. I wish I had learned it earlier so that I wouldn't have come back in." The participant interpreted getting out of prison as receiving discharge papers. Another participant mentioned that participation in activities changed their perspective on prison and made it easier for them to perceive it as home: "The film screenings and poetry readings were good. Once, there was also a folk song concert. Both delighted and helped me pass the time. I think these activities have contributed to my acceptance of prisons as home."

Participants' struggle with adapting to prison life primarily stemmed from the establishment of prison regulations. More than half of the participants questioned these regulations. Here are some of the views shared on this matter:

- "Why are these rules even in place?" What difference does it make if we maintain order here? Anyway, we're constantly surrounded by guards. I'm tired of getting disciplinary sanctions all the time."
- "Someone says something, and we just follow the suit." Why should we do this? Being counted every day is primitive. Repulsive. Why should I get used to that?"
- "I've never been rewarded for following the rules. How many years have passed since? They do not give a reward or acknowledge that they should when you behave smartly and obediently, but they quickly punish you for any trouble you cause. They even banned my visitation once. I got sick of distress. They set these rules to make us sick."
- "It's like we followed the rules of the streets, but now they expect us to follow the rules of punishment. If I were able to comply with these, I wouldn't be here."
- "I don't like rules. Are you going to force me to something I don't like? I'm not going to do it, sister. But I'll face the consequences."

Those who expressed having spent a long time in prison seemed to be more willing to adapt to prison life: "If it were just for a few months, it wouldn't matter much, but I stayed and lived for a total of 14 years. You get used to it out of necessity. I used to participate in activities because time does not pass if you do not. Because time is abundant here." Another participant said, "It's not easy for me to say. 9 years and 8 months... Then 3 years... When you stay for a long time, you become the master of the place. You learn everything. If you follow the rules, you can relax. I liked having peace of mind. Whatever education or program there were, I would say, "Let's go, I'm in.'"

Prisoners who reported having good relationships with other inmates mentioned that they adhered to rules more and adapted to prison life more quickly. One participant said, "They say women like to talk, right?" It's true. We loved it too. It is hard to be liked and to adapt when you join a game late. It's not like that there. I got along with everyone and have given many years of my life. When the horizon is far, the heart welcomes every rule, everyone kindly," while another participant mentioned that having a good relationship with other prisoners had a healing effect: "If they were bad, I would have been worse. My mind and body could not take it. I have met good people. I was imprisoned three times, and each time, the people were good. They healed my soul. When they turned out good, I adapted to their order."

Participants predominantly spent their free time in prison by participating in prison activities, spending time together, and writing letters. One participant mentioned that they utilized their free time: "I wrote many letters. Most of them went unanswered. Writing letters helped me express myself when I was unable to talk. Whenever I had the opportunity, I would read a book. Not selectively, whatever I came across." Another participant stated, "I wish I had done sports. However, not many are into individual activities. We attended educational sessions and sang folk songs while playing volleyball. We spent time together. What else could we do?"

Only one participant mentioned using their free time to engage in religious activities: "You're just spinning within these four walls, looking at the air and the ceiling. You can't even see the sky. But you know Allah is there. So whenever I had the opportunity, I prayed, and I prayed to Him. Not to get out of here but not to end up here again."

4.2. Life After Release

Considering life after release, the impacts of prison experiences on later reoffending and adjustment to post-release society, as well as changing aspects of life, have emerged as significant topics.

4.2.1. *Impact of Prison Experiences on Subsequent Criminal Behavior*

Personal experiences, participation in education and rehabilitation programs, prison life, and certain conditions, such as situations and processes, affect the likelihood that individuals will commit crimes again. Therefore, the gained experience can be important and even decisive in recommitting crimes. In this study, it was observed that prison processes vary according to the personal experiences of the participants. Therefore, this individuality leads us to the conclusion that their risk of re-offending is not the same even under identical conditions.

Individuals who associate themselves with crime may have different interpretations of the concepts, which can affect the reproduction of this relationship. For example, participants who perceived crime as "a way of life" were observed to have no remorse for committing other crimes. However, participants who interpreted crime as "misfortune" described their subsequent criminal behavior as "an accident," even if they engaged in it again later on. Those who interpret guilt as "regret" have expressed that they were not happy or satisfied with their criminal behavior but rather felt that their life circumstances "led them" to it. Individuals who associate the term "criminal" with "potential danger," "illegal person," "thief," "traitor," and "corrupt" have acknowledged that crime is "bad" but stated that they "had to" engage in it. Those who view the term "criminal" as "a prisoner of fate" or "an unlucky person" perceive committing crimes as a professional field. The negative connotations attached to the words have led to a more negative interpretation of criminal actions, while the attribution of positive meanings has facilitated the perception of crime as a "job" or "profession."

The focus of the inmates who shared their experiences regarding education and rehabilitation programs in prison is that these programs are beneficial for passing the time during incarceration but failed to meet their needs after release. One participant expressed, "There were some courses offered to acquire a profession. Participating in them feels good. It broadens your mind. You won't get bored. But that won't save me. I am discouraged by poverty. Even if I work, I can't find enough money to live on. How many jobs do I need to work at, three or four, to live a decent life?" Another participant echoed similar sentiments, stating, "They don't ask us for what they taught us here when we get out. They just say goodbye bye when they see our records. So, you're only going to those courses to pass the time. There needs to be an environment where you can use the skills you learned when you get out."

Two different perspectives have emerged regarding the impact of prison life and conditions on individuals: The first is that the experience in prison leads to trauma and anxiety: One participant, who stated that an incident in prison left a mark on them, said, "After getting out, I couldn't sleep in the dark. Wherever I am, there must be light for me to sleep," and they experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. Another participant said, "When I'm in a closed space, I feel suffocated. My hands and feet were trembling. I want to throw myself out," which is an example of claustrophobic anxiety disorder. Another participant could not forget the pressure they experienced in prison and even considered suicide: "I couldn't grasp all that order. Would they argue and gossip for hours about the smallest things? I got fed up. I even thought about suicide to get away. I had a bit of fear of God, so I backed off. But when I got out, I didn't know what to do. I felt like I was in outer space. Now, I don't care about my job or marriage. When I think about these things, I forget about God. I took a lot of pills. I thought I'd die. My brother saved me. I couldn't even manage to die. I sinned for no reason." One interesting point is that despite the participants' religious beliefs in not committing suicide while in prison, they attempted suicide after release without any change in their beliefs.

The second perspective reveals a more rule-based lifestyle: "In prison, everyone did something they did. I also had mine. I was disciplined. I learned to do things by myself. My waking up and bedtime were fixed. My mother would

be proud if she saw how disciplined I was," one participant said. Another participant remarked, "In prison, everything is in order. Whether you like it or not, you learn to be decent and have patience. You find yourself teaching others the same thing," highlighting the internalization of orderliness and its reflection on others.

The effects of prison life on reoffending can be categorized under two main themes. The first theme suggests that prison does not have a deterrent effect; on the contrary, it may encourage re-offending. One participant expressed, "I'm not a bad person. Shame on the system that made me do this. Unless some things are fixed, the problem cannot be prevented. At first, I was thankful for the situation compared to others there. The second time since I was already in, I decided to play big like them. I asked around, became knowledgeable, and educated myself." Another participant stated, "I'm young. I misbehave. What does a child know about behavior? My father used to beat me. He beat me up, and I would do it again. Now, the state beats me, and I will do it again. I even meet masters inside, learning better from them." Another participant highlighted the instructional role of prison, saying, "There were big brothers and sisters. They were making sure we were seasoned. They told us everything they knew. Once out, we would help them with their jobs outside." These comments point to a concerning aspect of prison culture, where, rather than rehabilitating, the environment may serve as a learning ground for further criminal activities, thereby perpetuating a cycle of crime.

The other theme suggests that while prison may have a deterrent effect, the inevitability of re-offending is attributed to the inability to improve external factors that could lead to crime: One participant stated, "Once you fall into that hole, you'd understand why my psychology is messed up. If it's so bad, why do I risk the same thing again? What else could I do? Should I just die of hunger in the corner? The chance of being caught is possible, and death is certain." Another participant expressed, "You can't choose your family. If I had a decent family, it wouldn't have been like this. My family made me a prisoner of fate." These statements highlight how external circumstances, such as socioeconomic factors and family background, contribute to individuals feeling trapped in a cycle of crime, despite acknowledging the risks and consequences associated with reoffending.

4.2.2. *Adapting to Society and Changing Aspects of Life*

The difficulties experienced by individuals upon release vary depending on the type of crime, duration of incarceration, and level of social support. Challenges in adjusting to society include finding employment, housing issues, financial problems, social exclusion, official supervision, psychological issues, addiction, family and relationship issues, education, and skill development. Housing problems, social exclusion, official supervision, psychological issues, addiction, family relationships, and others constitute the changing aspects of life for ex-convicts after release.

The process of adapting to society varies according to the duration of the sentence, types of crimes, and experiences. A participant who received a sentence of approximately 2 years for a crime and later was convicted of murder for killing someone who attempted to rape them, after approximately 13 years, expressed the following regarding adjustment to society: "When asked, I will tell them." Those who expected me to embrace them instead of killing them could forget about it. I hold my head high, and my face is bright. I don't care about anyone. I did not do evil inside, and I will not find evil outside. It will be tough, but I'll get used to it."

A participant who spent 15 years in prison and returned to prison for theft 3 years later, serving 2 years before being released again, had this to say about the matter: "The first time it was murder, the second time it was theft. I wish it hadn't happened, but it did. I have served my sentence. I did not harm anyone. From now on, I'll act like a gentleman and do whatever I can without leaving any regrets."

A participant who had been in prison three times for assault and drug dealing said, "The outside world is worse than being inside. Sometimes I miss my four walls and me bed. My imprisonment lasts for 5.5 years. It's not that long. If they come after me again, I'll do the same things again." This indicates that he perceives his time in prison as short and suggests that he may commit crimes again, depending on the circumstances.

Nearly all participants experienced difficulties in employment after their release. One participant mentioned issues related to finding a job, education, and skill development, saying, "People start learning a trade from childhood. Who can learn a profession in just three to five months of training, especially if they lack talent? Our main problem is finding a job. They shouldn't let us remain ignorant just because we were raised in ignorance. Instead of cramming us into a place, they should teach us in the field, in our area." Another participant stated, "It's not enough to teach grasshopper breeding without knowing the market. If it had been true, we would have found jobs in the country with the education we received in prison," indicating that the education and training provided in prison did not contribute to employment opportunities.

Another significant problem experienced after release is finding housing. Approximately two-thirds of the participants mentioned experiencing housing problems due to both economic constraints and the attitudes of landlords. One

participant expressed, "I have no money and no home. I would like to live in a place where I can put my head down, even if it's dirty, and sit on a chair. A place with curtains, somewhere that belongs to me. The idea alone is nice." Another participant stated, "I wanted to rent a place to get away from both the environment and me family. I found a cheap, tiny place, but the landlord didn't want me. He said he would only rent to a family or a civil servant."

Nearly all participants experienced financial difficulties. Regarding this issue, one participant mentioned, "I needed financial support while in prison. It made me feel bad. After I got out, I still feel bad. If friends and family don't give me money, I will not survive. I don't know how much they can tolerate me, honestly." Another participant expressed, "I am a burden to my family, to myself, and to life." I am the son of a load. Maybe three or ten months later, I'll be a burden in prison again. I cannot break this cycle."

Approximately two-thirds of the participants expressed difficulty adapting to society because of their feeling excluded. This exclusion was frequently experienced in finding housing, in the employment process, and in establishing new friendships. One participant stated, "I am as good as dead. Who would entrust their daughter to a dead man?" indicating his struggle to find a suitable partner. Another participant mentioned, "I have a mark of shame on my forehead. It's preceding me everywhere. People don't want to entrust their businesses to me. Maybe they're right. I could not control myself. However, if I could not control myself again, I might do the same. In addition, his property is his property. I can't change that." This illustrates the challenges faced in finding employment.

Nearly all participants subject to probation stated that regularly going to sign-in is exhausting both financially and emotionally. One participant said, "What's with this constant signing?" Are we in a fight, or something? Where are we going on this record?" Another participant expressed, "I used to take time off work to sign when it coincided with my shift. My boss used to deduct it from my salary. I swear, I'm tired of it."

Nearly half of the participants reported experiencing psychological issues after their release. One participant mentioned, "I was already sick, but I went crazy there." They make a psychopath out of you. So many rules nowhere else." highlighting the psychologically draining aspect of prison rules. Another emphasized their experience of anxiety using these words: "Not every moment can be described. But after I got out, I couldn't sleep well for a long time. When I closed my eyes, I had very real dreams of being back inside. I had to use medication because of these dreams."

Less than a third of the participants had a relationship with addictive substances, which is typically understood through drug use. One participant stated, "We ended up here for selling drugs anyway. How would I know something I didn't use? After getting out, I started using. This time I needed money to buy it, so I had to steal." Another participant expressed, "Does punishment work?" I couldn't stop without drinking. At the treatment place they sent me, everyone was worse than me. It's all about money." indicating that rehabilitation efforts for addiction did not have a positive effect on the participants.

Only one-third of the participants stated that they continued to communicate with their families and that the family environment did not have any effect on being pushed into crime. One participant stated the importance of family in being dragged into crime: "If we had proper parents, I would not have gone through this", while another participant said "When the family was poor, I became the only hope. I died many times so that they could live" and saw the low economic income of the family as a driving force in committing crime. Another participant said, "I did it because I felt it." My family does not have any sins. Newborn babies run after me saying, "brother, brother, brother." This makes me happy. My family has nothing to do with it", emphasizing that crime motivation is more dominant than family.

It was observed that the participants only cared about education and skill development while they were in prison; they did not receive training to increase their education and improve their skills after release; and they evaluated this situation on economic grounds: "I lost count of how many times I told you about money today. If you don't have money, you cannot go to a course; let's say you can barely go. You cannot buy the materials you want. I am a person who earns a living, sister. If I am going to give some of what I earn for these courses, I cannot eat or drink." Another participant said, "If I had this opportunity, I would not resort to any other means to earn money. If the places I go to promise to find a job, I would work day and night, and I would pay. But here you are rowing in vain. It is useless".

5. General Assessment and Suggestions

The findings were evaluated under two headings: daily life experiences in prison and life after release. While the daily life experiences in prison include prison routines, the prison adaptation process and leisure time evaluation, communication with other inmates and correctional officers, two themes emerged in the post-release life section: the effect of prison experiences on subsequent criminal behavior, adaptation to society after release and changing aspects of life.

Prison routines revealed codes such as counts, eating, showering, visits, phone calls, health services, and religious activities, while the process of adaptation to prison and leisure time evaluation revealed codes such as whether they participated in existing programs, whether they behaved in accordance with discipline or rules, and social interaction.

The impact of prison experiences on recidivism was attempted to be understood from the comments of the participants, their prison experiences, rehabilitation and support activities, difficulties experienced in adapting to society and changes in their former lives.

The general findings of this study are as follows: The meanings attributed to concepts such as crime, criminality, and delinquency effectively reproduce the relationship with crime. Because those who attributed negative meanings to these concepts interpreted their repeated relationship with crime as an accident and undesirable situation. On the other hand, it was revealed that the participants who attributed positive meanings to these concepts identified this action with their identity. Although external reasons were effective in the repetition of the action, there was also a preference.

It can be seen that the process of adaptation to prison differs according to the type of crime, duration of sentence, and experience. For example, inmates who stay in prison for a long time pay more attention to prison rules, participate in programs, accept the reality of prison, and try to adapt to the situation. On the other hand, resistance to prison rules and questioning can make the adaptation of inmates difficult.

When the effect of prison experiences on recidivism is examined, the role of length of stay, communication between inmates, and religious activities can be mentioned. It was observed that those who stayed in prison for a long time were more willing to adapt to the prison. These people stated that it was more relaxing to adopt prison life and obey the rules. Those who communicate well with other inmates are more likely to follow the rules and adapt to prison more quickly. Religious activities were seen as a way of coping with difficult processes in prison.

Prison experiences are not in themselves a reason for re-offending; individual differences related to personality traits such as impulsivity, familial reasons, and criminal motivation, and external factors related to post-prison conditions such as labeling and poverty, which can be considered as the driving factors of crime, may also have a key responsibility in re-offending.

The effect of the criminal subculture in prison on recidivism was observed. To summarize, it can be said that along with the effect of variables such as the duration of incarceration on recidivism, prison ensures the normalization of crime and can also have a quality that can function as a school. Although it varies from institution to institution, the criminal subculture it contains imparts an instructive quality to crime.

It can be seen that the activities carried out in prison increase adaptation to the environment and ensure the adoption of prison as a living space. In addition, in cases of committing a crime due to an external reason, such as poverty, the effect of vocational training and rehabilitation programs in prison on recidivism is very limited. The reason the participants commit crimes is not because they lack any profession but because they do not have an income that can provide their livelihood. The fact is that they cannot find a working area suitable for their profession, and even if they do, they cannot reach the minimum standard of living, which leads them to establish a relationship with crime. However, there is also a desire for the training received in prison to be provided as an income-generating job after release. For example, convicts who participated in different courses, such as painting, tried to find ways to use what they had learned as sources of income. This did not prevent repeat offenders from re-offending per se because repeat offenders have different types of offenses rather than the same type of offense. Although poverty is the predominant reason for this finding, other factors such as the inability to control anger, the influence of the place, the effort to become popular, and the perception of crime as a profession are also possible.

However, an important point to emphasize is that participation in prison programs is a therapeutic way to spend leisure time. In fact, most of the free time is spent participating in activities/courses. Participants frequently stated that participation in the program encouraged personal development and helped them to use their time more effectively.

Repeat offending also involves learning about different types of crimes in prison. The fact that prison is coded as a school and considered a learning center for many things has enabled those who commit crimes for reasons other than individual reasons to learn the intricacies of different crimes. The fact that a person imprisoned for theft later becomes a drug smuggler, or a drug dealer starts human trafficking are typical examples of such a situation. This situation leads us to conclude that crime is a learned activity and confirms the validity of learning theorists.

Prison experiences can trigger psychological illnesses and make it difficult for people to adapt to social life. Participants stated that they experienced some psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional insensitivity and suicidal thoughts. The emotional difficulties experienced by those who stated that they had started to experience psychological problems in prison, especially with the contribution of negative effects such as anxiety and depression, increased their tendency to commit crimes. For this reason, it is necessary to develop a social

service approach that can control the psychological health of those released and provide psychological support as long as necessary.

One of the most important problems experienced by individuals with a criminal past after release is stigmatization. Stigmatization is especially experienced during the stages of finding a job and establishing family unity. People who think that they have been exposed to bad labels may be more prone to associate with crime. In addition, stigmatization can also lead to exclusion from social life.

Poverty is one of the main factors that make it difficult for people to adapt to social life after release. Many participants attributed poverty as the main reason for repeated offenses.

The other main factors affecting the socialization process of prisoners are related to finding a job, housing, financial gain, exclusion and official supervision. Family and social support also play an important role in social adaptation. The weakening or negative impact of family ties negatively affects social adaptation.

It is possible to consider social support as a facilitator for the social integration of individuals released from prison. The support of family, friends and community can help ex-prisoners build strong links to prevent recidivism.

The findings of this research support the relevant literature. Although the effect of prison experiences on subsequent offending varies depending on social adaptation and rehabilitation processes, incarceration is understood that incarceration in a place is not a sufficient reason to reduce or eliminate criminality. This situation demonstrates that it is important not only to use the punishment method in combating crime, but also to adopt the rehabilitation programs adopted in Scandinavian countries, to develop alternative models and social support. In order to improve the process of socialization, it is necessary to increase the efforts to provide prisoners with more access to employment and vocational training opportunities, to provide crime sensitization training for individuals and families, to strengthen social support systems, to eliminate the problems they face in finding housing and to expand the opportunities for psychological assistance.

In general, using innovative criteria to encourage learning in prison, planning and actively implementing a strong needs analysis system, taking measures to address poverty and social exclusion, which are seen as the biggest problems especially in post-release integration into society, are measures to reduce recidivism, in other words to rehabilitate the offender. To summarize, prisoners need to be empowered from a social work perspective because the problems experienced by this group are problems for the entire society because they affect the entire society.

6. Conclusion

In this study, which aims to examine the effects of prison experiences on post-release lives and their likelihood of recidivism in depth, the symbolic interactionism approach was used. A total of 15 people were interviewed and the focus was on their prison experiences and the processes they went through after release.

The findings revealed that daily life routines, in prison, adaptation processes and communication between inmates and correctional officers were important. It was observed that inmates who stayed in prison for a long time were more likely to comply with prison rules and participate in programs, which was associated with their acceptance of the prison reality and adaptation to the situation. However, it was observed that the adaptation of inmates who exhibited resistance to the prison became more difficult. The education received in prison and activities participated in made the prison experience more meaningful and encouraged personal development.

After release, the impact of prison experiences on the offending experience is complex. The criminal subculture and normalization of crime in prison may contribute to individuals' tendency to re-offend. However, external factors such as impulsivity, personality traits, family reasons, labeling and poverty have also been found to play a role in recidivism. In particular, poverty is one of the main factors that make it difficult for people to adapt to their social life after release. It has been stated that the time spent in prison can negatively affect the psychological state of individuals, making the process of adaptation to social life difficult. Stigmatization, difficulties in finding a job and participating in social life can lead ex-prisoners to re-engage with crime. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen social support mechanisms that facilitate the integration of prisoners into society after their release, to increase employment and vocational training opportunities, to provide psychological support and to fight against poverty.

In conclusion, the impact of prison experiences on post individuals' post-release lives and recidivism is complex and multidimensional. While experiences in prison may increase individuals' tendency to reoffend, insufficient social, economic and psychological support may also negatively affect this process. Although the trainings and programs attended in prison contribute to the personal development of individuals, recidivism may be inevitable unless basic problems such as poverty are solved. In this context, supporting post-prison rehabilitation and social adaptation processes is of critical importance for preventing crime and ensuring social cohesion.

ORCID :

Roza SÜLEYMANOĞLU   0000-0003-2649-7572

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Research Article

Exploring Migration Motivations from Developed to Developing Countries: A Study of American Emigrants to Developing Countries

Mustafa Şeref AKIN[1,2] (iD)

[1]Prof. Dr., Boğaziçi University, Faculty of Administrative and Economics, Management South Campus, Istanbul Türkiye
[2]Prof. Dr., Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, Faculty of Administrative and Economics, Management, Yalnızbağ Campus, Erzincan Turkey

Corresponding author : Mustafa Şeref Akın
E-mail : mustafa.akin©boun.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the motivations and challenges faced by American emigrants by focusing on the stories of 12 individuals who moved to developing countries. Through an in-depth analysis of social media videos produced by the CNBC Make It program and the migrants, the study provides firsthand insights into their decision-making processes and the factors influencing their choices. Our findings reveal that economic opportunities are not the primary driver of early decision-making. Instead, motivations for migration are deeply rooted in social and psychological aspects, such as detachment from home communities and personal growth and fulfillment. Economic considerations, including the ability to earn income from the U.S. (through online work, retirement, or passive income), become relevant for geographic arbitrage only after the decision to migrate has been made. Having an income from home country, combined with the lower cost of living in developing countries, enables Americans to achieve financial independence. Notably, tax benefits are a low priority, contrary to popular belief about tax avoidance as a motivation. Therefore, migration from developed to developing countries is primarily a personal decision driven by a desire for change, adventure, creativity, and self-discovery.

Keywords: Sociopsychological Factors, Personal Growth, Geographic Arbitrage, U.S. Migration, Developing Countries

1. Introduction

This study investigates the economic, sociological, and psychological motivations behind the migration of individuals from the United States, a developed and prosperous nation, to developing countries. This study primarily focuses on economic incentives, such as geographic arbitrage, which allow individuals to maximize their financial resources by capitalizing on differences in cost of living between their home and host countries. This strategy not only enhances purchasing power and potentially accelerates the attainment of financial independence (Fieber, 2018).

Migration is an inherently complex and impactful phenomenon that influences social structures, cultural dynamics, economic developments, and political landscapes in both the origin and destination areas. This complexity is especially pronounced in migration from developed to developing regions, where people move from wealthier to relatively poorer countries. This transition can have significant financial, cultural, and psychological effects on migrants, affecting their budgeting, mental health, and emotional well-being.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted motivations that prompt individuals from the U.S.—a country often idealized for its wealth and opportunities—to relocate to developing countries. By exploring these motivations, this study seeks to shed light on the potential advantages and challenges faced by migrants, thereby offering valuable insights into how migration impacts individuals' lifestyles **and financial planning**. This analysis not only contributes to the academic discourse on migration but also assists potential migrants in making informed decisions.

Most of the existing literature examines migration as a form of migration from developing countries to developed countries (van der Mensbruggh & Roland-Holst, 2009; Solano & Huddleston, 2021). This is logical given the association between developing countries and relative poverty, which prompts migration toward developed countries. The primary focus in this literature revolves around measuring countries' benefits and drawbacks, particularly concerning the migration of skilled labor (Skeldon, 2021), national security concerns (Abdullayev et al., 2023), the impact of institutions (Arif, 2020), and push–pull determinants (Urbański, 2022). However, there is a noticeable dearth of research on migration from developed to developing countries. Moreover, economic, sociological, and psychological aspects are an underexplored contribution to the literature. In this paper, we will focus our attention on individuals who have successfully made this migration, aiming to uncover their motivations.

2. Literature on Migration

2.1. Economics Aspect: Geographic Arbitrage

Geographical arbitrage has long been employed by global companies and can also be advantageous for individuals seeking financial and personal improvement (Fieber, 2018). Global corporations reap various benefits from geographic arbitrage, primarily through lower-cost labor markets. For instance, many technology companies have shifted their operations to countries like China, India, and the Philippines, where labor costs are lower than those in the United States or Europe (Friedman, 2005). This strategic move allows firms to trim labor expenses while maintaining high levels of productivity and quality. Geographic arbitrage is an unexplored field of economic geography and lifestyle migration (Kelly et al., 2019; Benson & O'reilly, 2009).

On an individual level, geographic arbitrage becomes a means to optimize one's lifestyle by residing in a location that aligns with their budget, freeing them from income constraints. Individuals may opt to live in a foreign country where their savings yield greater value, affording them opportunities to travel more, pursue hobbies, or invest in personal development (Ferris, 2007).

Geographic arbitrage empowers individuals to seize greater control over their time and finances by relocating to lower-cost areas (Karlgaard, 2004, 2006). This strategy serves as an individualistic counterpart to corporate offshoring, where companies capitalize on lower labor costs abroad to attract higher-earning consumers in more expensive locales (Hayes, 2014). Both approaches exploit global economic disparities to maximize financial benefits.

The positive economic impacts of relocating include a lower cost of living, increased savings, the generation of passive income through the sale or rental of homeland assets, active income through business ownership or expat work, the opportunity to work remotely, and potentially lower taxes. The concept of geographic arbitrage is intriguing because it allows individuals to leverage their purchasing power, potentially facilitating earlier retirement or remote work while enhancing their overall quality of life.

Geographic arbitrage also facilitates various forms of international movement, including international retirement migration, in which individuals use their retirement funds to acquire a more affluent and culturally diverse way of life (King et al., 2021).

Geographic arbitrage provides attractive options for individuals from wealthier locations. As an example, in our research, a former San Diego resident who is now living in Bali, Indonesia, has experienced the advantages of geographic arbitrage. Bali, a popular destination for digital nomads and expatriates, offers an affordable cost of living, scenic beaches, and a lively culture. Compared to San Diego, expenses for housing, food, transportation, and other necessities are typically much lower in Bali, allowing for potential savings. Bali's beautiful beaches, tropical climate, and vibrant culture contribute to an enhanced quality of life compared to San Diego. Additionally, Bali boasts a growing community of digital nomads and entrepreneurs, offering both networking and business opportunities. The resident claims to live a luxurious life on a budget of US$2,500 per month. San Diego, ranked as one of the most expensive cities globally by the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2022 Worldwide Cost of Living (WCOL) survey, has significantly higher rent, restaurant, and grocery prices than Bali, according to Numbeo, a website offering cost-of-living comparisons worldwide. Despite the high cost of living, many people continue to reside at San Diego and other expensive cities without considering geographic arbitrage. However, selling a house or similar asset and investing the proceeds in a 4% 30-year U.S. dollar Treasury bills can provide substantial passive income (USD 3,000 per month) to support a comfortable lifestyle without having to work. Additionally, residents of San Diego may face up to 37% federal taxes, 12.3% state taxes, and 0.74% property taxes. In California, residents may pay half of their income in taxes (IRS, 2022; balancemoney, 2022). For individuals with passive incomes or remote jobs, moving abroad can offer them a better quality of life while saving significantly on taxes. For instance, the Bali digital nomad visa allows remote workers to live and work in Indonesia without having to pay taxes (Euronews, 2022). If people were economically rational—homo economicus—they would follow this mathematically robust approach and move from San Diego to Bali. In this paper, we explore whether the primary motivation for those who relocate is economics.

Indeed, geographic arbitrage enables people to live their best lives, travel the world, escape the 9-5 rat race, build wealth, and achieve financial independence. Interestingly, those benefiting from geographic arbitrage are not primarily motivated by the cost of living and higher savings; tax considerations, however, should receive much higher attention. Mancinelli (2020) asserted that the self-fulfillment project of digital nomads aligns with the ideology of entrepreneurship, enabling them to leverage their privileged nationalities to navigate the global inequalities of the capitalist system through geographic arbitrage.

The objective of achieving financial independence and early retirement involves a meticulous reduction in expenses and debt, the accumulation of assets, and eventually departing, if desired, from the workforce to rely on investments (Taylor and Davies, 2021). Financial independence, as defined by Robin and Dominguez (1993), denotes the economic capability to fulfill basic needs through passive income. It grants the freedom to be where and when one desires without dependence.

The question of how much is needed for financial independence has been explored by numerous scholars (Bierwirth, 1994; Bengen, 1994, 1996, 1997; Ferguson, 1996; Cooley et. al., 1998; Fisker, 2017; Pfau, 2018). While the answer depends on factors like location, spending habits, and life expectancy, a general recommendation is that individuals should save to cover living expenses for several years (Pfau, 2018). Bengen (1994, 1996, 1997), using US financial data from 1926-1993, established a sustainable withdrawal rate of 4% over a 35-year period, adjusted for inflation, using a portfolio of 50-75% equities and 25-50% long-term bonds. Despite the passage of more than two decades and various financial crises, evidence supports the continued validity of these studies (Pfau, 2018). Bengen (2017) mentioned in an interview that, with tax advantages like those of the private pension system (e.g., 401k), the rate could potentially reach 4.5%. According to the 4% rule, the required asset amount is 25 years of an individual's annual expenditure.

Even if an American needs to reside in the United States for employment, achieving financial independence can happen much earlier through geographic arbitrage because the required amount of wealth differs. In addition, employees face significant threat of job loss. For example, in 2023, approximately 50,000 software engineers experienced job reductions at five major tech companies in the U.S. (Indiatoday, 2023). With careful financial management, those who saved from their substantial salaries might have avoided reentering the job market by considering a move to developing countries, either by living off their savings or working remotely if they desired.

It is crucial to recognize that the decision to pursue geographic arbitrage hinges on an individual's profession, lifestyle, and goals. Before making such a significant move, conducting thorough research to evaluate the potential benefits and drawbacks of relocating to a specific destination is vital. While Bali may be an excellent option for some, others may prioritize a more luxurious lifestyle that this island cannot offer. Portugal, with its exceptional infrastructure, has become an attractive destination, especially for those seeking a tropical or Mediterranean climate. In addition, Panama, Argentina, Mexico, and Montenegro offer unique advantages and are worth considering.

It is essential to note that various destinations can be compared, such as Manhattan to Dubai or Oklahoma to Belgrade, depending on individual preferences. For Americans inclined toward Western cultures and beliefs, Europe could be

an ideal destination, offering a soft landing. Despite the common assumption that living in Europe is more expensive, most European countries, excluding the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark) and financial centers (UK, Ireland, Switzerland, and Luxembourg), are more affordable than the United States (Dalmatian Mapper, 2023).

For a family of four, the average cost of living in the United States is $3,522. In comparison, in Portugal, it is €1,972; in Croatia, €2,153; in Spain, €2,267; and in the Netherlands, €3,198 (Dalmatian Mapper, 2023). In each case, a higher quality of life can be achieved at a much lower cost, especially when considering tax benefits and free university education within the EU.

Given these significant opportunities, a pertinent question arises: Why do people from developed countries hesitate to move to developing countries? Within the EU, which has a population of 446 million citizens and the freedom to live and work in any EU country without restrictions, few people take advantage of opportunities for geographic arbitrage between developed and developing European countries. For instance, a software developer residing in Frankfurt, Germany, where the cost of living is high, could potentially relocate to a city like Granada, Spain, where the cost of living is lower. This move would allow them to save on housing, food, and other expenses while maintaining their income. Similarly, retirees residing in high-tax countries like France could opt to move to countries with no income taxes, such as Portugal, to preserve more of their retirement savings. However, despite the potential benefits, only 2.9% (13.7 million) of EU citizens currently live in another EU country.

Relocating to a lower-cost location allows individuals to enjoy a better quality of life for the same income. This strategy empowers individuals to navigate the global map to their advantage, allowing them to choose locations that align with their personal preferences and lifestyle goals. Geographic arbitrage serves as an individualistic exit strategy, reducing reliance on high-cost structures and providing greater control over finances, time, and lifestyle.

2.2. Sociological Aspect

This review explores the sociological impacts of migration, focusing on identity formation, social integration, and the interplay between migrants and host societies. Migration studies often employ several sociological theories to understand the multifaceted impacts of moving from one locale to another.

Push-Pull theory highlights economic disparities, political instability, and social tensions as push factors, and better living conditions, job opportunities, and safety are pull factors' (Lee, 1966; Urbanski, 2022).

Transnationalism focuses on the sustained tie that migrants maintain with their home countries while integrating into their host society (Basch et al., 2020).

Assimilation and multiculturalism examine how migrants integrate into host societies and the extent to which they retain their cultural identities (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Bueker, 2021).

The migration process is intrinsically linked to the concepts of identity and cultural hybridity. Migrant identities are often hybrid, incorporating elements from both the home and host cultures (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 2015; Bhandari, 2022; Ullah, 2024). This hybridity can lead to the creation of unique subcultures that enrich the cultural tapestry of the host society but can also lead to identity crises among migrants, influencing their social integration and mental health.

Social integration of migrants is a critical aspect of sociology, influencing policy decisions and community dynamics. argues that while diversity can initially lead to lower social cohesion and trust, over time, inclusive societies can foster deeper intercultural understanding and solidarity (Putnam, 2007; Morgan et.al., 2021). Additionally, the formation of ethnic enclaves can provide support to new arrivals but may also hinder their integration into the broader society (Portes & Manning, 2019).

Migrants often contribute significantly to the economy of the host country, filling labor shortages, and creating new businesses. Studies that debate the economic impacts of migration, with findings suggesting that while short-term labor market disruptions may occur, long-term benefits include increased innovation and economic dynamism (Chiswick, 2018), Borjas (1985), Arellano-Bover & San, 2020). However, social mobility among migrants varies widely, being influenced by factors such as education, race, and the legal framework governing migration. The challenges associated with migration include xenophobia, discrimination, and unequal access to resources, which can exacerbate social division.

Policies aimed at improving integration, such as language training, equal employment opportunities, and anti-discrimination laws, are crucial. Additionally, international cooperation is essential to address the root causes of migration, such as conflict and global inequality.

Most sociological research on migration has focused on integration challenges in the destination countries. However, scant discussion is available in the literature about the cultural issues that arise in countries of origin. It is important to acknowledge that cultural disharmony within the United States can drive individuals overseas to seek opportunities.

This paper demonstrates that internal cultural conflicts and feelings of disconnect with prevailing societal norms can motivate Americans to explore life beyond their national borders, viewing international relocation not merely as a change in physical locale but as an escape from cultural discord and an opportunity for personal realignment.

2.3. Psychological Aspect

This review explores these impacts with a focus on mental health, identity formation, adaptation strategies, and intergenerational effects. Psychological studies on migration often use several key theories to understand migrants' mental health challenges and coping mechanisms.

The anthropotive stress model describes the stress experienced by people moving to a new culture, highlighting challenges such as language barriers, discrimination, and cultural alienation (Berry, 1997; Berry & Hou, 2021).

Social identity theory examines how migrant identities are shaped by their membership in social groups, influencing their self-esteem and social interactions (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Ecological systems theory examines how different environmental systems affect the development and psychological well-being of migrants (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Crawford, 2020).

Migrants often experience a higher incidence of mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These issues can be intensified by traumatic migration experiences, such as fleeing conflict or disaster, and by challenges in the resettlement process, such as isolation and discrimination. A meta-analysis by Lindert et al. (2009) indicates that the prevalence of mental health issues is significantly higher among refugees and asylum seekers because of cumulative pre- and post-migration stress.

Identity formation is a crucial psychological process shaped by migration. Migrants often navigate a difficult transition between maintaining their cultural heritage and adapting to new cultural norms, which can lead to identity conflicts. Berry (2005) showed that successful cultural integration—achieving a balance between heritage and new cultural identities—leads to better mental health outcomes compared to assimilation or separation.

Despite these challenges, many migrants exhibit remarkable resilience. Psychological resilience in the context of migration encompasses the ability to maintain or regain mental health despite experiencing adversity. Factors contributing to resilience include strong family bonds, community support, and positive host-society reception. Jafari (2020) emphasized the role of social support and community networks in facilitating migration adaptation and resilience.

The psychological impact of migration can span generations. Second-generation migrants may face different challenges than their parents, such as negotiating dual cultural identities or dealing with parental expectations versus societal norms. Research by Zhou and Bankston (1998) suggests that second-generation migrants often struggle to balance the cultural expectations of their parents with the pressure of assimilating into the host culture, which can impact their mental health and social integration. Addressing migrants' mental health needs requires culturally sensitive healthcare services and policies that recognize the unique stresses faced by this population. Community-based interventions, access to mental health services, and anti-discrimination policies are crucial for supporting migrants' psychological well-being.

Much of the psychological research on migration primarily addresses the challenges faced by migrants in their destination countries. However, this view overlooks a crucial aspect of migration experience: the psychological motivations rooted in the country of origin. In the context of migration from developed to developing countries, this study will analyze how a significant number of Americans harbor serious concerns about feeling trapped by the societal and cultural constraints of their home country. These concerns drive the pursuit of new opportunities abroad, where people hope to not only discover different lifestyles but also potentially liberate personal and professional environments.

3. Method

3.1. Design

Qualitative content analysis is a widely recognized systematic approach for analyzing qualitative data. The approach involves identifying patterns, themes, and concepts in the data to generate meaningful insights and understanding (Lindgren et al., 2020). Our aim is to understand people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors through interviews and observations. Content analysis was used to condense and abstract a substantial amount of textual data and directly extract participant messages without imposing a researcher's viewpoint to gain fresh insights into the study phenomena (Agafonoff, 2006). Content analysis was used to condense and abstract a substantial amount of textual data and directly extract participant messages without imposing a researcher's viewpoint to gain fresh insights into the study phenomena (Gupta et al., 2018).

To address the study's central question, "What are the motivations and challenges that drive American emigrants to relocate to developing countries?" it is noteworthy that more than 11 million people—mostly from developing countries—apply for the American green card lottery each year, with fewer than 1 in 200 applicants being accepted (US Department of State, 2024). What motivates Americans to migrate to developing countries, leaving behind countries that are considered highly desirable?

3.2. Setting and Participants

The study focused on individuals' previous experience of migrating from developed to developing countries (Table 1). The research methodology utilized a video ethnographic approach, which involves using video recordings to study people's behaviors, practices, and cultures within their natural environments. This method captures real-time interactions, settings, and social dynamics, offering rich, visual insights that are often more nuanced and detailed than traditional ethnographic methods, which typically depend on observation and interviews. Our focus was on participants' experiences as featured in the CNBC Make It program. Through these videos, we observed their stories and lifestyles—from their favorite coffee shops to their homes—in both the U.S. and developing countries, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of their contexts. By focusing on experiences, the study aimed to avoid any demographic or socioeconomic biases (Young, 2015; 2022). This approach allowed the researchers to examine individual motivations and experiences that led each individual to migrate rather than solely examining broad demographic characteristics such as age or income. By considering the unique circumstances of each participant, including factors such as family circumstances, job opportunities, and personal preferences, the study aimed to capture a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By emphasizing individual experiences, the researchers sought to present a complete and more detailed picture of motivation.

CNBC Make is a dedicated section of CNBC that was launched in 2016 and focuses on personal finance and entrepreneurship. The company aims to educate and inspire its audience about financial success, covering topics from deciding to land a dream job to investing in retirement. With conversational and authoritative content, CNBC Make It taps into CNBC's extensive access to successful business figures, providing insights and advice that are akin to those of a knowledgeable friend. Its mission is to guide readers toward significant financial milestones and encourage a prosperous life. The platform, which became a standalone website with a unique design in 2019, continues CNBC's legacy, which was established in 1989 as a leader in business news and financial market coverage globally. The CNBC Make It team comprises over 30 professional journalists and video producers stationed in New York City, with additional correspondents located in Los Angeles, London, and Singapore.

CNBC's Make It offers several opportunities to explore geographic arbitrage. First, the program features real-life stories of individuals who have moved to developing countries to save money and improve their quality of life. Second, the business-oriented feature of CNBC provides economic insights into geographic arbitrage, which refers to the practice of maintaining a high standard of living at a lower cost. Third, social media platforms have provided opportunities for individuals to share detailed experiences with geographic arbitrage. We further investigated the motivations behind migration by examining the YouTube channels of these emigrants in CNBC Make It who have moved to developing countries. Specifically, we aimed to elucidate the stories, experiences, motivations, and contexts of American emigrants from diverse demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Each story is unique—whether it is someone moving to Bali or another to Bangkok—spanning various occupations from entrepreneurs to retirees and including individuals of all ages. Despite this diversity, their underlying motivations reveal several common patterns.

Regarding financing, some individuals continue to work as freelancers and serve their clients in the United States, while others sell their assets and live off the returns.

In qualitative research, the saturation point determines the number of participants required for the study. However, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) found that between 9 and 17 participants is statistically sufficient, provided that the participants are homogeneous in terms of subject, geography, and culture. In this study, professional reporters interviewed 12 U.S. citizens (from the same culture) about their experiences of migrating to developing countries for affordability (same topic). According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), it is necessary to increase the number of participants when heterogeneous elements increase (e.g.,moving from developed countries to develop ones). The participants were coded as x1, x2, ... (Table 1). In this research, we reach saturation.

Table 1. Migrant List

	From	To	Source of income
X1	Columbus (grown up), San Diego	Bali, Indonesia	social media marketing business
X2	Lufkin (Texas), San Antonio	Quaretaro, Mexico	Website developer
X3	New York City	South Africa	Passive income
X4	Midwest	Pattaya, Thailand	Passive income accumulated over 28 years (sold his house)
X5	Ohio (grown up), California (work)	Batum, Kuala Lumpur, Belgrade	Passive income (sold his assets in the USA) and re-invested in his business to the western country's clients
X6	California (grow up), Portland (work)	Lisbon, Portugal	Passive income
X7	Miami	Costa Rica, Portugal	Real estate, a influencer
X8	Did not declare	Philippines	Influencer
X9	Wisconsin	Bangkok, Thailand	Web developer
X10	New York (born) Santa Cruz (live)	Mazatlán, Mexico	Social security, freelancers, royalties
X11	Los Angeles	Bangkok, Thailand	Passive income + coaching for living abroad
X12	California Bay Area	Mexico City, Mexico	Passive income + coaching for living abroad

3.3. Data Collection

For qualitative analysis of geographic arbitrage, data were extracted from participants' experiences (Young, 2022). In 2022, CNBC conducted face-to-face interviews to extract the experiences of individuals engaged in migration. The interviews were conducted to explore the challenges faced by migrants in fostering social connections and to elicit their personal experiences with immigration. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and included an interview about their lives in developing countries.

The data collection continued until data saturation, at which point no additional data were found and the researcher could not develop a new category (Faulkner, 2003). The categories appeared to be saturated regarding their properties and dimensions after the 10th interview. However, two additional interviews were conducted to ensure that no new data and conceptual codes emerged. In qualitative methods, the number of researchers is typically determined by reaching the point of saturation, which was achieved with the 10th participant, at which point no new categories emerged; instead, existing categories were merely reinforced through repetition from earlier participants.

3.4. Data Analysis

All interviews were conducted via social media. After each interview, the content was transcribed on YouTube. The transcription process involves the following four steps:

1. The text was read multiple times to obtain an overall understanding of the content.
2. Meaning units were identified and coded.
3. The codes were grouped into subcategories based on their conceptual similarities and differences.

4. Subcategories were compared, and latent data content was identified to form the main categories (Table 2).

Table 2. Example of the category formation process (Grouping)

Quotation	Code	Subcategory	The main category
I want to experience new things and travel.	X3	Adventure	Non-Economic factors
The bottom line is that staying here in the U.S. as comfortable and safe …..that moves us toward the challenge.	X6	Adventure	Non-Economic factors
You know, it feels really good as soon as I get on the plane (heading to Amsterdam). I feel like all my anxiety has just melted away, and then I feel	X7	Adventure	Non-Economic factors

3.5. Trustworthiness

We took several steps to ensure the quality of the study. The following steps are included

- Adequate sample size
- Member checking
- Constant comparative method
- Detailed reporting
- External review
- Maximum variation sampling

We believe that these steps have helped ensure that our findings are credible, reliable, confirmable, and transferable.

4. Findings

Our main finding indicates that **non-economic factors play** a more significant role than **economic factors in** motivating migration from developed countries to developing countries. Therefore, economic factors, such as geographic arbitrage or tax avoidance, play a secondary role. Migration from developed to developing countries is not mainly a financial but personal decision. The participants cited sociological and psychological reasons such as the following:

- A desire to detach from their home country's culture (Cultural Detachment) (4.1.)
- A desire to seek adventure and creativity (Creativity & Adventure) (4.2.)
- Desire to find fulfillment and happiness (Fulfillment) (4.3.)

Considerations related to economic factors (such as geographic arbitrage and cost of living) emerged only after the decision to move was made.

- A desire to live a cheaper place without sacrificing quality of life (Cost of living) (4.4.)

These findings suggest that moving is not a financial decision. It is also personal, motivated by a desire for change, adventure, and self-discovery. Participants thought two main reasons for their lack of migration from the U.S.

- Afraid of leaving American comfort (Comfort Zone) (4.5.)
- Selling hard assets (selling properties, business) (4.6.)
  Moreover, the participants suggest that getting tuck with American comfort is the primary reason, and selling hard assets and finding new ones in new locations are secondary.
  According to Americans who have moved to developing countries, the secret to success is to adapt to the foreign culture and find a place to live.
- Adapting foreign culture (4.7.).

4.1. Reasons for Migration I: Cultural Detachment

When individuals move from the United States to live abroad, they often experience a detachment from their home country. Detachment from one's home culture refers to a process in which an individual distances themselves from the cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors that they grew up with and are associated with their place of origin.

Detaching from one's home culture can lead to **feelings of alienation, confusion, and loss**. Some individuals may experience a sense of detachment from the U.S. culture even before they leave their home country, such as **first-generation migrants from Argentina (currently settled in Portugal)** to the United States, who may not fully integrate into American culture.

My family came to the U.S. when I was about 11, and so I never really established solid roots there... never felt like home x6

Racial discrimination is particularly harmful to Black Americans, and it may be a reason why some Americans choose to leave the United States. A black American settled in Bali recounted his childhood in the U.S.:

Being a person of color, I felt that there were certain times in my life when I just didn't feel valued as a black person growing up in the Midwest. Bali doesn't have the same history as America with racism and discrimination — in my opinion, they're more accepting of foreigners and people from different backgrounds ... people just look at me as a fellow human being, not a Black man always felt left x1

Political division in the U.S. can play a role in detachment because it can create a sense of disconnection and alienation from one's own country and society. When individuals have strong political beliefs that are not shared by a significant proportion of the population, it can be challenging to feel a sense of belonging and connection to that society. Additionally, political division can lead to social tension and conflict, which can cause individuals to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in their own country.

Every time there is a national election, half of the population threatens to move to Canada. There are intense political divisions x7.

The **US healthcare system** is complex and expensive. Many people in the US do not have access to affordable healthcare, which can lead to financial hardship and poor health. **Gun violence** is a major problem in the US. Every year, thousands of people are killed or injured by guns. This can lead to feelings of fear and insecurity in the public. **The gap between the rich and the poor** in the United States is growing wider due to wage differences. **Consumer culture** is sometimes associated with materialism, in which the pursuit of material possessions and wealth is prioritized over other values. The notion that access to certain goods and services is linked to social status (keep up with Jones) can be seen as problematic and contributes to divisions within society. Work **stress** (rat race) can lead to resentment and hopelessness. This includes long hours and limited vacation time; this can negatively impact individuals' well-being and work-life balance.

The dysfunctional healthcare system, the gun violence, the consumer culture, the constant anxiety and Rush of the rat race, and keeping up with the Joneses I mean there's plenty of issues that go on in the United States x7.

*I still do not relate or identify with many topics of conversation and the wants and desires of many people in my community. I'm not **interested in shopping** and don't want to **talk about politics**. I don't have any office politics or work drama to talk about. **I'm not interested in gossip**, and*

*there's a lot of people here of course, but **I just really miss the conversations that I have with Travelers and with locals in other countries**. I'm also a bit **weirded out by the whole consumer demand cycle in the U.S. (Valentine's day, 4th July,)** x8*

4.2. Reasons for Migration II: Creativity and Adventure

In their home country, individuals perceive certain limitations in career advancement and express concern about feeling stagnant. Their motivation to move abroad is not driven by an expectation of higher incomes or career progression. Instead, they are driven by the potential for **spiritual growth and personal development** as compelling reasons to pursue geographic mobility. They seek opportunities to **broaden their horizons, expand their perspectives, and experience personal transformation** by embracing new environments and cultures. Their desire for **self-improvement** and pursuit of a fulfilling life were significant factors motivating their migration decisions:

My parents wanted me to become a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. I wanted a creative life; one that was filled with travel, art, and opportunities to meet people from all corners of the world. X1

Traveling and living in various countries is an adventure that involves **trying new things, challenging** one's comfort zone, and enhancing creativity.

*I want to experience **new** things and travel x3.*

*The bottom line is that staying here in the U.S. as comfortable and safe as it might be is a sort of death trap and that goes for living anywhere; we would feel we were done ready for something **new** and **different** that moves us the challenge x6:*

You know, feeling really good as soon as I got on the plane (heading to Amsterdam) I felt like all my anxiety had just melted away x7

***Traveling and seeing** that the way we work ourselves to death in America is not common around the world made me realize that I could have a **different life** if I made the choice to have a different life. x12*

Traveling and living in other countries can contribute to **personal development** in many ways. It can help individuals learn **new things and develop new skills**. It can also help them to gain a *better understanding of themselves* and **the world** around them. The desire to step out of one's comfort zone, explore new opportunities, and challenge oneself can all be important psychological factors that drive decisions to move abroad.

*I am not saying that traveling is going to solve all of my problems; I mean it probably will create more new and different problems that I didn't have when I was living at home, but one thing that travel can do is that it can give you a **new perspective**, it can give you a little bit of a reset and a fresh start in life, and I know that each time that I've traveled to a new place and each time I've made a big change it's always resulted in **personal growth and learning**. I mean **travel to me is the best real-world education** but it's also **the best education about who I am in this world** and the longer that I stayed in the US and in my daily routine the more I felt like I was losing that sense of connection with the outside world outside of my local community and the more I started to forget who I was x7.*

I grew up in a small town with not too much trouble, not too much adventure, and not too much drive to achieve exciting things, so I always had the idea that I wanted to get out. . . more traveling gave me some inspiration to explore some new places x9.

Location-independent work provides opportunities **for creativity by** offering **flexibility, freedom, and the ability to work in new environments and surroundings**. This can help individuals **to break free from routine and familiar surroundings, which can be a catalyst for new ideas and inspiration**. The ability to **work in different locations** can also lead to **new experiences and exposure to different cultures**, which can broaden one's perspective and inspire new ways of thinking and problem solving.

*Just me hundreds of millions of people have found a new sense of work freedom of location freedom and they are taking advantage of it so whether you're moving throughout your country or throughout the world **so many millions of people have been freed from the cubicle have been freed from the office** and are working remotely and this is an unprecedented time in history where even in the past year or so upwards of 50 countries have announced new remote work or digital Nomad visas that allow people to apply to live there for one to five years at a time if you earn an on online income and so this is a very exciting time to be alive you have a one in three or four quadrillion chance of being born at this time and so I think it's time to seize the day.x7*

Moving abroad can **be a call to critical thinking and independent judgment**. This suggests that blindly following the opinions and beliefs of the majority can be problematic because they may not be based on sound reasoning or evidence. Instead, it encourages individuals to step back, think critically, and reflect on their own beliefs and opinions rather than simply accepting the views of the majority. The idea is that by pausing to reflect, individuals can arrive at a more informed and authentic perspective that is true to their values and beliefs.

*I don't want to live a normal life. I'm much more interested in what people like **Mark Twain have to say about it, which is that if you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect**. I don't know about you, but I've had plenty of time to pause and reflect*

*over the past few years. All of my friends and family and people who don't understand why I would leave a good thing for the unknown I just have to say that **it doesn't matter how good your life looks on paper it doesn't matter how good your life looks from the outside what really matters is how you're feeling on the inside** so did I make the right decision by packing up all of my stuff and setting off around the world again with a one-way ticket I don't know you know if you were to ask me right here right now I would say yes I'm feeling very at home here in Amsterdam and I'm very much looking forward to my next destination of Portugal I think that time will tell but regardless of where I go next I hope that you will join me here on the journey.x7*

4.3. Reason for Migration III: Fulfillment

In their home country, some may experience a sense of stagnation and loss of direction or purpose. If a person does not have clear goals or a sense of purpose, they may feel **directionless and unfulfilled**.

*After working for 28 years and one day, I woke up and decided **I wasn't happy** with my job, I wasn't happy with my life, I wasn't happy with the city, and I wasn't happy with the way the country was going x4.*

*I didn't realize **how unhappy** I was and how much it manifested itself in my body. When traveling, I saw how other countries and societies treated work; how in America, we are so focused on what you do and how that defines who you are x12.*

They are **trapped in their homes**, which they see as places of destruction. They are miserable and want to change their lifestyles **before they die**.

I don't know how much I'll live. X4

*I was 50. I was looking at what was ahead of me in my life and **I wanted to change**. I **really wanted to be happy**, and I needed to find work because the internet had upended my career in journalism, so I tried to **think outside the box** x10*

A migrant settled in the Philippines has criticized the work culture in the United States, saying that people there are too focused on working long hours and earning money to buy luxury items, rather than prioritizing **work-life balance**.

People will spend their extra hours working harder to earn more money and to pay for these expensive Lifestyles instead of using those extra hours to spend with friends and family and at the gym taking care of their health, and as a result, you won't get a work-life balance x8.

Another opportunity offers more occasions for a *specific hobby or interest*, such as a beach town for surfing enthusiasts or a mountainous area for hikers and skiers.

The pace of life is much lower in many other countries. I have time for my hobbies. x8

4.4. Location Decision: Geographic Arbitrage

Their common statement was that they only considered the economic benefits of a move after they had settled in. The primary reasons for this are cultural detachment and personal growth (creativity and fulfillment). This suggests that **they did not factor in the economic costs and benefits (geographic arbitrage) before they started their journey**, even though there were many potential economic advantages to moving. High taxation is at the bottom of the list when moving decisions.

Moving to a location with a lower cost of living to **save money on housing, food, transportation, and other expenses is a viable strategy**. For example, an American who moved to the Philippines explained that he could eat a delicious meal for the cost of just tips in the US.

*I started traveling the world in these cheap countries. I saw the price differences and how much lower the cost of living is outside the US. For example, in Southeast Asia, you're in Thailand, Vietnam, where I've been in the Philippines. If you're eating at a local place, you're spending less than 10 dollars to sit down at a restaurant and have a meal and drink. In a casual restaurant I've been eating recently in the Philippines, it's $1.00 per item, so you get chicken, and then you get vegetables, and you get another side. In the United States, **tips** are even more **expensive** than food costs in the Philippines.*

Creating a budget is essential for realizing potential savings from the move. For example, an American expatriate living in Mexico City provides a useful case study. According to this expatriate, it is possible to retire early in Mexico City with $660,000 in bonds and equity, maintaining a monthly budget of $2,300 (annually $27,600). This fits Bengen's 4% rule of return on assets ($660,000 x 0.04 = $27,600), which balances income and expenditures. One of the advantages of living in developing countries is the lower cost of living, which means that the total assets required can also be reduced.

*I looked at my investments and I had about half a million dollars saved and invested, and I knew I was going to get another hundred fifty thousand in stocks from a company I used to work for. I knew I had about **six hundred and sixty thousand** because I knew I didn't want to go back to work. . . .In a typical month, I spend about **23,000 dollars** to live in Mexico City.x3*

A migrant from San Diego says his savings have increased significantly since he moved to Bali. The cost of living in Bali is much lower than in San Diego. **A spacious ocean view condo for $1000 per month, which would cost him at least twice as much in San Diego**. He can easily eat out for $20 per day, which would cost him at least twice as much in San Diego. He is saving a lot of money while enjoying his lifestyle.

Since moving to Bali, I have been able to spend more on travel, dining, and other hobbies as well as increase my savings. I'm never worried about money anymore because Bali has a much lower cost of living than the U.S. X1.

Moving abroad helped save me a lot more x2.

A resident of Belgrade from the United States describes this strategy as purchasing property without incurring debt and benefiting from the much lower prices of nearly all goods and services. Additionally, buying a house in a central location eliminates the need for a car.

The idea of living overseas, buying a property without debt, enjoying a lower cost of living, better-quality food at a much lower price, and perhaps not needing a car — that's a great way to stretch your dollars or euros times five. X5.

The **cost of living in a luxurious lifestyle** varies significantly from city to city. For example, a migrant can **rent a *full-service* condo in a trendy district in Bangkok for $2700 USD per month. In Manhattan,** the average rental price for a one-bedroom apartment **per month is US$450, not including utility charges, flat service charges, and extra services such as cleaning and laundry** (Rentcafe, 2023).

I pay 2700 a month in a very trendy district, which includes amenities including all utilities, electric Internet, as well as cleaning and laundry. It's a very full service. I find that it removes a lot of my life admin time and allows me to be more productive and have a lot more free time x9.

Accommodation is crucial. The expenditure on good quality housing is much cheaper than the one in the U.S. X3.

Moreover, the cost of **an affordable condo in** Bangkok is **390 USD per month** and **280 USD in Pattaya, which** includes amenities such as sports and entertainment facilities, a swimming pool, and a doorman. This is comparable to the cost of a condo in South Florida, which can cost up to $2,000 per month.

I am here in downtown Bangkok. This place is called life Asok Rama 9. It's right by a couple of great malls. There's the job fair market, which is one of the hippest and most popular nightlife markets in Bangkok. It is a beautiful location; you can walk to the market in a few minutes and you're right downtown. The best-selling features of this building are by far the pools, gyms, and co-working space. I pay14.000 Baht -390USD-. X11

The luxurious, modern sports, entertainment facilities- condo with ocean view in Pattaya, I paid 280USD. In the US, I would pay much more for ocean-view condos. X4

In a Mexican seaside resort town, the **most expensive house costs $420 USD per month**, while the average rental fee is $200-USD per month.

This apartment that I have now that I pay 420 a month for is the most expensive place. I have lived in Mazatlán for 15 years, and usually, my rent has been around 200 USD. I wanted to be in central historical, I wanted to be close to the ocean, I wanted to be able to walk to restaurants and cafes that I wanted to go to x10.

Because of the many geographical opportunities available, Americans may not need to own valuable assets or earn international income to maintain a good quality of life. **Social security payments and additional revenue can be sufficient**. For instance, an American retiree who relies solely on social security payments and now resides in Mazatlán, Mexico, vividly describes the potential benefits of geographic arbitrage. By choosing a location with a lower cost of living, one can potentially save a significant amount of money and achieve financial independence:

The truth is, I wouldn't be able to afford to live in the U.S. anymore, not with just my social security and the little extra money I get. So, living here in Mexico, being happy, and affording the things I want in my life is a blessing. x10

It is a combination of social security, some royalties from book sales, and a little bit of freelance writing, and it's between $12,000 and $14,400 a month x10.

Homeowner association (HOA) fees in South Florida are notoriously high, and residents often complain about how they are increasing drastically. According to a recent study by the National Association of Realtors, the average HOA fee in South Florida is $250 per month.

*I bought a condo just over 2 years ago in Florida. **The HOA fees** were **315 a month**. **Now I'm paying 505 a month**. Just crazy. In the United States, I have a wonderful house, but **I live to pay my bills**. X4*

A digital nomad couple who recently spent time in both Estoril, Portugal and Boca Raton, Florida, commented on the significant difference in the cost of living between the two cities. They noted that the cost of accommodation in Estoril is only 3.5% of that of a luxurious unit in Boca Raton. The couple said that they were surprised by the difference in prices, especially considering that both cities are considered luxurious destinations. They said that they were able to find a spacious and well-appointed apartment in Estoril for just $1,000 per month, while a similar unit in Boca Raton would have cost them upwards of $30,000 per month.

Greetings from Portugal...I remember vividly back in the early 2000's going with a buddy of mine who was an realtor in the Boca Raton area and looking at different properties...East of 95 where going for 30k...Condos...H.O.A. fees etc... insane...Been an legal resident here since 2016...I rent an 1 bedroom condo in one of the most expensive areas of Portugal, Estoril...Total cost a month...€700 euros split by my gal and I...No fees...Just peaceful and relaxed living...Get Busy Living!

In many developing countries around the world, it is possible to purchase a full meal made with fresh ingredients for around $1.50. This is not possible in the United States or Europe, where the cost of food is much higher. The reason for this difference is due to a number of factors, including labor cost, transportation cost, and food safety regulations.

There are amazing versions of fresh food all over the country where you can get a full meal that's freshly made of fresh ingredients for around fifty dollars, and you can't really do that anywhere in the United States or Europe x9.

A resident of Belgrade described geographic arbitrage as a way of moving to a location with a **lower tax rate** to keep more of their income.

If you've got problems paying 40% of your business profits in tax that's a problem and you grow your business a lot slower than you could and there's probably a competitor who's incorporated Malta, they've got 35 percent more cash to play with at the end of the day if they're at the same profitability they can reinvest that and grow faster x5.

Moving to a location with **lower healthcare costs** can help individuals save money on medical expenses. For example, a resident of a Philippines explained how expensive hospital bills can be in the United States even for simple procedures.

When I come here (the U.S.), sometimes I go to the doctor. I went to a specialist last time I was in town, and the out-of-pocket cost was 210 dollars just to meet with this specialist. We decided to do some blood work to check some blood levels, and the nurse casually came into the room. I don't need to go to the lab. She drew my blood. They said they'd send me the results didn't even mention a price a couple weeks later I get a bill in the mail from Lab Corp for 330 dollars that's 540 dollars just for them to tell me I was fine, which is absolutely absurd. This isn't the case in other countries x8.

Non-economic opportunities include moving to a location with better **gastronomy, weather, or natural beauty to** enjoy a higher quality of life. It is interesting to note that he does not just find the quality of life in Bangkok to be a little better; he believes it is **much better** in almost every category.

The quality of life in Thailand compared to the United States I'd say for ninety percent of things is much better x9.

4.5. Constraint on Moving I: Comfort Zone

What prevents people from taking action? According to emigrants, the comfort zone is their main factor. While it can be a place of ease and familiarity, **staying in one's comfort zone can hinder personal growth and prevent new and rewarding experiences**. By avoiding challenges and sticking to what is known, individuals may miss opportunities for self-improvement and growth. This can result in **feelings of boredom, frustration, and unfulfillment, as well as a lack of progress toward personal and professional goals**. In addition, staying within one's comfort zone can **limit the development of new skills** and perspectives, which are crucial for personal and professional development. Therefore, stepping outside one's comfort zone and embracing new challenges and experiences can lead to personal growth, increased self-awareness, and a sense of accomplishment.

*I could not do before (moving) because **I built a comfortable zone in the city, job, and house**. X4*

*I thought maybe I was getting a little bit too **comfortable**. I started feeling again like maybe I would never leave. I mean I had my friends there and my family there. I had my stuff there. **I bought furniture, I rented an apartment, I signed a long-term lease, I bought plants. I started growing tomatoes on my balcony** x7*

*Anyone is uprooting themselves from a **settled and comfortable situation** in pursuit of that new beginning that promising next location even for motivated nomads like ourselves. This is a hard undertaking there's still a weight to living where we do and quite a process ahead in transplanting ourselves to somewhere new; there will be many challenges for sure x6.*

Change can be difficult for individuals. **There are two main types of resistance to change: cognitive and social**. Cognitive resistance refers to an individual's **reluctance to accept or adopt new ideas** or ways of doing things due to deeply ingrained beliefs, perceptions, and habits. Resistance can be difficult to overcome because it is often based on unconscious assumptions and biases.

*I have lived in Miami, which many people consider being the perfect place on the planet. A town that is so high in demand that people from around the world spend upwards of a million dollars per bedroom to call my neighborhood their home despite all of that I left but not without some regret you know being out here on a Monday morning and just paddling around the islands in front of my **house it seems crazy to leave like why would you leave such a beautiful paradise like** x7.*

Social resistance refers to collective resistance to change within a group due to shared values, norms, and practices. This type of resistance can be even more difficult to overcome than cognitive resistance because it is often supported by group culture. Both cognitive and social resistance to change can arise from **a fear of the unknown, a lack of understanding the benefits of change**, or a **feeling of comfort with the current status quo**.

*Announce a decision of this magnitude is that you will get met with many pushbacks. **friends my family** everyone was like why like why would you leave this beautiful life that you've created this beautiful place so many questions and I couldn't answer all of those logically or rationally it was mostly just a feeling that this chapter in my life was closing and it was closing fast and it was time to move on a problem that many of the naysayers face when you're telling them about your plans to make a big life change like quitting your job or moving to a foreign country is that they are stuck in the status quo there's two main problems facing modern day humans are physiological and evolutionary programing and also our societal and cultural programing you see both of these sets of programing are too keep us **safe and to help maintain the status quo** and the species for that matter and so to break out of that is very difficult x7*

Being too comfortable can lead to a lack of personal growth and fulfillment. When people **become too comfortable** in their routines and surroundings, they may **stop** trying **new things, taking on new challenges, and exploring new opportunities**. This can lead to feelings **of stagnation and boredom and** a lack of progress toward personal and professional goals. While comfort can be a source of security and stability, it can also prevent people from **achieving their full potential and living a fulfilling life**.

*I think that things go deeper than just the surface of living in a beautiful place living in a very comfortable place and living an idyllic existence and **if comfort brought happiness**, then billions of people would be really happy and so even though I definitely appreciate where I live and it's going to be **Bittersweet** to leave, I still think that it's the right time and it's the right thing to do x7.*

When people become too comfortable with their current circumstances, they tend to resist change, which can lead **to feelings of fear and uncertainty about the future**. The fear of getting stuck is rooted in the belief that change may disrupt the comfort and stability to which they have become accustomed, and they may not be able to adapt to a new situation. This fear can be especially pronounced when the change involves significant life transitions, such as starting a new job or moving to a new city, as occurs in the case of migration.

*Give up a lot of the comfort and convenience and feeling of Safety and Security that I had developed over the past few years, but what starts to happen after you've lived in one place for a long time, and maybe you can relate to this is that you start to **feel stuck like the longer you've lived somewhere, the harder it becomes to leave** x7.*

Overcoming the fear of getting stuck requires developing resilience and **a growth mindset**, embracing new experiences, and learning to adapt to unfamiliar situations. Both making a move and remaining stagnant entail opportunity costs, and the decision to take action depends on weighing these costs. In essence, change occurs when the negative consequences of staying the same outweigh the fear and uncertainty associated with initiating change. The underlying concept suggests that individuals must reach a threshold of pain that motivates them to act rather than relying solely on their desire for a better future.

*It took me a whole another year of thinking about moving before I actually went into action, and I think this is because of a quote that I think comes from **Tony Robbins**, where he says that change only happens when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the fear of taking action x7.*

Indeed, Belgrade residents argue that individuals tend to **underestimate the extent of frustration they encounter in their home country**. Several factors have contributed to this phenomenon. First, individuals may have become **accustomed to the frustrations and challenges of their home country, normalizing them as part of their daily lives (familiarity bias and perception of control)**. Consequently, they may not fully understand the extent of their difficulties until they venture abroad and experience a different environment. Second, **a strong sense of loyalty and attachment to their home country can hinder individuals from acknowledging its flaws and problems**. They may perceive acknowledging the frustration and **difficulties as disloyalty or unpatriotic**, impeding their ability to address these issues (**social desirability bias**). Third, **a lack of information or awareness about other countries** and the

opportunities that they offer can contribute to this underestimation **(lack of awareness)**. Individuals may be unaware of alternative options that could potentially alleviate their current frustrations and difficulties.

I think that we probably underestimated how many challenges and frustrations we had in our own country because it just feels natural that when I lived in the United States, you had plenty of frustrations x5:

Interestingly, he also claimed that different types of frustration exist overseas. Selecting the frustration type might help guide migration.

The frustrations kind of hit you a little bit harder because it's a different culture, it's a different way of responding, you know in some countries people just naturally late, and so it's kind of frustrating like why are you an hour late don't move to that country if you don't want people being late, you know x5.

When making a migration decision, individuals consider **the benefits they hope to obtain and the frustrations they can tolerate the most**. The key issue here is **adjustment flexibility, which refers to the ability to adapt to new and changing circumstances**. It involves being able to adjust one's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in response to changing situations and cope with challenges and stressors. Individuals with high adjustment flexibility are able to change their approach as needed, remain open to new information and perspectives, and effectively manage stress and uncertainty. They are often able to **handle change and uncertainty in a positive way and are more resilient when facing adversity**.

The difference between the overseas and home countries is adjustment. People in their homeland were already accustomed to the problem and accepted it. Life is perfect; you can build your business or social life anywhere X5.

4.6. Constraints on Moving II: Adaptation of Culture

Migrants have pointed out that American culture is linked to **comfort in many aspects, such as house size, cars, and language**. A Thai resident stated that he had made an effort to adapt to foreign languages and cultures. Although he works remotely and can live with English, he describes his **language adaptation** efforts as follows:

*As far as language barriers are concerned here in Bangkok, you **can definitely get by with English, especially** in the more central, more touristic areas; however, learning **Thai has been a huge advantage**, the Thai people really appreciate it, and as a foreigner, you can really **engage in the culture** and **have a better life** if you do have some level of Thai. I think **it's important to respect locals** in any place that you are a guest and again the Thai people really appreciate it as well and your life is better; it's **really a win-win to practice** the local language x9.*

Adaptation to community and culture is another important factor to consider when deciding where to live, along with the cost of living and quality of life. Finding a friendly and accepting community is especially important when moving to a developing country. Residents of Thailand and Mexico often praise their communities for their warmth and friendliness.

Thai people are much different than in us. It's a much friendlier, more relaxed, and more inviting culture. It is generally a culture that is interested in meeting foreigners and different people, and it's just a very welcoming place x9

Mazatláns are known throughout Mexico as being really friendly people, and they are really x10

4.7. Constraints on Moving III: Selling and Finding Houses

Selling properties abroad can be inherently stressful, particularly when aiming to achieve the desired price. The selling price of a property is significantly influenced by the state of the market, and in cases where the market is saturated or the economy is sluggish, individuals may be compelled to sell at a lower price than they originally anticipated. Moreover, property prices can be sensitive to fluctuations in mortgage interest rates, adding further complexity to the selling process.

I tried to sell the house while the mortgage rate rose (in 2022). I have to drop the price of the house twice. X8

Finding suitable accommodation in a new country presents another significant challenge during migration. New settlers often encounter difficulties in navigating local real estate markets, which encompass unfamiliar laws, regulations, and customs. To address this need, many migrants create informative videos discussing the local property market, showcasing available houses and even providing virtual property tours, aiming to assist others contemplating a similar move. It is advisable for individuals to initially consider renting a property, allowing them to gain a better understanding of the local property market before making a long-term commitment.

We stayed in Airbnb for a week before moving our apartment to better understand the local market x8.

Additionally, we must consider the constraints of geographic arbitrage, which can lead to price rises in emigrated locations related to housing supply. Affordability can be disrupted when the practices of arbitrage for digital nomads increase in certain locations, such as Lisbon. Rental prices have made it difficult for people to maintain their lifestyles (Koh, 2021; Caminero and McGarrigle, 2021). For example, Lisbon has become a popular destination for young entrepreneurs and digital nomads who work in creative industries. As a result, these cities may no longer be able to accommodate the growing number of migrants (Jung & Buhr, 2021; Tulumello & Allegretti, 2021).

5. Conclusion

According to this research, sociological (cultural detachment, alienation) and psychological (creativity, fulfillment, personal growth) factors are the primary drivers of migration from developed countries (Table 3). Most studies highlight that migrants face challenges related to identity formation, social integration, and adaptation in their destination countries. However, there is a significant motivator for Americans considering relocation abroad that is less commonly addressed. Many Americans feel entrapped in a "comfort zone" due to the predictable and routine nature of life in the United States. This perceived stagnation inspires a desire to relocate as a means to unleash creative potential and enhance the enjoyment of life. Moving to a new country is seen not just as a change of scenery, but as a transformative experience that promises renewed inspiration and a fulfilling lifestyle. Our findings suggest that American emigrants leave the United States mainly because of sociological and psychological dissatisfaction, which often stems from a lack of fit with American culture, politics, consumption, regulations, relationships, and values. Individuals often migrate to develop mentally, spiritually, and personally.

We anticipate that individuals facing economic constraints, such as barely making ends meet, high housing prices, and high taxes, will continue to remain in the US unless significant sociological or psychological disconnections occur. Contrary to popular media portrayals, high taxes are not a primary reason for U.S. citizens leaving the country. Significant detachment and a sense of unfulfillment must occur to trigger migration.

Table 3. Reasons for leaving the United States

Cultural Detachment (feelings of alienation, confusion, and loss).	Creativity	Fulfillment
Consumer culture	Broaden horizons	Trapped in their home
Unfit culture	Expand perspective	Change their lifestyle before death
Racial discrimination	New experience	Work-life balance.
Political division	Transformation	Perform hobbies and interests
The US healthcare system	Self-improvement	
Gun violence	Trying new things, challenges	
Income inequality	Learning new things	
	Develop new skills Discover yourself Discover the world	
	Free from routine/familiar surroundings	
	Inspiration	
	Critical thinking	
	Independent judgment	

Our paper introduces an alternative approach for individuals aspiring to retire early or achieve financial independence, particularly those who find themselves insufficient funds in the United States (developed countries) (Table 4). Our analysis demonstrates that Americans can achieve financial independence and potentially retire early by leveraging

geographic arbitrage. Relocating to countries with lower living costs can extend savings and significantly enhance spending power. Furthermore, for those engaged in remote/online work, there is an opportunity to preserve a substantial portion of their income. This approach not only sustains individuals' financial well-being but also accelerates their journey toward financial freedom. However, it is crucial to recognize that the decision to migrate is not driven solely by economic factors. The cost of living, financial benefits, and quality of life are considered after the decision is made.

Table 4. Advantages of Geographic Arbitrage

Low Cost of living and high quality of life in developing countries	Financial advantages
Housing and HMOs	Save money (low cost living and no keep-up Jones)
Food and Gastronomy	Retirement salary (the dollar is valuable)
Transportation and private sector:	Lower tax rate (
Healthcare (reasonable price and fast)	
Entertainment	
Non-debt purchase of property	
Living a luxurious life (condo, villa, resort)	

There can be several reasons why people choose not to relocate their lives even though geographic arbitrage works for better living with a lower cost (see Table 5). Based on the research results, people often find comfort in the familiar routines of their lives and are resistant to change. Societal and cultural norms can also influence people's perceptions of limitations and what they believe are achievable. Many fear unknowns that they might encounter in developing countries. Additionally, some may not realize that they have the power to make significant changes in their lives. Successful relocation requires effort to discover the community and learn about new cultures and languages. Selling hard assets, such as homes and businesses, is not easy. Participants in the research noted this challenge when interest rates rose. Another obstacle is finding a suitable location in the new country because of the lack of familiarity with the local housing and business markets.

Table 5. Constraints on Moving

Comfort Zone	Adaptation of Culture	Selling Hard Assets
Beliefs,	Avoid new friendships	Selling high
Perceptions	Search community	Stress
Habits	Learning language	Mortgage interest rates as a percentage
Resist new ideas	Discover the culture	Unfamiliar local real estate
Fear of the unknown		
Status quo		
Avoid questioning		
Accustomed frustrations in the home country		
Familiarity		
Loyalty and attachment		

ORCID :

Mustafa Şeref AKIN   0000-0002-1850-9118

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The Problem of Early-Age Marriage in Afghanistan

Osman ÖZKUL[1] iD, Nabila Shaheedmal OMARI[2] iD

[1]Assoc. Prof. Dr., Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sakarya University, Türkiye
[2]Department of Gender Studies, Faculty of Social Science, Ruhr-Universität of Bochum, Germany

Corresponding author : Osman ÖZKUL
E-mail : oozkul@sakarya.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

Early marriage is an ongoing problem in Afghanistan, as is the case in many other countries around the world. This situation has also led to many social, legal, and moral problems. In this study, as a result of the statistical analysis obtained from the surveys, it is understood that the phenomenon of early marriage in Afghanistan continues to be a widespread cultural issue. However, in Afghanistan, it is difficult to say whether there are sufficient sociological studies on the causes and consequences of this problem. Accordingly, elements that demonstrate the originality of our research and some of the causes and results that may contribute to the literature are indicated as results and recommendations. Among the main causes of early marriages in Afghanistan are poverty, pressure from parents, the economic situation, education level, and traditional cultural values. In addition, findings from the interviews show that environmental pressure is very strong. As can be seen in some examples, marriage candidates feel obliged to accept early marriage because they feel unable to deal with oppression. While the impact of the ceremonial and tribal phenomena in the region has weakened, the influence of the tribal structure in the region continues to be seen.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Early Marriage, Famile, Education, Culture, Tradition

1. Introduction

The Family is the most important social institution created and developed by human beings throughout history for their biological and social existence and continuity. Early marriage, or the marriage of underage children, remains a social problem in some societies today. Therefore, the focus of the problem of this article is the phenomenon of marriage at an early age. This phenomenon continues in Afghanistan, as in many other countries around the world. In fact, this situation is expressed by the expression of an Afghan student whose mother was married at 14 years old; which is an inevitable way to protect. This dramatic example has also been a stimulating and guiding reason for our work. However, for a marriage to take place, a person's level of physical and mental maturity is regarded as one of the vital conditions that are stressed by the experts of the area (Parsons et al, 2015; Pandey, 2017; Muharry et al, 2018). Moreover, the religious literature and moral values in this regard also indicate that a marriage without understanding the values, aims, and philosophy of the matter and without the consent of the parties has no legal validity. In other divine religions, such as the Islamic religion, the phenomena of the birth, marriage, and death of a person are precious and sacred enough to reach divine dimensions. In addition, marriage, an important phenomenon in civilized human communities in our age, has special traditions and customs that show its importance for creating a healthy society and for the birth and upbringing of a valuable generation.

However, under the influence of various historical, cultural, and ecomic factors, the phenomenon of early and young marriage in Afghanistan remains a common practice. Economic and social problems stemming from political and military instability in Afghanistan have caused the problem of early marriage to continue under the influence of many factors in Afghan society. This article first attempts to identify the causes of the social phenomenon in question and then focuses on some ways and methods of solving the phenomenon. Until when the Taliban re-captured the administration in 2021, for 20 years, girls and women had witnessed fundamental and positive changes in terms of legal and social rights. However, in Afghanistan, which is under the influence of highly sophisticated historical and social problems, many families are forcing underage children to marry. Until 2022, educational opportunities for women significantly improved in Afghanistan, although they were affected by some deep-rooted cultural factors that are relatively independent of these effects.

During this period, Afghanistan also made considerable progress in enhancing women's education, health, early marriage, and other cultural rights. However, as in all countries with weak economies, these challenges affect and aggravate human rights, especially women's rights and education (Tomar et al, 2021). For the solution to these problems, programs supported by international organizations can and do offer important contributions. Nevertheless, these solutions remain temporary or superficial. In order for more permanent solution mechanisms to be established and to make them continuous, the actions that need to be undertaken must take the internal dynamics of society into account and determine multifaceted and profound solutions on how they can be executed.

The subject of this article is to get to the roots of the marriage problem at an early age, which is still a common problem in Afghanistan, and to reveal the reasons for early marriages (Tomar et al, 2021), the biological, psychological, and social situations of individuals, and their life experiences. In addition, this article aims to discuss possible solutions to prevent such marriages that cause many difficulties for young girls and women who marry at an early age.

The purpose of this article is to analyze this problem in detail, to understand its root causes, and to create possible solutions. It is especially important to understand how young people who marry at an early age evaluate their current situations. For this purpose, it is thought that including the narratives and feelings of women who are married early will play a stimulating role in producing correct and immediate solutions.

Regarding the significance of the article, in addition to making a considerable contribution to the literature in the field because of the limited number of academic studies on early marriage in Afghanistan, the data obtained from this study are crucial. By merging local knowledge with general principles of social service, it is expected that this information will help shape social policies for individuals who need support due to early marriage, aligning with fundamental human rights.

The results of this research are significantly important in shaping local policies on early marriage. They provide valuable scientific data that can aid public institutions, government entities, and non-governmental organizations in this field. The findings are instrumental in guiding the development and implementation of services related to early marriage.

The research universe consists of men and women who were married at an early age in the vicinities of Kabul, Wardak, Logar, Ghazni, Jalalabad, and Khost, Afghanistan. This study examines the lives of women in these regions, particularly those who were married at an early age. With the help of many captivating narratives, this research aims to investigate the causes of early marriage. Besides explores the effects of early marriage on the lives of both women

and men after marriage. The purpose of this study is to clarify the thoughts and expectations surrounding marriage experiences and develop solutions aimed at preventing early marriage.

The research employs qualitative methods with comprehensive and interpretive approaches. However, to better understand the problem by supporting the facts, along with the literature research; both the survey and interview techniques were used. The interviewees were asked 26 Questions. Through these surveys, data were collected from people living in different villages and cities in Afghanistan. In the data collection process, taking into account the sensitivity of the political and security situation in Afghanistan, some people were surveyed, and others were interviewed face to face. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using online techniques. Open-ended questions were preferred so that participants could express themselves more easily. The survey was sent to 150 people, 114 of whom answered completely. While 17 respondents answered some of the questions, 19 never answered any of the survey questions.

Hence, the research aimed to employ a more profound and detailed approach. Ultimately, during the analysis of the survey responses, a method was used to establish consistency among the answers. The conclusion section discusses all the data in an explanatory manner. As a result, the information acquired through quantitative measurement techniques is interpreted alongside insights from interviews, which represent a qualitative approach.

Regarding some of the challenges and limitations of the research, the entire survey could not be conducted face-to-face because current managers in Afghanistan do not allow women to work. To overcome these difficulties, some negotiations have been held using communication technologies as much as possible. However, the lack of primary education among some female participants and their lack of literacy, as well as access to the internet to read and answer online survey questions, has also made this process difficult. Some participants who simply entered the online survey were unable to complete the survey. Some participants tried to participate through their relatives. The fact that there are different ethnic groups in Afghanistan and that they speak different languages also created some obstacles during the research. Before the study, the literature on the subject was reviewed; thus, the study attempted to determine the causes of early marriage in different countries worldwide. This information was compared with data on the status of women in Afghanistan.

2. Early Marriage Problems in the World and Afghanistan

Afghanistan has a different structure from the surrounding countries in terms of political culture and social traditions (Sirat, 2016); it has serious problems with regard to the civil rights of individuals and groups in society, especially the rights of girls. For example, girls' education is often seen as a defect in Afghan society. Therefore, for girls in relation to this, problems in many areas can be seen as inevitable. The best thing about these problems is that girls are forced to get married at an early age.

As in Afghanistan and many other countries of the world, marriage before the age of 18 is still a social reality for many young women. According to UNICEF data from February 2021, Niger has the highest proportion of child marriages at 76.3%, with a 15-year-old child being married at 28. Niger is followed by the Central African Republic (Rost et al, 2022; Zaman & Koski, 2020), Chad, Mali, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, South Sudan, and Bangladesh. In a study (Yiğit, 2017; Yorgun, 2019) in Latin America, the rate of early marriage among women was 8.9. The demographics show that among the black community, American Indians/Native Alaskans, and education- and income-low southern and rural areas, such marriages are common. Afghanistan ranks 202nd in the report on the rates of children marrying before the age of 18, with 14.7. In the same report (Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020), when examining the rates of children married at the age of 15 and before (UNICEF, 2021), it is important to note that child marriages are primarily due to traditions, economic reasons, and a misinterpretation of religious information. In addition, the state of education, gender inequality, migration, and social and domestic pressures on parents are cited as influential factors.

In addition to these factors, the solution to this problem, which continues due to historical and cultural factors, constitutes a fundamental human rights issue. In Afghanistan, in areas with a strong traditional family structure, the opinions of individuals about marriage are often not considered. Traditional steps, thoughts, and beliefs play an important role in the marriage process. There are various forms of marriage in Afghanistan (John et al, 2018; Reiss, 2017). In rural Afghanistan, another type of marriage called "marriage for money" is common in low-income circles. This means that school-age children are not allowed to attend school, or their education is abandoned and they are married with money in return. These children are sold to people who are old and/or who have special needs. In addition, some wealthy people who have settled in big cities and have high incomes prefer to marry their children with special needs in exchange for money with the daughters of families living in low-income rural areas.

A common form of marriage in rural Afghanistan is called bardel marriage. In this type of marriage, two married boys exchange wives for each other. Two families, old and close together, get along and give their daughter to the family of the girl they want. Often, families without title solvency want to marry their marriage-age son or daughter, and they

prefer this form of marriage by contracting a family with the same condition (Groot et al, 2018). If, after the marriage has taken place, one of the girls dies, the wife has the right to marry the deceased's brother. If the wife marries another person, the deceased spouse has the right to ask for the title from his family (Aktepe & Inci 2017).

When the reasons for the realization of marriages at an early age are examined, factors such as false traditions and religious beliefs, low education levels, economic problems, domestic violence, and social pressure are seen as prominent. The socioeconomic status of families, cultural values, and educational levels of parents are factors that promote early marriage. In families struggling with poverty and experiencing unemployment, girls are seen as a source of income, and they are married at an early age in exchange for title money. Children who grow up in unfavorable family conditions and do not receive enough love can decide to get married at an early age based on the idea that the conditions in which they live are difficult (UNICEF, 2011). Thus, Marrigaes can take place in either form: Girsl run away from home, or they obtain the consent of their family. Because the parents in question themselves got married at an early age, early marriage is perceived as normal.

Studies have revealed a strong association between economic problems and early marriage (Yigit, 2017). Families do not tend to marry their children at an early age when their income levels are not low (TBMM, 2010). In Afghanistan, income distribution varies by region. Early marriages are more common in rural areas where development levels are further behind and economic problems are more frequent. This situation causes women to become economically dependent on their partners, in particular, and to experience poverty.

Families with low socioeconomic status withdraw their daughters from school for the purpose of marrying them before they finish school or do not send them to school at all. These individuals, whose educational rights are violated, are denied the right to have a job and work. Women, in particular, may face the risk of entering the cycle of uneducated poverty and spouse/family addiction without adequate economic resources (TBMM, 2009).

While the consequences of early marriage are primarily felt at the individual level, other effects such as deep and far-reaching effects on national and global levels of lost gains and the intergenerational transfer of poverty are ignored (Parsons et al, 2015).

Whereas the results of early marriage are primarily experienced at the individual level, the intense and far-reaching effects on national and global levels, including lost gains and the intergenerational transfer of poverty, are often ignored. Families can marry their daughters at a young age because of the high costs associated with raising children. In traditional societies, children may also tend to be married at an early age to prevent relationships that are not considered legitimate before marriage. Girls raised in this way may be afraid of staying at home if they do not get married at an early age and may choose this approach, thinking they will never be able to get married again. As a result of traditional beliefs, established practices, and customs, early marriage has become widespread and ongoing. This approach is especially effective for girls (TBMM, 2009).

Misunderstanding religious beliefs and personal interpretations can accelerate marriage at an early age. In many parts of the world, including Afghanistan, early marriage has been legitimized on religious grounds. For example, Islamic law recognizes the marriage contract as a trust agreement in which spouses fulfill their mutual responsibilities and undertake to perform these duties. Therefore, the official wedding, which fulfills the aforementioned religious conditions, also fulfills the provisions of religious marriage.

In the emergence of early marriage, alongside factors such as social, cultural, economic, education, and gender discrimination, we see other factors like wars and natural disasters. Civil wars, natural disasters, and pandemics in countries have led to an increase in IN marriages at an early age. For example, conflicts in Afghanistan have been known to leave children vulnerable to the risk of marriage at an early age, resulting in individuals marrying at a young age (Shaheen et al, 2022). Factors such as the economic and cultural chaos caused by forced migration, abuse, and assault of girls, and the risks of escaping or abduction of children lead to such marriages, while fast marriage is resorted to as a solution. (Gül, 2022). Displaced persons, even with similar socioeconomic conditions, face the risk of child marriage at an early age compared with their host peers.

3. Consequences of Early Marriage

Early marriage has many consequences. Among these results, the most prominent and important are the disruption of education for people who marry early and the fact that women who give birth at an early age experience various problems resulting from a lack of knowledge in the aftermath. Early marriages cause the educational rights of children in childhood to be lost; children who are far from the educational process are deprived of their work life by being denied the opportunity to have a profession. In addition, early marriage is more common in families with parents with low educational levels (Nasrullah et al, 2014).

Too many health problems occur among individuals who marry at an early age. These consequences include a move away from the social environment after marriage, a desire to be alone, a lack of self-confidence, and a reluctance to participate in social activities. In addition, children who have not yet completed their physiological and psychological development may face various diseases and disorders. Girls who are married at an early age are at risk of violence because they are too young to protect their rights and are married without being informed by their parents. This type of marriage can include domestic violence and disharmony, leading to divorce or suicide (TBMM, 2010).

Since girls have not yet completed their biological, psychological, and social development, having children in this process prevents them from developing in a healthy way and gaining a questioning and solution-oriented perspective on events. The stress and distress experienced by mothers who have been married at an early age leads to the inability to want or provide adequate care for their children, which means that these parents can experience depression and therefore exhibit overreactive, hostile, or over-controlling behaviors in their relationships with their children (Yorgun, 2019).

This can leave scars on children. Even if they have not been directly exposed to violence in childhood, individuals who witness violence are at risk of engaging in violence against their spouses and children when they become adults. Children who marry at an early age have higher rates of psychiatric disorders throughout life and over the past 12 months than women who have married at an adult age. In addition, those who marry at an early age are more likely to be in need of health services. Those who marry at an early age are less fortunate in terms of sexual and reproductive health than their peers who marry at a later age (Roost et al, 2022).

Studies have shown that early marriage has a devastating effect on individuals and that marriage leads to biopsychosocial problems and even increases suicidal tendencies (Groot et al, 2018). It is observed that child marrigae cause individuals to experience unhappiness and serious problems. This type of marriage causes significant difficulties, such as violence, lack of education, diseases, and unemployment. A problem that still remains important in Afghaistan is the fight against early marriage so that mortality rates can be reduced and a healthy generation can be created (Yorgun, 2019). These early marriages affect not only married individuals. Over time, this problem has become a large and complex social problem affecting all society.

The problem of marriage at an early age cannot be solved by simply looking at a single dimension or the aspects that appear. In order to correctly intervene in this problem, different studies on social services are required. For example, the problems faced by an individual who is married early and whose education is halved are not solely due to his or her parents being uneducated. For example, the problems faced by an individual who is married early and whose education is halved are not solely due to his or her parents being uneducated. In order to better understand these problems, they need to be addressed through more comprehensive studies. With the system approach, social workers should focus on the root cause of the early marriage problem. In this focus process, work must be done with individuals, families, groups, institutions, communities, and society. In addition, the focus should be on the connections among these systems.

It can be said that individuals who have experienced marriage at an early age do not have control over their lives and cannot determine their own destiny; they require an empowerment approach. This approach recognizes that families and communities have various strengths and resilience mechanisms in preventing early marriage (Muchacha & Matsika, 2017). A specialist working to solve the problem of early marriage in the context of an empowerment approach should focus on the current problems facing this individual. It should help individuals cope with their own difficulties and problem-solving skills by reminding them of their strengths and resources.

4. Analysis of Early Marriage in Afghanistan

To test and make comparisons based on the literature, quantitative information based on survey data will be included under this heading. A survey of 26 questions was conducted in different provinces, tribes, and languages. Given the current situation in Afghanistan, there are many obstacles to this questionnaire, but to obtain a strong result, it is worth noting that the majority of participants were women, especially those who were victims of early marriage.

The people who suffered the most in this regard answered survey questions to be able to contribute more to the research, showing that their answers and all the negative effects in their lives were more remarkable. According to the answers given to the questions, the age of the respondents, the age of education, the regions in which they lived, and the satisfaction rates of marriage were given as a percentage. The percentage distributions of the answers that collected information about the gender, marriage age range, and education levels of the participants are shown in the tables, and then the answers are displayed in the graphs.

Table 1. General Information about the Participants

Gender		Marriage Age			Where He Lives	
Ms.	Mr.	13 -18	18-25	25+	City	Village
69%	31%	47%	42%	11%	36%	64%

Taking into account that the percentage of early marriage in Table 1 in Afghanistan, the majority of the victims were women, and about 47% of them were married between the ages of 13-18 and 42%'s, 18-25, it shows that marriage at an early age has a very large rate. It is also understood that early marriage is more common in rural areas than in urban areas.

Table 2. Training Information According to Answers

First Child			Education Level				Satisfaction with Marriage		
-18	18-25	+25	High School	Bachelor	Master's Degree	None	Yes	No	50/50
32%	36%	32%	26%	13%	6%	55%	29%	52%	19%

When examining the results and percentages obtained from the survey in Figure 2, it is clear that early marriage has noteworthy implications for health, combined with lower levels of education. The table also shows that a considerable majority of individuals are not content with marriage in the early stages. This has certainly had a lot of negative effects on their lives. Participants were asked a series of questions to evaluate the readiness of Afghan society for early marriage (Nour, 2009). With the help of these inquiries, initiatives aimed at improving societal awareness concerning the phenomenon of early marriage were explored. The public was asked to evaluate awareness levels regarding early marriage and the roles played by key figures, particularly family members and other social groups. When examining the groups expected to contribute and endorse public awareness against the phenomenon of early marriage, the actions of parents have the highest expectation level. Afterwards, there is a remarkable emphasis on the modification of established information. The third group that makes up the highest level of expectations appears as imams of mosques. It is seen that because they are closer to people and hold religious roles, they are associated with confidence.

5. Factors Affecting Early Marriage in Afghanistan

To identify the causes of early marriage in Afghanistan, some questions were asked the respondents. According to the responses of the interviewees, the decisions of the parents, poverty and ignorance are the most influential factors. Family decisions here and acceptance of economic factors are very close to each other, which can explain why the two elements are interconnected. It can be said that the war and instability in Afghanistan, which has been ongoing for many years, have aggravated the situation. Another challenge arises from the difficulties related to the functioning of safety and production consumption mechanisms, which further complicates this process. As understood from the answers given by the interviewees, lack of education and cultural and social factors are seen as having less of an impact. This supports the conclusion that, apart from basic human needs, other elements have a lesser impact. The phenomenon of poverty in Afghanistan has led to forced marriages with underage children in many parts of the country. In some areas, poor families, due to the limited availability of their economic resources and facilities, are forcing their daughters to marry in exchange for money, food, or to marry their adult daughters (UNICEF, 2007). Another phenomenon associated with this is the ignorance of families. Although it can be viewed as related to ineducation, in Afghan society, ignorance, which is a public expression, has a wider meaning than ineducation. Many parents living in remote areas are unaware of the health, social, and economic consequences that their underage children may experience because of marriage.

With the influence of patriarchal culture, traditions, and customs, male dominance, and some cultural acceptance and social attitudes toward women, in most cases lead to the disregarding of the rights of women (Raj, 2010). For example, from the moment she reaches a certain age, keeping a girl at home is considered shame. Along with the societal conception of keeping girls at home, factors such as the misinterpretation of religious rules, the illiteracy of girls in reading and writing, as well as parental illiteracy, make early marriage an inevitable choice on the part of parents.

According to the literature on the subject, education is often seen as the key to preventing child marriage (Omari, 2002; Saqqızi, 2010). For example, in the 42's of the countries analyzed, women who attended primary school between the ages of 20 and 24 are less likely to marry than those who did not reach the age of 18. The preventive effect of education is stronger in the fact that those who go to elementary school marry at an earlier age than those who are more educated; those who do not go to school seem to get married earlier than all of them. Education is the most important method that can effectively eliminate certain basic human rights traditions. According to Omari (2002), for example, early marriage is a violation of rights; thus, in societies with low educational levels, the number of early marriages has been high. The results obtained from this study on Omariin and from our data support each other.

In most cases, social violence and armed conflict force families to enter wrong *marriages* (ICRW, 2007). Social norms, as well as tribal codes, indicate what behaviors or attitudes are socially acceptable or acceptable. These norms strongly influence a community's attitudes toward child marriage and gender inequality.

The topic under this subheading was about how some influential groups in this society were influential in traditional culture (UNICEF, 2004). The following subheading will examine the problems faced by victims of early marriage.

6. The Consequences of Early Marriage in Afghanistan

Some of the most obvious and important results of early marriage are that people face health problems if their education is disrupted and they give birth prematurely. The level of education arises as both a cause and result of early marriage. Early marriages lead to the removal of the rights to education and training in the period of child development; children are deprived of education and opportunities to have a job and participate in business life. Individuals who marry early often display a tendency to detach themselves from their social environment. This is accompanied by a lack of self-confidence and unwillingness to participate in social activities. At the same time, children who have not completed their physiological and psychological development may develop various diseases and disorders (Nguyen & Wodon, 2012).

Individuals who are married at an early age are at risk of being exposed to all forms of violence by their partners. In such marriages, domestic situations such as domestic violence and disharmony can arise, potentially leading to divorce or even suicide. In fact, similar to the conclusion we have reached (Zaman & Koski, 2020), Zaman and Koski stated that marriage at an early age is associated with negative health outcomes throughout life. Girls who marry at a young age are more likely to experience partner violence and its effects on health (UNICEF, 2017).

It seems that women who marry at an early age face more problems as their children grow up. It has been concluded that the number of children, the fact that they are young and have diseases that affect them, and their children have an adverse effect on their lives. Due to all these factors, the number of marriages without consent in the absence of physical and mental maturity in Afghanistan is quite high, which brings about many social, legal, health, and moral problems. According to the results of the study, early marriage in Afghanistan is caused by various factors. These factors include poverty, parents' wrong decisions, poor economic situation, lack of education, safety anxiety, patriarchal culture, and traditional family lifestyle.

7. Conclusions and Suggestions

Following a brief review of various studies on the underlying causes of early marriage in Afghanistan, this article examines whether these causes stem from transient factors or are linked to specific geographical areas or ethnic groups within the country. Extensive research has been conducted to encompass all victims of early marriage in Afghanistan, addressing the diverse regions and geographical areas where different ethnic groups reside within their communities.

While some studies have identified the patriarchal culture in Afghanistan as a primary cause of early marriage, our research findings suggest that the influence of this culture is more limited, being primarily associated with certain regions and specific communities. Some research indicates that early marriage in Afghanistan is closely linked to poverty. However, the results of our study indicate that the reasons for early marriage are multifaceted, encompassing factors such as economic conditions in various provinces and tribes, parental decisions, poor economic status, and a lack of education, cultural awareness, and family lifestyles.

Regarding the manner in which individuals enter into early marriage, it is often concluded that such decisions are made by families. Families are also observed to support marriages between relatives. The early marriage of relatives can lead individuals to conceal their struggles and feel unable to share their problems with others. The fact that only two participants expressed a desire to marry and did so of their own accord highlights the significant influence of family elders in these decisions. This emphasizes that family decisions play a crucial role in the phenomenon of early

marriage, as these choices often give rise to the issue. Although some women seek assistance from official institutions when faced with problems, it is believed that such support is not yet at the desired level.

Several factors contribute to child marriage, with poverty being the foremost among them, alongside parental illiteracy, economic inefficiency, and the circumstances of families in rural areas. Economic hardships often drive families to seek financial relief by marrying off their daughters. Additionally, a lack of education and awareness remains a significant issue in Afghan society. The findings indicate that the education level of parents is a vital factor influencing child marriage; for instance, parents who are not literate tend to marry their daughters off at younger ages. The disparity between urban and rural living standards also plays a critical role in the prevalence of child marriage, with such marriages being more common in rural areas.

Child marriage results in various negative and unexpected consequences, including the spread of diseases, an increase in divorce rates, and instances of girls running away from home. This study concludes that many of these factors are interconnected with the issue of child marriage. Factors such as poverty and a lack of adequate family responsibility can lead to early marriages, which in turn can hinder girls' access to education and economic advancement.

One key finding of this study is that the tradition of early marriage remains prevalent in Afghanistan, driven by various causes and factors. Therefore, immediate and long-term measures must be implemented to address the elements associated with early marriage. Addressing poverty appears to be the most significant step in combating early marriage, as it must be eradicated. To combat ongoing unemployment and poverty in Afghanistan and enhance employment opportunities, it is essential to improve government effectiveness in the economic sector to the greatest extent possible. However, this issue is also linked to the development of international, political, and diplomatic efforts beyond Afghanistan's borders.

If some of the primary causes of early marriage can be mitigated or eliminated, it can be more effectively demonstrated to Afghan society—especially to parents—that early marriage exacerbates poverty and increases economic challenges. Religious leaders, health workers, authorities, and charitable organizations can play a crucial role in conveying this message to individuals, particularly parents, highlighting how early marriage contributes to various economic difficulties. Implementing screening and interview programs within health institutions, along with health workers, can effectively communicate the health risks associated with early marriage and its potential impact on future generations.

The government and non-governmental organizations can raise awareness about the disadvantages of early marriage through seminars, media campaigns, and other outreach methods. This issue could greatly benefit from long-term, international sociological studies, which can provide valuable insights and contribute to the development of effective solutions.

To reduce the incidence of early marriage in Afghanistan and employ effective strategies to eliminate it, it is essential to examine similar cases of early marriage in different countries and regions around the world.

ORCID :

Osman ÖZKUL   0000-0002-0418-7007
Nabila Shaheedmal OMARI   0000-0002-1844-713X

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Research Article

Analyzing Symbolic Violence Phenomenon in Project Schools

Tuğba KONAL MEMİŞ[1] ⓘ, Mithat KORUMAZ[2] ⓘ

[1]PhD. Student, Yıldız Technical University, Educational Administration, İstanbul, Türkiye
[2]Assoc. Prof. Dr., Yıldız Technical University, Educational Administration, İstanbul, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Mithat Korumaz
E-mail : mkorumaz@yildiz.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to determine whether teachers are subjected to symbolic violence by administrators and, if they are, to disclose the practices of symbolic violence, the reasons behind it, and the reactions of teachers in the face of symbolic violence. The study was conducted using a single case-holistic design. The context of this study is a prestigious and well-established project high school located in one of the high-income districts of Istanbul. The participants of the research consisted of 14 project school teachers, all of whom were selected using the criterion sampling method. A semi-structured interview form, observation, and document analysis were employed in the study to collect data. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis. This study highlights three themes that are 'incidents of symbolic violence', 'roots of symbolic violence at project schools' and 'reactions to symbolic violence'. The results demonstrate that teachers are exposed to symbolic violence, which is more visible and severe in the vertical hierarchy at school. Symbolic violence practices are exercised not only by administrators but also by the state, colleagues, and parents against teachers. Regarding the reasons for symbolic violence at project schools, administrators with high symbolic capital, pressure groups (parents/media), and pressure on success are prominent. Lastly, the study discloses that teachers mostly succumb when confronted with symbolic violence; however, some of them resist it and even choose to respond or remain unresponsive.

Keywords: Symbolic Violence, Habitus, Capital, Field, Project School

1. Introduction

"The word 'violence' is in fact applied to countless phenomena, and used to describe all sorts of events and behaviors, both individual and collective: delinquency, crime, revolution, mass murder, riots, war, terrorism, harassment, and so on" (Wieviorka, 2009, p.3). When hearing the word 'violence', people often think of physical harm. However, in the modern world, the phenomenon of violence is mostly realized by dominating the mind of an agent and targeting the line of reasoning rather than physical harm. Likewise, Bourdieu focuses on the concept of symbolic violence without ignoring its physical effects. As reported by Bourdieu, "violence mostly applied through symbolic channels such as communication, acceptance, feeling, and invisible and unnoticeable for the exposed ones" (Bourdieu, 2015, p.11). In this sense, symbolic violence is regarded as a phenomenon that those who are exposed to are also responsible and unconsciously internalized and leak into the thoughts and practices of agents. Bourdieu stated that symbolic violence pervades every aspect of social spaces. Therefore, in every relationship, there is a bit of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is a way that power—what is meant by power—is used not only by political authority, but also by those who hold large numbers and amounts of capital to consolidate and protect its symbolic power and symbolic capital, as well as its own status.

Symbolic violence basically refers to the case where agents with more symbolic capital, along with other types of capital and symbolic power, accept and approve this power and status. To achieve this, the power hierarchy can also be used as a tool. Regarding the school context, it can be seen that there are different power hierarchies, such as teacher-student, teacher-administrator or student-administrator. At this point, those who occupy higher positions in the hierarchical system at school may exert symbolic violence on others. Symbolic violence can occur in many forms at schools. Teachers may be victims of symbolic violence. Goldstein (2006) specified that stakeholders such as parents and teachers may be a matter of symbolic violence. Moreover, since administrators are at the top of the hierarchy, they may direct symbolic violence against teachers. Bourdieu (2015) claims that symbolic violence is at the center of every relationship. In this case, teachers who are responsible for revealing power relations that lead to symbolic violence and establishing critical rationality turn out to be the side exercising symbolic violence. To exemplify, the administration sometimes imposes responsibilities that are not included in the job definition on teachers against their will and requires teachers to fulfill them, or the administration intimidates the teacher with a look or tone of voice. Namely, it is in question that administrators create a power area for themselves, establish authority, and transform it into symbolic violence using the tools they already have. However, symbolic violence can sometimes be dispersed in informal horizontal social networks. That is, symbolic violence may be exercised among colleagues, administrators, or students. In this regard, it is important to disclose the symbolic violence that teachers are exposed to in order to prevent symbolic violence. Furthermore, informal social networks in schools and the fact that schools are open, social, and constantly interacting systems are both advantages and challenges to deal with the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the context of schools. However, Bourdieusian theory suggests that preventing symbolic violence can be achieved by revealing the inequalities underlying power relations. It is paradoxical that teachers are the victims of symbolic violence, but they can also be the tools that prevent it. Therefore, it is crucial to handle symbolic violence from the teacher's perspective. The aim of this study is to determine whether administrators have inflicted incidents of symbolic violence on teachers or not, the meaning teachers attribute to the phenomenon of symbolic violence, and, if such a violence exists, to reveal the practices leading to the phenomenon of symbolic violence in educational institutions, reasons prompting administrators to exert symbolic violence on teachers, and teachers' reactions to the phenomenon of symbolic violence.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Bourdieu's Thinking Tools and Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu developed theories about power, stratification, action, culture, and sociological knowledge (Swartz, 2015). Despite the fact that the concepts like habitus, capital, field, symbolic power, and symbolic violence can be characterized independently, they turn out to be meaningful when they relate to each other within these theoretical frames (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2014).

Habitus, one of Bourdieu's most well-known concepts, is a difficult concept to define precisely because of its nature. While habitus shapes the agent, it is also a concept shaped by the agent. Therefore, it is both a structured and a structuring mechanism. Bourdieu (2005) expresses the concept of habitus as the cognitive and physical schemas through which people assimilate, accept, and perceive the world during their socialization periods. In other words, it refers to the basic set of knowledge that agents possess in their schemas as a consequence of their residence in a specific culture or subculture. The relationship between habitus and symbolic violence is believed to play a crucial role in the

internalization of symbolic violence. Even our predispositions or actions in our habitus can bear traces of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990a). As mentioned in the previous sections, the types and volumes of the capital that the agents belong to are also determinants of their habitus. Symbolic violence, on the other hand, is a phenomenon inscribed on the body of an agent through habitus. Like habitus, habitus is a mechanism that we do not even realize when we are in it, which we accept most of the time and is deeply reflected in both our intellectual, mental, and physical processes. Our habitus has something to do with the capital types we have, and symbolic violence is the case of imposing the dominant groups' symbolic capital on the dominant ones, which means symbolic violence is a sort of process of imposing symbolic capital. This signifies that it targets transforming an agent's habitus using various channels. Moreover, habitus may prevent the agent from comprehending the symbolic violence to which they are exposed and contributes to their reproduction. In general, it may put agents in an engulfing stalemate. At this point, it is useful to remember that habitus is not accepted as a destiny because it has a structuring side. It is possible to break the chain through education and building critical rationality. Therefore, habitus can be both the cause and solution of symbolic violence.

Field is a concept that is closely related to Bourdieu's other key concepts and becomes true when used in relation to them. The field is a social space where people maneuver, develop strategies, and struggle for power (Bourdieu, 1989). The concept of the field represents the place where power relations are revealed, and the hierarchy is structured as the place where struggles are exhibited. Basically, this is where the hidden and overt aspects of the struggle between the parties and their causes are reflected. At this point, it is useful to remember the belief in victory that underlies the struggle in these fields and the idea that what is achieved is worth the struggle. This leads to some consensus on the fight. The shared consensus is called 'doxa' by Bourdieu. With the help of doxa, symbolic violence can be justified in the eyes of oppressed. Thus, fields are thought to be places where symbolic violence can be justified. The doxa that exist in the social field and the habitus that adopt it become a common game in the field and reflect symbolic violence as a natural phenomenon (Olcer, 2019). Indeed, fields are places where symbolic violence takes place. The field of education is the very field where symbolic violence is formed by political power. Because it is not overt or direct violence, it is carried out by mechanisms that are subtly and insidiously placed within the fields.

In Bourdieusian sociology, the term capital refers to any form of resource that an agent accumulates and uses to obtain power in a field. The power and influence of actions depend on the capital included. That is why; agents should have forms of capital to be powerful in a field. The inadequacy or abundance of any capital type designates the agent's power, role, and position in a field. Agents are positioned in social spaces by their size and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1989). Capital means the ability to exchange dispositions like educational background, religious affiliation, and ways of speaking with other agents in some forms like domination, subordination, or sharing (Bourdieu, 2017). Bourdieu argues that among all other types of capital, there is also a bit of symbolic capital. Therefore, he argues that symbolic capital covers other types of capital to some extent. Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is closely related to symbolic values such as prestige, honor, and prestige that the concept of symbolic capital includes (Anderson, 2013). In the modern world, power holders instill their own values, cultural norms, language use, artistic tastes, and so forth to the oppressed through symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984). Through institutionalized fields, especially education, they permeate their own symbolic capital into the bodies and mindsets of lower classes. The oppressed become a part of it by naturalizing and accepting symbolic violence.

This study examines the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the field of education. The climate, practices, and outcomes of schools are crucial and influential because human activities and humans themselves are at the center and education fundamentally attempts to influence people. Symbolic violence is also more about how affected people perceive and make sense of it. How the imposer displays symbolic violence also matters; however, how the affected perceive it is more vital. In this respect, there is a completely distinctive relationship between the phenomenon of symbolic violence and education. Bourdieu characterizes education as a field. As he depicted, since the concept of the field, whose boundaries are not clearly defined and are in relation with other fields, has moved from the monopoly of the agent to a national and even international dimension, the field of education also appears as a large-scale research field by including these features. Basically, education is a field where struggle prevails and symbolic violence is embodied. Moreover, Bourdieu cites that constantly reproduced symbolic violence can end by revealing unjust power relations. In that regard, questioning and revealing the place of the concept of symbolic violence in the field of education is crucial for ending the reproduction of symbolic violence in schools.

Agents struggle to occupy cultural capital through institutions in education. The education they receive offers them cultural capital, depending on their habits, economic capital, and social class. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that the cultural capital obtained through education creates inequality in the social space by offering some advantages to agents. Agents who rise to a dominant position in society want to impose their cultural capital on others, and as a result, they become a part of symbolic violence. Therefore, the reproduction of symbolic violence through schools emerges.

Moreover, under the guise of the principle of equal opportunity, schools equate socially unequal students. In this case, lower-class students automatically succumb to their education life. Thus, the school does not go beyond being the center where inequalities are reproduced. Bourdieu stated that rather than promoting equality of opportunity, the school contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities and to the legitimation of these inequalities through meritocracy discourse (Bourdieu & Whitehouse, 2013). It also uses various tools to naturalize and institutionalize inequalities and symbolic violence. For instance, central examinations are important tools that mask symbolic violence and inequalities in education. Assuming—or making the stakeholders assume—that all students come from equal conditions and have equal capital, it charges students with exams as the cause of failure.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

We conducted the study using a case study research design, which is a qualitative research approach. According to Neuman (2012), qualitative research can be realized by examining in detail the events that occur in the natural flow of social life. We implemented a qualitative research approach in the current study because it requires in-depth interviews and analysis to make the phenomenon of symbolic violence visible in schools. In the case study, the aim is to collect extensive, systematic, and detailed information about the cases (Patton, 2014). Yin (2009) divided case studies into four categories: single case-holistic design, single case-embedded design, multiple case-holistic design, and multiple case-embedded design. When a rock-solid theory is present in a study, single cases may provide an elaborate description and even support for it (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In this study, we implemented a single-case holistic design because there is a single analysis unit as well as a well-formulated theory and it is a matter of strengthening or refuting this theory. Because the theory of symbolic violence is widely accepted to have been well-formulated by Bourdieu, we utilized a single case of holistic design in this study.

3.2. Context of the Study

The context of the study is a project high school in İstanbul. According to paragraph 9 of Article 22 of Law No. 28941 published in the Official Gazette on March 14, 2014, project schools are defined as "the schools that are established within the framework of cooperation agreements with domestic or foreign institutions and organizations or other countries, carry out national or international projects, and implement certain education reforms and programs" (Official Gazette, 2014). Implementing the project school practice is intended to increase the quality of education in parallel with the increasing number of schools (Cırıt & Günday, 2019). What is expected from these schools is to come to the fore in terms of academic success as well as social, sportive, artistic, and technological projects and to increase the quality of education.

We conducted the study in a prestigious and well-established project high school located in one of the high-income districts of İstanbul. The school has approximately 500 students and 50 teachers. The average age of the teachers is in the range of 40-45, as in many project schools. The school is among the schools preferred by students with the highest scores on the national exam held throughout Turkey. Therefore, the school involves students with the highest academic achievements across the country, and academic achievement entry levels at the school are quite high. In this sense, the school has an atmosphere in which academic success, project production, competition participation, and achieving a degree in competitions are more prominent than in other project schools. The pressure of success is intensely felt by teachers, administrators, and students. Many academic and social projects are produced at schools, and students take an active role in these projects. The school has a competitive climate among students and teachers. Administrators demand support and work from teachers in many subjects apart from their job descriptions. There is a high-power distance between administrators and teachers. The location of the school principal's room is not immediately accessible, and approval from the secretary is often required before the principal's meeting. In the school principal's office, all security camera footage from the school is always kept open. In general, the attitudes of the administrator are regarded as open to communication and friendly; however, power distance is always felt. There is a formal relationship between the teachers. Although most teachers have the qualifications required to work in a project school, some have already started working at the school before it was converted into a project school, and they have a sort of unproductive attitude toward project production.

3.3. Participants

We employed a non-probability sampling method. In a qualitative study, smaller samples are purposely chosen to maximize the use of limited resources, and doing so helps to investigate the research phenomenon comprehensively

(Patton, 2014). The participants of this study comprised 14 teachers working in one of the most established and prestigious project high schools in Istanbul, Turkey. We selected the participants of the study using the criteria sampling method, which is a nonprobability sampling approach. One of the criteria within the scope of this study is that teachers had worked with administrators for at least 2 years. As the second criterion, we considered the career phases of Bakioglu (1996) and included teachers who were in the relaxation, empiricism/activism, and specialization phases to eliminate possible shyness and provide the most qualified data for the study. It is important to be able to include extensive and saturated data from a convenient number of participants that are knowledgeable and experienced in terms of the research phenomenon (Sargeant, 2012). We included 14 participants in the study because I realized that the research reached saturation. Also, we gave pseudonyms (Oblomov, Raskolnikov, Bazarov, Akakiyevic, Anna Karenina, Vlasova, Sonya Semyonovic, Natalya Rostova, Konstantin Levin, Ivan Karamazov, Chichikov, Golyadkin, Madame Odintsova) to the participants to keep their identities confidential.

Table 1. Participants' Backgrounds

Pseudonym	Educational Status	Master's Degree	Years of Experience	Experience in The Institution	Union Member
Oblomov	Bachelor's degree		20	6	no
Raskolnikov	Bachelor's degree		8	2	yes
Bazarov		Educational Administration	16	8	yes
Akakiyevic		Mathematics	17	7	yes
Anna Karenina		Educational Administration	18	9	no
Pelagueya Nılovna Vlasova	Bachelor's degree		16	10	no
Sonya Semyonovic		History	20	2	no
Natalya Rostova		Sociology	14	3	no
Konstantin Levin	Bachelor's degree		16	4	yes
Ivan Karamazov	Bachelor's degree		15	4	no
Chichikov		English	16	3	yes
Yekov Petrovic Golyadkin,	Bachelor's degree		20	11	yes
Madame Odintsova		Sociology	13	3	no
Lisa Kalitina		Educational Administration	14	5	no

As seen in the table above, 8 of the 14 teachers participating in the study had a master's degree. It is remarkable that 3 participants have a master's degree in Educational Administration and 2 participants have a master's degree in sociology, demonstrating that teachers have prior knowledge of the research phenomenon and can provide profound information flow to the research. While 8 of the participants are in the specialization phase and 5 of the participants are in the empiricism/activism phase, only 1 of the participants is in the relaxation phase. Such diversification of professional experience is actually accepted as a typical case in project schools. That is, it is not common practice for teachers with little professional experience to overlap in project schools, meaning that the context of the study represents a typical project school. In addition, the participants must meet the conditions of working with the same school administration for at least 2 years. Finally, 6 out of the 14 participants were union members. While 2 of the 6 participants are currently members of the union that has the most members and is known by many to have political ties, 4 participants are members of unions that are considered oppositional.

3.4. Data Collection

Before the data collection process, I obtained the necessary official permissions from Yıldız Technical University's Ethics Committee. One of the most important factors in qualitative research is to obtain a profound analysis based on multiple sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Based on this, we obtained data from diverse sources that presented multiple sources. Therefore, we employed a semi-structured interview form, observation, and document analysis in the study. In addition, using at least three data collection tools ensures triangulation and increases the credibility of the study (Denzin, 1978). We reviewed the relevant literature and created several questions. We formed an interview form

by selecting clear, focused, single-dimensional, and non-directing questions among these questions. While preparing the interview form, we consulted with 3 field experts and a language expert. This contributed to the credibility and transferability of the study (Yin, 2009). Then, we conducted pilot interviews with two teachers and re-examined and checked for clarity of the questions in the interview form. We also utilized unstructured observation data to support our dataset. In this observation, we included the remarkable attitudes, behaviors, and words that we encountered during breaks, meetings, and after school when some of the teachers were in their rooms. Creswell (2013) emphasized that field notes enrich the data of the study and provide a detailed setting for data analysis. Therefore, we observed where the administrators positioned themselves symbolically, particularly their attitude and communication style. Such notes are of remarkable value to make sense of symbolic violence, as they may be an obscure mechanism for victims. To contribute to research credibility, interviews should be conducted in a friendly and comfortable context (Creswell, 2013). For this reason, the first 5-10 minutes of the meeting were conversations from daily life. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

3.5. Data Analysis

We analyzed the data from the interviews using thematic analysis, which is a content analysis technique. Thematic analysis is primarily used to classify, examine, and describe themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In accordance with the content analysis technique, we applied Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five-phase data analysis framework. We analyzed data from the study in certain phases. First, to systemize the data, we transcribed and computerized the data collected in the form of audio-visual recordings. Second, we reviewed the dataset and compared it to the recordings. Then, we and a faculty member experienced in qualitative research coded the written data separately. The raw and impartial analysis of the data obtained from the interviews contributed to the credibility of the research (Creswell, 2013). Subsequently, we used the codes showing concordance from both groups to identify themes and form descriptions. Finally, we reviewed the themes and descriptions. In the final phase of the data analysis, we included documents indicating symbolic violence along with field notes that we believed would nourish the dataset and support existing themes.

3.6. Credibility and Transferability

The term validity and reliability were replaced by the concepts of credibility and transferability in qualitative research. In this study, we took various measures to contribute to the credibility and transferability of the study. In qualitative research, obtaining opinions from experts who are experienced in qualitative research and research subjects increases the credibility of the research, which is called peer debriefing (Creswell, 2013). While preparing the interview questions for the study, we consulted with 3 separate field experts along with a Turkish expert to ensure credibility. In addition, one of the most well-known ways to increase credibility is triangulation. Triangulation is accomplished by diversifying the data sources, the researcher, the theory on which it is based, and the data collection method (Denzin, 1978). Considering this, we obtained data from diverse sources that presented multiple sources. Therefore, we employed a semi-structured interview form, observation, and document analysis in the study. Using at least three data collection tools ensures triangulation and increases the credibility of the study (Denzin, 1978).

After receiving expert opinions, we conducted pilot interviews with two teachers and re-examined and checked for clarity of the questions contained in the interview form. We made the necessary corrections in line with the feedback obtained, which contributed to the transferability of the study (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). For the interviews, we made use of field notes to intensify the data inference. Field notes contributed to the credibility of the study (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Therefore, we took notes during the interviews. These notes included some gestures, mimics, intonations, a glance, or an implication, and any kind of thing needs to be taken into consideration as they are difficult to record. Moreover, we recorded the interviews and sent them to the participants for approval. In qualitative studies, ensuring data accuracy promotes study transferability. To contribute to research credibility, interviews should be conducted in a friendly and comfortable context (Creswell, 2013). To this end, we set up interviews where the participants wanted and felt comfortable, as well as at a time that was convenient for them. Before starting the interview, we presented the printed version of the interview protocol in which there is information about the purpose of the research. The confidentiality of personal information and withdrawal from the research are welcomed at any time.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings and comments obtained from the study. As a result of the analysis, three themes emerged: "incidents of symbolic violence", "roots of symbolic violence" and "reactions to symbolic violence".

4.1. Theme 1: Incidents of Symbolic Violence

Incidents of symbolic violence in project schools are basically considered as "administrative-based", "state-based", "parents-based", and "colleague-based". One of the subthemes derived from the analysis of participants' interviews is administrative-based symbolic violence. Teachers cite administrators as the major perpetrators of symbolic violence in schools. To illustrate this point, Oblomov perceives it as a warning that administrators show up in the teachers' rooms when the bell is about to ring. She likens it to the act of waiting at the door to check the teachers' arrival times and indicates his view in this way:

Oblomov: *It is symbolic violence that administrators frequently show up in their teachers' rooms. His visit to the teachers' rooms when the bell was about to ring was a form of warning against teachers. It has prejudice in itself. It is like the fact that administrators wait at the school entrance in the mornings shows me that my arrival and departure times are being checked.*

The second subtheme derived from the analysis of the interviews of participants is state-based symbolic violence. Some participants discussed symbolic violence from a broader perspective and focused on symbolic violence practices that they believe are perpetrated by the state. For example, Bazarov perceives the government's process of transferring its ideology to students as symbolic violence against all stakeholders. Bazarov's views on this subject are as follows:

Bazarov: *The government emphasizes issues that it considers important for its ideology in its curriculum. For example, July 15. Making it mandatory for schools to create bulletin boards on this issue is an obvious symbolic act of violence against all stakeholders in the school. Other national holidays are not emphasized. ... Why not universal values? Why is the government's ideology wanted to be imposed on us? Or why was the importance attributed to July 15 not attributed to Republic Day? Killing another person day by day while promoting one ideology is symbolic violence by the government.*

The third subtheme obtained from the analysis of the interviews is parent-based symbolic violence. Some participants argued that families consciously or unconsciously inflicted symbolic violence on teachers, administrators, and their children. For example, Levin complained about the messages and calls sent by the parents at inappropriate times and found the administration guilty in this regard. He claims that, encouraged by the attitude of the administration, parents use symbolic violence by ignoring teachers' private lives as follows:

Levin: *One of my parents' audacity to text me at midnight, even during summer vacation, is symbolic of violence. It is also a violence that the administration is a partner in, which makes the parents think that they have this right. Because at every meeting, it is said that our teachers are supposed to share their phone numbers and create a WhatsApp group. We have to set it up if we want it or not. Otherwise, we will be blacklisted.*

Another subtheme derived from the analysis of interviews is colleague-based symbolic violence. Teachers point to some colleagues as perpetrators of symbolic violence at schools. Madame Odintsova indicates that her overwork makes some of the teachers uncomfortable, placing pressure on her. She argued that overworking makes a teacher prominent, and standing out bothers some of her colleagues.

Odintsova: *You are doing and you want to do it properly, but maybe your co-workers do not want to work that much and are uncomfortable with your work. In a way, it puts you under pressure. There are two sides to this: either you will work, you will make the administration happy, or you will be less visible and you will make your colleagues happy. This is actually symbolic violence by co-workers.*

We also made use of the observation process in addition to the interviews. To illustrate, during the teachers' board meetings, we took note of points such as the way the principal gave a say to the teachers and his overall attitudes. We detected that the teachers talked for only about 10 minutes in a meeting that lasted about three hours. Besides, the two-minute speech of a teacher was interrupted three times by the principal himself. However, he was disturbed by the fact that some teachers were talking to each other during his speech and felt the necessity to warn them. Realizing that he had talked too much and had not given a say to the teachers, the principal requested the clerk teacher to add some of his talk to the official meeting records. Based on the meeting observation report, we can actually say that the administrator did not give voice to the teachers and ignored their opinions, silenced and ignored them, which is an obvious form of symbolic violence.

4.2. Theme 2: Roots of Symbolic Violence

The reasons for symbolic violence at project schools acknowledged by teachers consisted of three sub-themes as "administrators with high symbolic capital", "pressure groups (parents/media)" and "pressure of success". The sub-theme of administrators with high symbolic capital, which is under the theme of roots of symbolic violence at project schools, highlights the attitudes of administrators who are endowed with various privileges and who have a

surplus of different types of capital in project schools, which in fact means symbolic power. Participants expressed the opinion that symbolic violence is highly likely to appear in project schools since administrators have considerable symbolic power. To illustrate, one of the teachers believed that the power of staffing is a type of symbolic power that the other administrators in other schools lack. The view of a teacher that symbolic violence results from the staffing authorization of the administrator is as follows:

Oblomov: *The principal selects you and can send you a reply within 4 years. This is a practice similar to that in private schools. Therefore, it gives a completely different power to the administrators. It makes you feel like you have to everything. Prove yourself, or else, bye. In such a case, would the attitude of the principal toward you ever be the same as in other schools other than project ones? No.*

The sub-theme of pressure groups (media/parents/teachers) focuses on the parents of project schools having a relatively large amount of different types of capital and some assertive teachers as well as the media, which can be a pressure factor. Because families with high cultural capital have high expectations from education, they can exert pressure on the project school. According to the participants, most families in the project schools can express themselves well and do not hesitate to hold administrators and teachers accountable when necessary. Likewise, project schools are closely followed by the media because they are schools with the highest academic success in the country. Under these circumstances, the media also function as a pressure group. To illustrate, one participant believed that administrators avoid possible negative expressions from the parents in online settings.

Oblomov: *Administrators are afraid of their parents. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that they flinch from their parents. They fear that the image of the school will be destroyed. Any negative discourse by the parent is spreading very quickly now because of WhatsApp groups. Or any negative case to be posted on social media now means more than before. That is why the administrators do not want to conflict with the parents.*

The sub-theme of pressure of success features stakeholders' high expectations from project schools because they are the ones with the highest academic achievement across the country. Accordingly, participants utter that the pressure to produce projects is exerted to administrators, teachers, and students exert pressure to produce projects to meet the expectation of success. They also assumed that this was due to the nature of the project schools. Most participants cite the pressure of success as the most visible reason for symbolic violence in project schools. To illustrate this point, the view of a teacher that symbolic violence results from high expectations created by the pressure of success is as follows:

Akakiyevic: *Projects schools are institutions where various high goals are set, administrators and teachers are selected to carry out a mission and vision, and there are various connections and high expectations. Even the name itself has a psychological effect. This creates pressure on the administrators; therefore, this pressure inevitably reflects on the teachers.*

In addition to the interviews, as part of triangulation, we observed the administrators and teachers to obtain abundant data in the natural setting of the study. Most participants cited administrators with high symbolic capital as the main source of symbolic violence in project schools. We observed some cases that were compatible with the above views. For example, a teacher who was waiting at the door for a while to meet with the principal stated that the principal always welcomed his peers and was in constant communication with union members of which he was a member. What is more, once we noted that the administrators did not find the dressing of the female students appropriate for dancing in a ceremony, and they wanted them to wear different costumes. However, we saw the families going to the principal's office together quite angry. The principal allowed the students to dance in the clothes they wanted without even arguing with their parents. After the ceremony, he stated that he had accepted the offer to prevent it from appearing on the media. This statement reveals the strength of families with abundant capital and the risks of disrepute impact administrators as well as teachers.

4.3. Theme 3: Reactions to Symbolic Violence

Reactions to symbolic violence consist of three sub-themes as "compliance", "resistance" and "inactive responses". The sub-theme of compliance includes the arguments of teachers about accepting and submitting when they are exposed to symbolic violence. For example, Rostova emphasized that victims accept symbolic violence because they avoid exposure to symbolic violence or because they fear that the volume of symbolic violence may be increased. The following is the related argument:

Rostova: *We're doing nothing. If we do anything taunt or protest, we are labeled as insane. They'll cross us out. Thus, we submit. If we react, we will again be subjected to symbolic violence. When this is the case, as teachers, we choose not to do anything. It is a pity that we, as educators, do not unite against anything and do not react to anything. No strike, no reaction, no criticism. What a pity!*

Regarding the resistance sub-theme, some of the participants considered that when facing symbolic violence, teachers prefer to struggle; they do not hesitate to conflict and try to eliminate symbolic violence with various methods. To exemplify this, Golyadkin utters that even if it is rare, teachers can withstand symbolic violence. However, he considers that this is a wear process described as follows:

Golyadkin: *If a victim does not get tired of struggling and knows his rights, he or she may struggle and claim his rights. But that is very rare. For example, one of our school teachers is one of them. He was the person who sued for mobbing in the country. He sought justice in his previous school, but he admits that this process was grueling.*

The last sub-theme, inactive responses, covers cases in which teachers neither accept nor reject symbolic violence. This indicates incidents other than direct acceptance or opposition. Rather, it refers to teachers' attitudes when dealing with symbolic violence. Participants stated that teachers can neither provide direct reactions nor remain completely silent to cope with symbolic violence. For example, Chichikov asserted that teachers prefer to grouch and share it with their friends in the face of symbolic violence:

Chichikov: *Our biggest reaction is to grumble. Or to share it with our close friends. Maybe we get relieved when we share, but I don't know. That is why teachers come together, they immediately begin criticizing their administrators. For minutes. They pour out and relax. However, no one can say half of what they say to their managers' faces.*

We also examined how teachers' responses vary in the face of symbolic violence practices. To set an example, one of the teachers stated in his conversation with his friends that after he had a child, the administration's view of her deteriorated, and she was made to feel that she would not work as efficiently as she used to. The attitude toward the teacher could be evaluated as symbolic violence. Regarding documentation, by analyzing one of the meetings, we observed the practice regarding the levels of English classes cited as "unanimously accepted". Contrary to what was written in the meeting record, teachers could not reach an agreement regarding the continuation or abolition of the practice, despite a long dispute. However, the administration stated that they would implement their decision. Indeed, they implied teachers' decision was somewhat of not really worth, and as a result, they declared themselves as decision makers. As a matter of fact, the "unanimous" statement in the meeting record revealed that. However, teachers did not respond to the disregard of their will. They neither showed any resistance nor made any complaints against the practice based only on the decision of the administration.

5. Discussion

According to the study results, symbolic violence acts perceived by teachers in schools fall into four subthemes. Although teachers highlighted the symbolic violence practices exercised by the administration, they also identified symbolic violence acts from a broader perspective, that is, state-based symbolic violence and those directed by parents and colleagues. The reasons why teachers consider administrators to be the most discernable source of symbolic violence at school may be several reasons. In the first place, it is known that administrators have distinctive privileges and resources in the context of the research, which is a project school. It is also indisputable that the symbolic capital of project school administrators is higher than that of other public schools. The administrators in these schools are more effective in the system because they are directly appointed by the Ministry. They have a fairly large network and can make use of union support more effectively. In addition, the opportunity to establish their own staff at the school makes them more effective in the school than other schools. By employing alternative financing tools, they can also freely act on the budget. The greater the symbolic capital, the higher the volume and frequency of symbolic violence is expected to be. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) denoted administrators as "knowledge engineers", which somehow empower them and legitimize their symbolic power. In project schools, based on these findings, it is the administrators, especially the principals, who are called "knowledge engineers". Thanks to the symbolic capital they belong to, both the students and teachers locate them in a higher and untouchable position at school, which increases the extent of symbolic violence and legitimization.

Capital enables agents to exchange dispositions like educational background, religious affiliation, and ways of speaking, with other agents in some forms like domination, subordination, or sharing (Bourdieu, 2017). That is, agents who have much of the type of capital that matters in a field have the power to dominate and subdue others. Furthermore, the inadequacy or abundance of any capital type designates the agent's power, role, and position in a field. Agents are positioned in social spaces by their size and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1989). Administrators in project schools are known to make use of extensive financial resources to establish relations with unions or even directly with ministers and benefit from political power, which signifies their symbolic capital. As the source of symbolic capital in the school, the symbolic capital they own provides a kind of superiority and power to administrators. In their study, Yıldız et al. (2021) highlighted that leaders generate crises to convince their advocates of their legitimacy, and crises give rise

to symbolic violence incidents. Because symbolic capital equips agents with the power to domination over others unwittingly that they may even ratify (Jourdain & Naulin, 2016). As a matter of fact, this superiority is revealed through symbolic violence practices, as stated by the participants and supported by observation. Acts of symbolic violence exercised by administrators come in forms based on legitimate power under which symbolic violence is justified. To illustrate, administrators tend to dominate teachers mostly over schedule and security duties. Consequently, it results in the approval of power, respect, and obedience or fulfilling the legitimate demands of an agent (Swartz, 2006). In this case, teachers feel the necessity of fulfilling the legitimate requests of administrators due to the symbolic power they hold across the school.

Teachers also handle symbolic violence from a broader perspective and claim that the state produces symbolic violence at schools through various means. Likewise, in his study, Apple (2006) indicated that the government uses the curriculum as an instrument of symbolic violence to ensure the continuity of existing power relations among the classes. Bourdieusian Theory regards education as a privileged field because political power and the upper classes exert their symbolic power on unprivileged individuals in the field of education. This is done mostly through the curriculum and policies dictated by national and international powers. The symbolic values and power of the dominant are anticipated to be hidden in many elements from textbooks to elective courses, from values planned to be taught to objectives. After all, teachers perceive the government's process of transferring its ideology to students and of raising a religious generation as symbolic violence against all stakeholders. Furthermore, the recent disgracing and prevarication of the teaching profession, as well as substitute teacher practices, can be counted as acts of symbolic violence exerted by the state. Furthermore, feeling obligated to self-censor when criticizing the education system is considered an act of symbolic violence. Lastly, teachers believe that the authorization of administrators to choose teachers in project schools violates meritocracy in staffing, which might be regarded as an act of symbolic violence by itself.

Teachers consider parents to be another symbolic perpetrator at a project school. Each family is assumed to have a certain level of knowledge about the field of education, and this might be the element that determines the extent to which the family benefits or does not benefit from education. For instance, parents who have not benefited from education and have no knowledge of the field of education do not blame the education system for their child's failure; on the contrary, they put the blame on their child. On the other hand, families with high cultural capital in education systems blame the system and teachers because they know the flaws of the system. Murphy (2013) claims that the capital of families in relation to the education system is formed by their exposure to the education system and varies in accordance with their habitus and variation in capital. "Those who have the benefit, through family, parents, ... and so on, of information about the formation circuits and their actual or potential differential profit can make better educational investments and earn maximum returns on their cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1998, p.25). At this point, social capital is believed to play a key role in the acquisition of cultural capital through education. On the other hand, it is not possible to buy cultural capital using only economic capital. Rather, families can accumulate capital that they pass on to their children. Therefore, education is also seen as a method of forming cultural capital. Although it is not just about academic knowledge, it is about much more than that. According to Murphy (2013), because lower-class families do not have strong social capital, they often set small goals for their children's education.

Another source of symbolic capital within schools is considered to be teachers' colleagues. Teachers, like other agents in the field, have different types of capital. Within the school field, some teachers may hold more economic, social, or cultural capital than their colleagues. Others may have a relatively large amount of experience in the profession or institution. The state of being more dominant in the school field as a result of experience may sometimes turn into an element of symbolic violence against newcomers and novice teachers. In the light of the obtained data, it can be seen that some young teachers are exposed to this violence because of their lack of experience. Similarly, teachers assigned to a project school from another type of school indicate that they are deficient in subject knowledge. In addition, within the competitive climate in the project school, teachers are reluctant to appreciate each other's achievements and sometimes even belittle their colleagues' achievements. That is, colleagues struggle with each other to gain various privileges in the school field. It sometimes appears in the form of ignoring, belittling, not appreciating, and sometimes vilifying colleagues to administrators or other colleagues. The teachers attribute the symbolic violence exercises that take place in the project schools to three reasons: the enormous amount of symbolic capital possessed by the administrators in the project schools, the parents and media featuring a pressure group, and the pressure of success felt by the stakeholders from diverse sources.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is closely related to symbolic values such as prestige, honor, and prestige that the concept of symbolic capital includes (Anderson, 2013). Basically, symbolic violence is the imposition of the status, prestige, power, title, value, and beliefs of power, that is, their symbolic capital, on those who are below them in social spaces, which is also accepted by the ones who are exposed to it. As the game metaphor mentioned in the

literature review suggests, rewards are not always monetary. Actors sometimes achieve symbolic gains that picture them as valuable, recognizable, useful, and prestigious both in the eyes of themselves and in the network they belong to. Administrators in project schools are acknowledged to have considerable symbolic capital through which they can be appointed. By means of the symbolic capital they possess, administrators struggle to be more prestigious and valuable within the network to which they belong and to maintain their privileges. Ensuring these privileges requires that other actors in the field approve them. For this reason, administrators consciously or unconsciously exercise symbolic violence and ensure the continuity of their dominance over school.

Administrators in project schools can make use of extensive financial resources, establish relationships with unions or even directly with the Minister, and even benefit from political power. The symbolic violence is created by the pressure of success, which can increase the intensity of symbolic violence for both teachers and administrators. In fact, this pressure may come from families, unions, the district national education directorate, or the Ministry of Education. In this regard, it is obvious that project schools have a distinctive aspect from other public schools, and administrators are equipped with various powers. This distinction may further strengthen administrators' use of symbolic violence. Many teachers succumb to this pressure so as to continue working in these schools, as students are high achievers. Furthermore, it is known that project schools are closely related to political authority, and the social capital and symbolic power of administrators appointed to these schools are quite high, which equips administrators with even more symbolic power. Furthermore, in project schools, the accountability mechanism works effectively, and the concept of accountability comes to the fore (Genç, 2021). A tighter accountability mechanism is said to operate thanks to the direct communication of the administrators in the project schools with the Ministry. As a matter of fact, the success rates and project production in these schools are closely followed by the authorities, media, and parents. All these factors are believed to play a crucial role in the volume of symbolic violence that takes place in project schools.

Regarding reactions in the face of symbolic violence, most participants assert that teachers choose not to succumb when confronted with symbolic violence. The minority indicates that some teachers resist symbolic violence and even choose to respond or remain unresponsive. The habitus of an agent determines how he or she will behave in the face of an incident or action. The relationship between habitus and symbolic violence is believed to play a crucial role in the internalization of symbolic violence. Even our predispositions or actions in our habitus actually bear traces of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990a). Moreover, habitus may prevent the agent from comprehending the symbolic violence to which they are exposed and contributes to its reproduction. Agents act like fish in the sea, an ordinary world for fish (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2014). In general, it may put agents in an engulfing stalemate. It is possible to break the chain through education and building critical rationality. Therefore, habitus can be both the cause and solution of symbolic violence. Teachers, on the other hand, since they normalize symbolic violence as part of and as a result of their habitus, they often adopt a submissive attitude or do not even realize what they are subjected to. Teachers who react to or resist symbolic violence may be aware of this phenomenon but do not normalize or legitimize it in their habitus. Nevertheless, as suggested by Bhambra and Shilliam (2009), being silent does not come through just by permitting subordinates to talk or to utter their matters; instead, organized or structural alterations should be employed so as to ensure that they are truly taken into consideration. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers make structural adjustments as well as not remaining silent in the presence of symbolic violence. In fact, the phenomenon of symbolic violence should be addressed within the framework of critical theory. It is necessary for teachers to object against the symbolic violence that they are subjected to and even produce without even being aware of Objecting, on the other hand, is possible only with inquisitiveness and reactiveness that take place on the ground of reflexivity (Topcu & Yaslioglu, 2022). With a participatory approach to organizational processes, it may be possible to reduce the effects of symbolic violence by pacifying elements that ensure the maintenance of existing power relations and by uniting social and organizational realities on the same ground (Topcu & Yaslioglu, 2022).

Recommendations based on the results of the study are as follows for policymakers and practitioners:

- Teachers and other stakeholders in the school field must develop a critical awareness of the symbolic violence phenomenon, and equal participation in both decision-making and implementation processes should be favored within schools.
- An internal evaluation process should be employed to highlight symbolic violence practices and to reveal the beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, and discourses of administrators and teachers through which both may acquire critical reflexivity.
- Heterodox arguments should be supported in schools so as to unsettle orthodoxy, the loss of prestige and the precarisation of the teaching profession.

Recommendations based on the results of the study are as follows:

- The study was carried out as a single case study in a prestigious and well-established project high school located in one of the high-income districts of İstanbul. Although it is based on a well-established theory and ensures the use of multiple data from different tools, multiple case studies may be favored to gain more profound insight and consider the research phenomenon in its natural flow in various contexts.
- In the research, it is seen that teachers are not only exposed to symbolic violence but also exercise it because of the symbolic power they hold within the classroom. Therefore, studying the phenomenon of symbolic violence reproduced by teachers and directed at students may be beneficial in terms of examining symbolic violence practices in schools holistically and making the phenomenon visible from the perspective of different stakeholders.

ORCID :

Tuğba KONAL MEMİŞ   0000-0002-4612-2236
Mithat KORUMAZ   0000-0003-1800-7633

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Deepfake Dilemmas: Imagine Tomorrow's Surveillance Society through Three Scenarios

Fatma DOĞAN AKKAYA[1]

[1]Asst. Prof. Dr., Kastamonu University, Faculty of Communication, Kastamonu, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Fatma DOĞAN AKKAYA
E-mail : fatmanurdoganakkaya@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

As deepfakes—hyperrealistic, manipulated media content becomes increasingly sophisticated, they raise critical questions about the future of social interaction and trust. Drawing on sociological insights enriched by the literature on virtual reality surveillance, this study explores the social landscapes that may emerge with the widespread adoption of deepfake avatars in the near future. Moving beyond technical considerations, the research employs social prediction methods to explore three potential future scenarios involving deepfake avatars: seamless integration that facilitates self-expression but complicates digital identity control; pervasive algorithmic surveillance that exacerbates social control and privacy issues; and the concept of ghost avatars, that is, digital representations that function as commodities or tools of resistance. This analysis highlights the ethical dilemmas surrounding deepfakes, particularly in relation to mass surveillance, digital self-control, and resistance movements. Contributing to scholarly discourse, the study underscores the need for proactive social and ethical frameworks to navigate the evolving deepfake landscape and highlights the importance of ongoing research for the responsible development and use of this powerful technology.

Keywords: Deepfake Technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Surveillance, Digital Society, Future Scenarios

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has had a profound impact on media, blurring the distinction between reality and fabrication. Of particular concern are deepfakes, highly realistic AI-generated media content, which pose significant challenges due to their ease of production and rapid dissemination on social media platforms. There is a growing academic focus on the societal implications of deepfakes, highlighting their potential to undermine trust and spread misinformation. Urgent attention is needed to fully assess the impact and implications of these concepts in contemporary discourse.

Deepfake technology, which uses deep learning in AI, convincingly superimposes one person's face on another, much like a mask, by processing large datasets to understand different facial angles. Recently, it has gained popularity for entertainment by integrating famous characters into popular films or videos (Gissen, 2022). Mainstream media has also explored the potential of simulating news presentations using deepfake experiences (Hwang, 2023). It has also been used to resurrect historical figures in order to demonstrate its transformative power (Gibson, 2021). In addition, major brands have used deepfake technology to conduct awareness campaigns as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives (Murray, 2021).

Conversely, academic research tends to present deepfake technologies in a negative manner. Systematic reviews highlight concerns about potential security breaches, whereas limited studies address broader societal impacts (Gamage et al., 2021). Research on the societal impacts of deepfakes highlights public discomfort with the unrestricted capabilities of the technology and the expected ethical, psychological, and physical impacts associated with manipulated audio-visual content (Westling, 2019; Hancock & Bailenson, 2021; Langa, 2021).

Deepfakes, which blur the line between physical and digital, aptly epitomize the transformative power of the digital revolution in societies (Negroponte, 1995). As technology advances rapidly, so does our interest in its social implications. Current research explores how companies (Bardzell, 2014; Mager and Katzenbach, 2021) shape perceptions, governments (Schmidt & Cohen, 2013; Manovich, 2014), and individuals (Dufva and Dufva, 2019; Suchman, 2012) adapt to this dizzying transformation. Despite conflicting predictions, such as fears that AI will dominate human intelligence (Bostrom, 2014; Barfield, 2015) or that AI will serve more sophisticated, futuristic societies (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2011; Schwab, 2016), technology is undeniably reshaping our world as a powerful mediator of societal development, as highlighted by influential thinkers such as Marx and Weber (Defleur, 1982).

This study explores the evolving concept of virtual identity within envisioned future communication systems consisting of interconnected virtual environments. Examining the impact of deepfakes aims to provide a deeper understanding of the social transformations wrought by digital technologies. Anticipating the rise of deepfakes in both public and private spheres, this research examines how technology will reshape society, ultimately focusing on how seamlessly integrated deepfakes will alter daily life. This paper critically interrogates ethical dilemmas such as autonomy, control, and resistance surrounding deepfakes and their manipulation of virtual self-perception. It argues that a comprehensive analysis of these issues is crucial for understanding the potential impact of various surveillance-based social control mechanisms on future societies. This study explores deepfakes not only as a form of manipulated media, but also as a novel form of technological surveillance, a crucial aspect often neglected in current research. This framework is based on a sociological perspective, an extensive theoretical foundation in surveillance studies, and is enriched by existing data. To achieve this goal, the study used the social prediction method, an indispensable element of sociology, as a framework for analyzing the social changes triggered by digital transformations. The proposed method is useful for analyzing future scenarios based on current trends and theoretical discussions.

This article begins with an insightful review of the technical aspects of deepfake technology, its origins, and its diverse manifestations. The analysis highlights how deepfakes differ from traditional manipulation and how technology blurs reality by drawing on research in security, media, psychology, law, and policy. Social impact reports, particularly from civil initiatives, further illuminate these concerns.

It then makes a critical link between deepfakes and surveillance, offering a nuanced summary of historical and contemporary surveillance studies. Driven by significant investment from technology giants, this future could see a rise in self-surveillance alongside the emergence of self-replicating avatars, malicious impersonation, and autonomous AI-powered digital identities.

Finally, the research concludes with three possible future scenarios shaped by deepfakes virtual selves: a world of balance between freedom and control in virtual spaces with avatars, a society trapped in constant algorithmic surveillance, and the endless commodification of fully digitalized beings through algorithmic surveillance, or the possibility of virtual escape where individuals resist control in digital afterlife.

2. Aim and Methodology

This study investigates how deepfakes, an AI technology that undermines media authenticity, could seamlessly integrate into future communication systems, reshaping human interaction and our understanding of reality within interconnected communities. The method integrates empirical evidence from academic papers, reports, and reliable sources, combining a sociological perspective with surveillance studies to deepen the existing research on digital technologies. This comprehensive approach aims to illuminate the ethical concerns, power dynamics, and broader societal implications of deepfakes.

Employing social forecasting—a cornerstone of sociology—the study seeks to comprehensively understand the multiple societal impacts of evolving digital technologies. While historically criticized for its association with positivist models of social engineering (Aldridge, 1999) and a long list of failures in terms of predictive accuracy (Henshel, 1982), contemporary sociology recognizes the value of this method in analyzing causal relationships and interpretable outcomes (Hofman et al., 2017). Watts (2014) advocated a renewed focus on sociological foresight, echoing Kaplan's (1940) emphasis on social prediction. This approach ensures that the discipline maintains scientific rigor and relevance through predictive analysis based on interpretable data.

In today's world of advanced algorithmic forecasting methods, a sociological lens is essential for examining the social implications of human-technology interactions. Compared to previous limitations in data and processing power (Martin et al., 2016), sociological prediction is now enabled by the availability of multi-source data, advances in computational processing, and the development of specialized algorithms (Chen et al., 2021). This allows for more accurate predictions and informed expectations from a social science perspective. This research, for instance, aims to forecast the societal impact of deepfakes by combining empirical AI research evidence with a sociological lens. This investigation provides an original perspective on the sociology of communication by analyzing the transformative potential of deepfakes.

3. Deepfake Technology and A Brief Review of Its Social Impacts

Deepfake technology uses state-of-the-art AI and machine learning techniques, such as deep neural networks (DNNs), Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), and other complex algorithms to manipulate multimedia content (Kietzmann et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2021; Rana et al., 2022). For instance, using GANs, a well-known class of machine learning systems, these inputs are processed by a trained algorithm to generate high-fidelity synthetic media. (see Figure 1.). These synthetic creations can be meticulously crafted to replace a person's face in existing media, effectively fabricating entirely new audio, video, or images, or even attributing false statements to individuals.
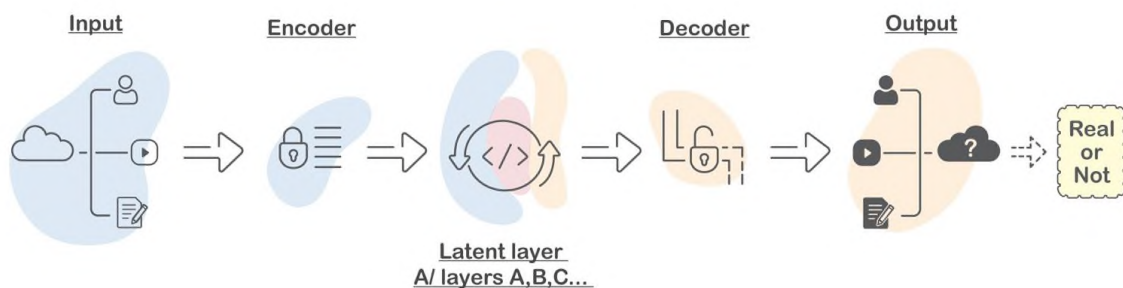
Figure 1. *Basic algorithmic logic of deepfakes*

Deepfake technology, a remarkable case of scientific progress, has recently come under significant scrutiny. A Reddit user first introduced the term "deepfakes" in 2017 to describe the use of face-swapping technology to create sexually explicit content featuring celebrities. This early instance exemplifies the ability to create deceptive content without ethical considerations. Subsequent cases involving impersonations of political figures and celebrities, along with fraudulent voice manipulation for financial gain, further highlighted the realistic and potentially harmful nature of deepfakes (Somers, 2020). Furthermore, Fagni et al. (2021) demonstrated how bot accounts simulating human behavior could generate fake text content on Twitter, further fueling the debate surrounding deepfakes. These developments have led to discussions on privacy violations, ethical boundaries, and intellectual property rights. Consequently, deepfakes have become a pressing security concern for governments, businesses, and the political sphere (Yu et al., 2021).

Although deepfakes and fake news share similarities in terms of the speed of dissemination, typology, and purpose, differentiation is necessary for a more nuanced understanding of contemporary communication dynamics. The negative

social and democratic impact of fake news has been well documented, while the response to fake news has been met with increased scrutiny and calls for caution. This is evidenced by pronouncements from technology centers (MIT Open Learning, 2020), academia (de Rancourt-Raymond & Smaili, 2023) and law enforcement (Busch et al., 2023) regarding the potential dangers of AI-generated media, particularly deepfakes. Public concern about deepfakes is growing due to their perceived security threat (iProov, 2022), with a notable gender gap in perception (Angell, 2020), while businesses show limited awareness and willingness to address the risks and benefits associated with the technology (Attestiv, 2021). These manipulations of visual, audio, and textual content pose an unprecedented threat to trust and authenticity in various digital media landscapes.

Deepfakes present two distinct challenges compared to other forms of manipulative content: *contextual persuasion and technological authorization*. Compared to traditional fictional narratives, deepfakes have an unprecedented power of persuasion. Köbis et al (2021) demonstrated that people's overconfidence in their ability to spot deepfakes blurs the line between reality and fiction, making them vulnerable to manipulation. Furthermore, Murphy and Flynn (2021) suggest that deepfakes use sophisticated persuasion techniques previously relegated to the realms of fantasy and science fiction, potentially implanting false memories. Technological authorization, however, refers to the ongoing struggle to maintain effective detection methods in the face of rapidly evolving deepfake production technology. As algorithm-based deepfake tools become increasingly sophisticated, detection methods may fall behind in the perpetual game of cat and mouse (Greengard, 2019; Kietzmann et al., 2020). The growing number of real-world incidents involving deepfakes underscores the urgency of addressing these concerns.

As Hancock et al. (2020) described, AI-mediated communication employs intelligent agents to modify, enhance, or generate messages that achieve specific communication goals. This area has seen a significant increase in deepfake content, with over 100 million deepfake videos circulating online by 2020 and over 5.4 billion views on YouTube between 2017 and 2020 (Sentinel, 2020). This rapid technological development has quickly attracted the attention of practitioners and academics. Owing to space limitations, this paper provides a concise overview of the main areas of academic focus, drawing on comprehensive literature reviews and prominent surveys.

A recent systematic review (Gamage et al., 2021) analyzing research from 2017 to 2021 highlights the emerging field of social science research on deepfakes, focusing on security concerns—particularly the ability of AI to mimic identities—as well as the psychological impact, legal regulation, and policy implications needed to address the societal threats posed by this technology. Hancock and Bailenson (2021) highlighted the urgency for innovative research, as even livestreaming, once a trusted medium, represents a critical breach of trust by manipulating real-time videoconferencing. Building on concerns about media credibility, Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) argued that deepfakes undermine trust in journalism and the media more broadly. This condition fosters an environment susceptible to misinformation, potentially worsening social divisions. The Council of Europe (Lacroix, 2020) expanded the discussion beyond explicit threats to include more implicit societal risks. Their report argued that all forms of AI bias have the potential to exacerbate social division, perpetuate stereotypes, and reinforce existing prejudices.

The rise of deepfakes has sparked widespread concern about their social impact. However, this concern often overlooks the critical aspect of deepfakes as a burgeoning form of technological surveillance. Surveillance theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing this under-researched facet of deepfakes. By examining how deepfakes interact with broader social surveillance practices, this theoretical lens illuminates the roles of different actors within the deepfake landscape and the ethical dilemmas surrounding their involvement.

4. Sociological Reflections on Deepfakes through Surveillance

A sociological lens can help unravel the complexities of deepfakes. Drawing on historical debates on surveillance, this perspective reveals a deep connection between manipulated media and broader societal control. By examining the roles of different actors, social norms, and the evolving surveillance landscape, this research explores the power dynamics, ethical complexities, and social implications embedded in the creation and dissemination of deepfakes. This approach aims to provide nuanced insights into the social transformations catalyzed by deepfakes, particularly how they reshape collective perceptions, the interplay between surveillance and trust and the evolving ethical landscape of the digital age.

Surveillance, which means 'to watch over' in French, refers to the systematic observation, monitoring and collection of information about individuals, groups or activities. This concept has been extensively studied and refined by scholars from various disciplines. Surveillance theory unfolds in three phases, with some overlap and continued influence. (Galič et al. (2017):

The first phase derives from Bentham's 18th-century model of the panopticon, an architectural concept that ensures constant visibility of the observed and fosters power dynamics through ever-present surveillance. Foucault (1977) theorized panopticism, a mode of power that relies on constant surveillance to cultivate self-regulation and conformity to social norms. As surveillance intensifies, the need for a central observer diminishes. Control becomes self-surveillance, with the individual internalizing the watchtower gaze.

In the second phase, the enduring significance of the panopticon extends beyond prisons to inform contemporary discussions on global surveillance. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) saw the panopticon as a broader symbol of social control in modern pervasive surveillance, echoing Haggerty and Ericson's (2000) notion of the surveillance assemblage, a network of components that form functional systems.

Finally, while traditional theories have focused on institutionalized control, the current distinguished by a technologically driven transition from unipolar to multipolar surveillance. Lyon's (2007) concept of "panopticommodity" and Whitaker's (1999) "participatory panopticon" highlight the normalization of surveillance, with commercial products and individuals actively engaging in mutual online data sharing, leading to a networked era of data surveillance. Consequently, the traditional panopticon with a central authority and the concept of a constantly monitored prisoner are becoming increasingly obsolete in this evolving multipolar surveillance and data collection landscape.

Deepfakes pose a novel challenge to surveillance theory, disrupting traditional paradigms by introducing sophisticated manipulated media. In addition to serving as tools for social control and information manipulation, deepfakes can potentially subvert established surveillance practices. This challenges the dominant panopticon model of discipline and punishment (Foucault, 1977) and requires a nuanced understanding of power dynamics in the digital age. Furthermore, deepfakes complicate the traditional view of collective and individual relations, offering avenues for entertainment, pleasure, and resistance to power structures (Haggerty, 2006; Mann, 2004). This necessitates a re-evaluation of surveillance theories to account for the dynamic interactions among governments, corporations, and individual users in the evolving landscape shaped by deepfake technology.

The proliferation of deepfakes highlights a significant imbalance in information and power dynamics. Organizations that can navigate AI-generated data wield considerable transformative influence, particularly in the realm of surveillance, where specialized tools enable the creation and dissemination of synthetic media. Clarke's concept of 'dataveillance' (1988) is highly relevant in this data-rich environment, describing the systematic monitoring of individuals through the collection and analysis of data from multiple sources. This extensive data collection not only influences consumer behavior, but also facilitates the manipulation of perceptions through deepfake interventions. AI-driven manipulation is increasingly used strategically in political conflicts (Giusti and Piras, 2020), branding disputes (Horowitz et al., 2022), and the production of synthetic media (Marcellino et al., 2023), reinforcing the prevailing power dynamics in these contexts.

Deepfakes, on the other hand, disrupt established power dynamics within surveillance and empower individuals to engage in counter-surveillance practices (Mann, Nolan, & Wellman, 2003). The burgeoning digital activism movement, led by social media and video activism, exemplifies this trend. Activists use online mobilization to circumvent traditional surveillance and document human rights violations, political injustices, and violence (Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018; Gonzalez & Deckard, 2022). This can be defined as the "participatory surveillance" age, where users engage in self-monitoring and curating their online presence rather than being subjected to external observation (Albrechtslund, 2008).

However, deepfakes are a double-edged sword. Although they enable counter-surveillance, their ease of creation fuel concerns about misinformation and manipulation of public opinion. This participatory nature of deepfakes is consistent with Lyon's (2007) concept of the "panopticommodity," where individuals willingly share information that can be used to generate manipulated content.

Consequently, the rise of deepfakes requires a re-evaluation of surveillance theories. Recognizing both the risks of manipulation in the digital age and the empowering potential of counter-surveillance, surveillance theories must reassess the evolving technological landscape.

5. Deep Scenarios for Tomorrow's Society

Significant investments by technology giants, such as Meta's Oculus headsets and Microsoft's HoloLens, in augmented reality (AR)[1], virtual reality (VR)[2], and mixed reality (MR)[3] technologies point to a dramatic shift in the landscape of virtual experiences by 2020. Once limited to niche audiences, immersive reality (IR)[4] experiences are rapidly becoming mainstream due to evolving user expectations. These expectations go beyond futuristic novelty and include a desire for more realistic experiences, broader accessibility, and potentially transformative applications across multiple aspects of individual and societal life.

Industry leaders such as Meta, Alphabet, Apple, Microsoft, Epic Games, and Unity Technologies are leading this transformation. Their significant financial commitments, including billions in annual spending, large funding rounds, and strategic acquisitions (, 2022; Jungherr & Schlarb, 2022), extend beyond the consumer product market. Partnerships with government organizations, such as the US Army and the Pentagon, highlight the potential of AR/VR for multiple sectors (Nellis and Dave, 2021). This collective effort underscores a shared vision: shape the future of immersive digital environments and create a seamlessly integrated meta-universe.

In the midst of rapid technological progress, critical questions are raised about social implications, particularly selfhood in virtual realms. Moving beyond the era of self-surveillance on social media platforms (Albrechtslund, 2008), a new paradigm is emerging: fake-*your-self-surveillance*. This envisions a future in which individuals curate multiple digital identities within immersive reality environments, each embodying different roles and experiences. Advances in AI and machine learning can facilitate the creation of self-replicating avatars that can interact independently in virtual spaces.

However, this raises significant concerns about the potential for malicious impersonation and the erosion of trust in online interactions (Tariq et al., 2023). Furthermore, the prospect of fully autonomous AI-powered digital identities blurs the boundaries between real and virtual selves, raising profound questions about privacy, authenticity, and the nature of human connections in these augmented realities, necessitating the development of new ethical frameworks to govern social interactions in immersive environments.

Leveraging three future scenarios, the next part of this study explores the potential societal ramifications that may arise from the convergence of deepfakes and pervasive social surveillance applications in next-generation virtual environments. Using a surveillance studies lens, the research examines the roles of different actors and the ethical dilemmas they face in virtual environments. The analysis aims to illuminate potential outcomes regarding security, privacy and ethics within immersive realities, ultimately navigating the complexities of this evolving landscape to promote a safe and ethical digital future for all.

5.1. Scenario 1. Autonomy and Control of the Digital Self

The rapid development of personalized avatars for diverse digital interactions in work, education, healthcare, entertainment, and social settings presents an intriguing yet multifaceted prospect (Nowak & Fox, 2018). While entrusting routine tasks to digital counterparts promises greater organizational efficiency, more leisure time and more engaging social experiences (Blodgett and Tapia, 2011), concerns about vulnerability to manipulation, persuasion and control are simultaneously emerging across domains (Hadan et al., 2024). This dynamic calls for a thorough examination of the interplay between autonomy and vulnerability in technologically mediated environments.

The rise of deepfakes coincides with an increasing emphasis on global online interactions in virtual reality environments. These systems often employ lifelike avatars that can replicate individuals with incredible precision. This convergence raises profound concerns about manipulated social experiences, the erosion of online authenticity, and the nature of selfhood in digital spaces. As self-replicating avatars and highly detailed virtual environments proliferate, critical questions arise about the legitimacy of online interactions and the potential for exploitation in these virtual landscapes. The key question is whether these technological advances will ultimately empower individuals or expose them to new forms of manipulation and control.

To understand the blurring boundaries between humans and machines, we consider a hypothetical scenario: Adam, a professional whose career is closely linked to a network of multiple virtual personas (See Figure 2.). These semi-autonomous, artificially intelligent avatars represent a new approach to professional identity that transcends traditional boundaries. Designed to automate routine tasks such as attending training sessions, performing data analysis,

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[1] Layers digital information onto the real world, enhancing user interaction via devices like smartphones or AR glasses.

[2] Overlays digital information to the real world, enhancing user perception and interaction via smartphones or AR glasses.

[3] Blend real and virtual elements to anchor digital content to the physical world and create a seamless blend of realities.

[4] Umbrella term combining AI, AR, VR, and MR technologies to engage users' senses, shaping captivating digital experiences.

conducting market research, or producing reports and reviews, these digital avatars improve the worker's efficiency and decision-making, thereby enhancing his or her value proposition in the labor market.
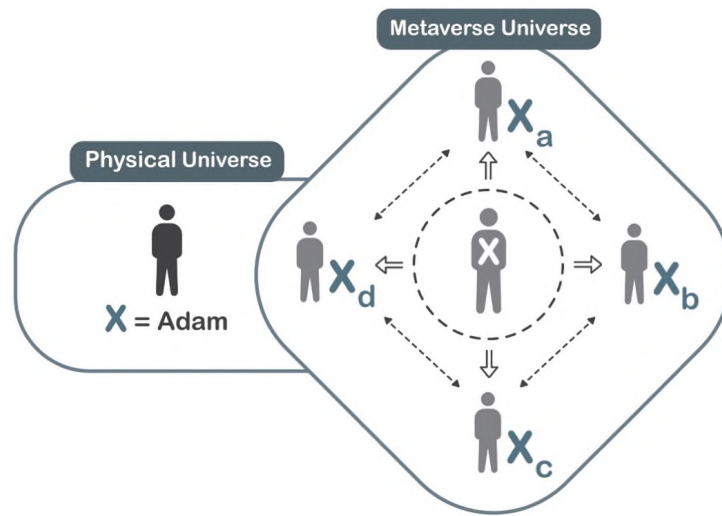
Figure 2. *Adam's different avatars in the virtual world*

The rapid integration of AI into digital environments poses a critical challenge to the very notion of self-hood. The creation of sophisticated digital avatars and the prospect of fully autonomous AI-driven identities in virtual environments require a re-evaluation of how we define and understand ourselves. The hypothetical scenario of Adam and his multiple AI personas illustrates this dilemma: will they fragment our sense of self or create a multifaceted identity that blends real and virtual experiences?

In today's digital landscape, the concept of a singular, static identity is increasingly being undermined. Surveillance practices now categorize individuals based on online profiles and digital footprints (Cheney-Lippold, 2011), transforming fragmented digital representations into marketable profiles (Fourcade and Healy, 2017). This shift reflects Deleuze's concept of the "dividual," in which individuals are seen as divided and segmented entities. This shift marks a shift from disciplinary societies to "societies of control," emphasizing the manipulation of digital representations over physical presence. Therefore, it is essential to re-evaluate social norms among these technological advances, particularly regarding the complex interplay of identity, representation, and control.

In 1992, Deleuze foresaw a world in which traditional institutions (family, school, etc.) would be transformed into coded entities governed by corporate structures. This shift, termed "modulation," positioned digital identities as commodities influenced by market forces, where their value is determined by utility and profit rather than intrinsic human value (Deleuze, 1992:6). Looking forward to the present, the integration of AI-driven replicas into everyday life has added a new layer to the fusion of technology and social structures. This convergence prompts a re-evaluation of the "surveillance assemblage" (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000). In this framework, human bodies are abstracted from their physical contexts and reconstructed as recognizable 'data doubles. These entities are subject to surveillance and intervention by sophisticated networks of modern technologies and practices, raising important questions about identity, autonomy, and social control (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000).

The *fake-your-self phenomenon, a* new conceptual tool for the surveillance of divided identities, can help us better understand the complex interactions between autonomy and surveillance in virtual environments. The rise of deepfakes and hyperrealistic manipulated content further blurs this line. Deepfakes allow the construction of meticulously crafted online personas, potentially empowering individuals to curate their online presence and transcend traditional limitations. However, this ability to manipulate online identities creates a paradox: the fine line between autonomy and a lack of self-determination. While individuals can exercise agency in crafting their online selves, the constant pressure to manage and perform these identities can blur the lines between genuine expression and constructed reality, potentially leading to loss of self-determination and a sense of inauthenticity.

In a fully virtual world, fragmented digital representations empowered by semi-autonomous AI replicas offer potential for self-control. Here, the end of life refers to the end of the task-performing digital identities rather than the tasks themselves. Individuals can transcend conventional boundaries and manage professional and social engagements through these proxies. However, as technological advances intertwine with personal agency, concerns arise about

whether individuals really retain control over their digitally curated identities or whether these replicas become tools of covert control.

This scenario highlights the need to move beyond the simplistic binary of real versus virtual to critically examine human-machine interactions in the digital age. The seamless integration of deepfake replicas requires careful exploration of redefined agency and responsibility within virtual communities. Potential consequences, such as reputational damage from exposed deepfakes, highlight critical ethical and legal issues. A comprehensive analysis that considers self-control, algorithmic bias, power dynamics, and transparency is essential. This research can inform future debates about the extent of individual control over their digital identities in the complex realm of AI-driven self-representation.

5.2. Scenario 2. Authentication and Disciplined Social Control

Contemporary surveillance practices have transcended the centralized model of the panopticon era, characterized by a single observer and a multitude of observers. The dispersed network of technologies that characterise the current landscape significantly alters the paradigm of surveillance. The emerging surveillance mechanism is often framed positively, emphasizing transparency and public visibility (Galič et al. 2017). Proponents argue that doing so fosters a collaborative and empowering environment (Björklund, 2021).

However, a critical examination of societal engagement with AI-powered communication and information systems reveals their potential to mask more subtle forms of control. Algorithmic processes in the post-panoptic era raise concerns about bias and discrimination, particularly in criminal justice, credit scoring, and online recommendations (Crawford, 2021; Lyon, 2003). For instance, algorithmic bias can lead to facial recognition systems failing to recognize non-white people (Algorithmic Justice League, n.d.) or discriminating against female job applicants (Dastin, 2018). Social sorting also introduces bias, stigmatizing certain profiles as deviant (Lyon, 2003). In its most extreme form, government surveillance can be legitimized under the concept of BANopticon (Bigo, 2006). The term describes an exclusionary approach in which those perceived as security threats are deliberately excluded from the system (Bigo, 2006). This concept can be illustrated by the recent actions of the US government, which has pressured telecommunications service providers to hand over private information about individuals or entities deemed threat (& Laperruque, 2023).

The challenges posed by contemporary algorithmic surveillance necessitate theoretical reframing. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) posited a shift from the panoptic model of disciplinary self-surveillance toward a mode of social control centered on manipulating and homogenizing online representations. This shift fosters a novel form of self-surveillance that prompts individuals to curate their online presence in accordance with the perceived expectations of algorithms and online communities. Consequently, the primary targets of surveillance have transformed from individuals themselves to fragmented digital representations constructed in their algorithmic footprints (Deleuze, 1992). This phenomenon blurs the lines between self-presentation and self-surveillance, as individuals actively shape their online personas for both human audiences and algorithmic systems (Kang et al., 2010). Thus, a crucial question emerges: how will the rise of virtual identities, potentially near-perfect replicas, in future extended reality technologies reshape the concept of surveillance communities?

To illustrate the potential consequences of this reframing of surveillance, let us take the aforementioned example of Adam, who created deepfakes of himself and placed them in various virtual spaces. However, generating an unlimited number of these digital simulations and dispersing them across metaverses could lead to a phenomenon we can call identity inflation. This poses potential security and legal challenges for Adam. His virtual duplicates may be mistaken for real data, potentially subjecting him to exclusionary or punitive sanctions within the system. To mitigate this risk, consider a scenario in which Adam acquires certificates of authenticity for some of his replicas. This introduces a complex situation regarding Adam's ontological existence (his sense of self in a world overflowing with digital copies) and his potential submission to the control mechanisms embedded within these virtual environments.
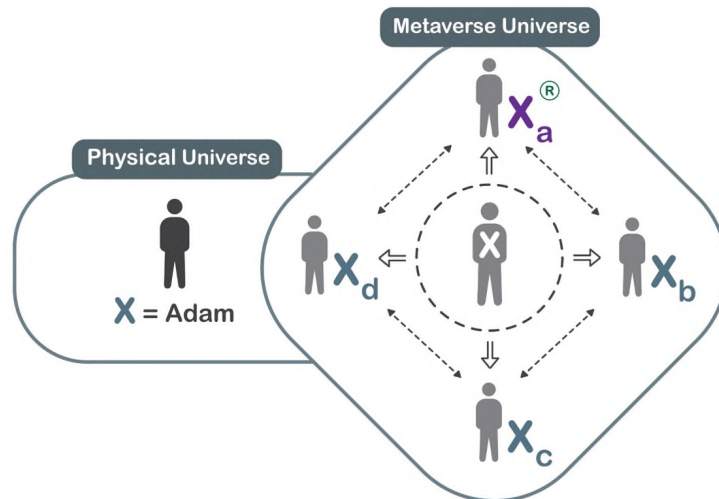
Figure 3. *Registered version of digital avatars*

The explosion of digital identities, exemplified by deepfakes, necessitates a radical shift in surveillance practices. Instead of directly monitoring individuals, the focus might move toward verifying the authenticity of online representations, potentially with user consent. Algorithmic systems that are adept at shaping online appearances are well-positioned for this role. However, this power comes at the risk of users. Actors may face pressure to conform to algorithmic standards of authenticity, leading to novel forms of online conformity dictated by algorithms. This scenario resembles a panoptic prison's disciplinary self-assessment, where constant monitoring compels specific behaviors. The ghost of the panoptic tower, in a sense, might haunt us again in the digital realm.

This blurred line between self-presentation and self-surveillance aligns with the concept of 'dataveillance' (Clarke, 1988). Dataveillance involves systematically collecting and analyzing vast amounts of user data, including user behaviors and preferences. Unlike traditional surveillance, virtual environments actively involve users in creating their online identities and sharing personal information (Boyd, 2004). Social media platforms exemplify this trend. The constant curation of online personas foreshadows a future where self-presentation and self-surveillance merge voluntarily or unwittingly (Kang et al., 2010). This dynamic echoes Zuboff's 'surveillance capitalism' (2015), in which platforms leverage user data to shape commercial practices and the very social structures within virtual spaces.

This burgeoning landscape of virtual identities presents a complex scenario that merges disciplinary self-assessment with the algorithmic social control inherent in data surveillance, forming what can be termed "*disciplined social control*." Individuals engage in self-presentation by authorizing virtual replica identities and voluntarily sharing personal information. Akin to the panopticon effect, they strive to conform to the social norms of virtual spaces. Meanwhile, algorithmic systems wield immense power, fragmenting online identities into data points used to assess factors like creditworthiness and access. This fragmentation influences user choices, preferences, and perceptions.

Ethical questions emerge as individuals surrender control over their digital self-portraits to experience immersive VR experiences. The use of multiple virtual identities by a single individual further exacerbates these concerns. We urgently need to re-evaluate privacy considerations, user consent practices, and the commodification of personal data. Further research is crucial for understanding the long-term consequences of this novel form of self-surveillance and its potential impact on individual autonomy and social structures within virtual environments.

5.3. Scenario 3. Compliance Versus Resistance in Digital Afterlife

Michel Foucault's (1977) seminal work on the panopticon served as a powerful critique of top-down surveillance, highlighting its capacity to disempower individuals. However, the contemporary landscape reveals a more complex interplay between surveillance structures and individual agency. While technological advances have undeniably increased the reach and sophistication of surveillance practices, they have also inadvertently fostered resistance movements that have actively challenged these power dynamics.

This is particularly relevant when considering the concept of "digital afterlife," a hypothetical scenario in which digital avatars transcend physical boundaries and potentially exist in perpetuity. In this context, the following question arises: Will these digital avatars passively submit to the ever-questioning gaze of algorithmic systems or will alternative

forms of resistance emerge? In a mind-boggling future, imagine Adam again—not as a physical being but as an ever-evolving digital essence residing in a virtual world (Figure 4). Here, the lines between life and death are blurred, with virtual identities potentially outliving physical counterparts. These *ghost avatars*, constantly evolving thanks to AI, mean that people are creating an immortal fake version of themselves: the digital afterlife is no longer a distant fantasy (Mason-Robbie and Savin-Baden, 2020). These concepts are rapidly moving from science fiction to reality. A growing body of research has focused on digital resurrection projects of historical figures, celebrities, and people's deceased loved ones to understand their potential for education, entertainment, and even to help people cope with grief (Sherlock, 2013; Basset, 2018; Rodríguez Reséndiz and Rodríguez Reséndiz, 2024).
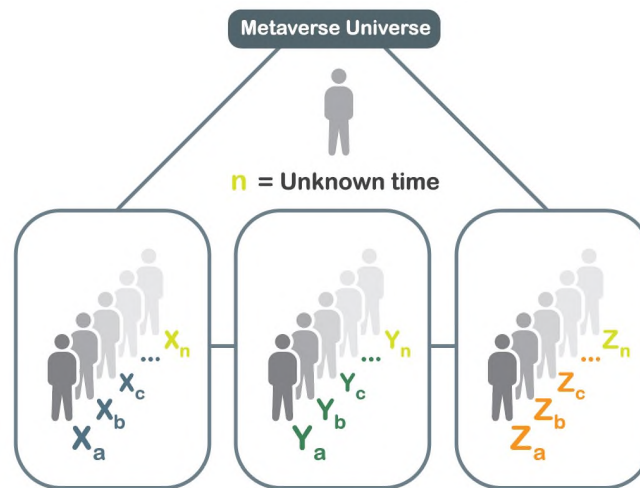
Figure 4. *Ghost avatars in digital afterlife*

Digital resurrection, while alluring, poses significant ethical and privacy challenges. Ghost avatars containing the personal data of deceased persons raise crucial issues of custodianship and exploitation. Even more worrying is the potential subsumption of a person's digitized essence—body, mind, memories, social connections, and even virtual possessions—by the ever-expanding apparatus of surveillance capitalism. Trapped in a super-panopticon' (Poster, 1995), individuals surrender their entire existence to a vast, ever-scrutinizing database. This is consistent with Zuboff's (2015) notion that the digitized self is the ultimate source of behavioral surplus. This data fuels algorithms that predict and potentially manipulate behaviors, eroding privacy and autonomy under constant algorithmic surveillance. Moreover, the commodification of the self reaches new extremes. Memories, relationships, and virtual properties become potential commodities within this all-encompassing system. The super-panopticon is transformed into a marketplace of human experience, raising profound ethical questions about the ownership and control of our digital selves in a world dominated by surveillance capitalism.

Algorithmic exploitation of data is a valid concern. However, this scenario avoids a purely dystopian view. Contemporary surveillance scholarship explores an appealing shift in power relations. Concepts such as "coveillance" (Mann et al., 2003) and "participatory surveillance" (Albrechtslund, 2008) exemplify this shift. These concepts move away from the panoptic model by emphasizing reciprocal surveillance, where users actively engage in online spaces and shape online narratives. The concept of "sousveillance," which implies that user-generated surveillance might subvert social control or resist powerful forces, adds further depth to the conversation. (Mann et al., 2003). Online platforms for citizen journalism and whistleblowing illustrate the potential of counter-surveillance tactics in the digital age. However, the potential misuse of these tactics warrants further investigation.

This user-driven approach indicates a more balanced power dynamic in which individuals are not simply passive subjects but also empowered participants. Further evidence for this user-driven approach comes from various studies on content moderation on platforms such as Twitter and YouTube (Mearns, 2015) and user engagement in review and rating services (Adams, 2012) and video streaming communities (Talvitie-Lamberg, 2018). These studies illustrate how users are actively involved in monitoring and challenging content, potentially disrupting established narratives in online communities.

In this context, ghost avatars unfettered by the limitations of physical existence present a unique opportunity. Free from the traditional sanctions and social pressures governing physical life, they could play a significant role in

social progress and intellectual advancement. Imagine historically significant figures such as human rights defenders, pioneering scientists, or inspirational role models transformed into autonomous digital identities powered by AI. These avatars can serve as invaluable resources, disseminate knowledge, advocate for positive change, and inspire future generations. Their persistence in the digital realm allows them to transcend the limitations of time and space, potentially amplifying their impact on a global scale.

This strategy goes beyond merely questioning private rules, as Koskela's (2004) exhibitionism term signifies. Instead, it uses the visibility of these avatars to promote positive social change. By actively engaging with the digital landscape, they can contribute to important discussions, educate the public on pressing issues, and mobilize support for critical causes. Ultimately, they can undermine the power imbalance inherent in top-down surveillance, empower individuals with knowledge, and foster a sense of collective responsibility.

Furthermore, while deepfakes disrupt trust and social interaction, they present a fascinating paradox. Their ability to create manipulated avatars represents a potential weapon against algorithmic surveillance. These "smoke screens" can confuse data collection efforts, hindering the ability of algorithms to track and profile online behaviors. This disrupts the very systems that deepfakes were 'born' to exploit—the ever-expanding apparatus of surveillance capitalism. However, the effectiveness of this resistance tactic is likely to be temporary. As deepfake detection methods evolve, the arms race between users and surveillance systems intensifies. Ultimately, more sustainable solutions lie in advocating robust privacy regulations and raising public awareness about the pervasiveness of such technologies.

Recognizing that ethical and privacy uncertainties surrounding digital resurrection are paramount is important. However, alongside these concerns lies the potential to propose ghost avatars for positive social and intellectual purposes. Further research is necessary to explore this potential and navigate the complex landscape of emerging digital afterlife. This research highlights the importance of developing strong ethical frameworks to ensure that avatars contribute positively to humanity without suffering exploitation.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the multifaceted societal implications of deepfakes, a rapidly developing AI technology with the potential to disrupt traditional social interaction norms and reshape surveillance practices in increasingly networked virtual environments. Using a sociological perspective enriched by social prediction methods and insights from surveillance studies, this research went beyond the technical aspects of deepfakes to examine their potential impact on human behavior, social control mechanisms, and the nature of selfhood in the digital age.

The three future scenarios presented—a world of balanced control through avatars, a society trapped in algorithmic surveillance, and a virtual escape through purely digital existence—highlighted the range of possibilities that may emerge as deepfakes become more sophisticated and integrated into everyday life. These scenarios underscore the urgency of proactive reflection on the ethical dilemmas surrounding deepfakes, particularly in relation to autonomy, control, and resistance within virtual spaces.

Further research is necessary to navigate the complexities of this evolving landscape. This includes in-depth analyses of the potential psychological and social impacts of deepfakes on individuals and communities. Furthermore, the development of robust legal frameworks that address the ownership and control of deepfakes, as well as the ethical implications of digital life, is paramount.

By promoting a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted societal implications of deepfakes, this research aims to contribute to a future where technological innovation fosters social progress and safeguards individual autonomy in the digital realm. As deepfakes continue to evolve, ongoing critical dialog and collaboration between policymakers, technologists, social scientists, and the public will be essential in shaping a future where this technology serves rather than undermines humanity.

ORCID :

Fatma DOĞAN AKKAYA   0000-0002-6296-5591

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How cite this article

Measuring Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories: Developing the Turkish Conspiracy Mentality Scale (TCMS)*

Abdullah KOÇAK[1] 🆔, Nuh AKÇAKAYA[2] 🆔

[1]Prof. Dr., Department of Public Relations and Publicity, Selcuk University, Konya, Türkiye
[2]Asst. Prof. Dr., Department of Sociology, Selcuk University, Konya, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Abdullah Koçak
E-mail : kocaka@selcuk.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

Scales that claim to measure generic conspiracy beliefs are significant instruments for understanding people's tendency to believe in specific conspiracy theories. Several studies have been conducted on conspiracy theories in Türkiye in recent years. However, there is a lack of a scale that measures generic conspiracy beliefs and a scale that can be developed by considering the local socio-cultural dynamics of Türkiye. This study aims to develop a psychometrically valid and reliable Turkish scale for assessing generic conspiracy beliefs. This study introduces the Turkish Conspiracy Mentality Scale (TCMS), which was developed to measure generic conspiracist beliefs and predict specific theory endorsements. The validity and reliability of the scale were evaluated with reference to three studies. Study 1 (N=112) explored four critical dimensions of conspiracy: *deep state, sexuality, foreign powers, and health*. Study 2 (N=374) confirmed the content, face, criterion, predictive, and construct validity and reliability of the scale, while Study 3 (N=1110) provided further evidence of the psychometric strength of the scale in a representative Türkiye sample. A recent study conducted in NUTS 1 regions has shown that the scale can be used in a large and representative sample. The findings of this study highlight the power of TCMS in measuring and predicting generic and specific conspiracy theory beliefs.

Keywords: Conspiracy, Conspiracy Mentality, Conspiracy Belief, Türkiye

1. Introduction

Academic studies on conspiracy theories have become an increasingly popular research area worldwide. The belief in conspiracy theory involves the idea that a malevolent force orchestrates undesirable events (Akcakaya, 2023). Such theories, which are widely believed (Granados Samayoa et al., 2022; Stojanov & Hannawa, 2022), have gained significant attention in the field of Turkish research and in society over the past decade (Erdoğan et al., 2022; Ertür, 2016; Gürpinar, 2020; Karaosmanoğlu, 2021; Nefes, 2019; 2015). These narratives intertwine hundreds of actors with real or imagined events, shaping perceptions of coups, sabotage, elections, assassination, and mind control. Understanding who believes in these narratives and their motivations to do so remains elusive (Nefes, 2015). The absence of a reliable Turkish scale prevents analysis of individual differences in conspiracist beliefs.

One of the most basic predictors of conspiracy beliefs in Türkiye is the Sèvres Syndrome. Sèvres Syndrome is described as a product of the fear of the Treaty of Sevres signed on August 10, 1920, after World War I (Guida, 2008). The treaty in question included the partition of Türkiye, which was within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, and its occupation by Western states (Gokcek, 2011). Although the treaty in question has not come into force, this fear of partition has caused serious concern in Türkiye (Nefes, 2015). For more than 100 years, the fear that Türkiye would be divided, especially by foreign powers, and that conspiracies would be organized against Türkiye, has fundamentally affected the way social actors make sense of their lives. Recent empirical studies have revealed that this fear predicts conspiracy beliefs (Akçakaya, 2023). However, it is observed that there are very few studies. The lack of measurement tools for quantitative applications can be considered one of the reasons why research cannot be conducted.

The Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ) developed by Bruder et al. (2013) is the only Turkish instrument, yet it has limitations (Swami et al., 2017) and has been used in a few studies (Akcakaya, 2023; Baserdem, 2019; Erdogan et al., 2022). Despite existing instruments for other countries, adapting these to Türkiye's socio-cultural context is theoretically challenging (Stojanov & Hannawa, 2022). The perspective of this study is consistent with the need for scales that are compatible with local cultures while acknowledging the limitations of cross-cultural translation (Stojanov & Hannawa, 2022). To address this lack, a Türkiye-specific scale was developed which capture; *health, sexuality, the deep state, and foreign powers* (Ertür, 2016; Gürpinar, 2020; Nefes, 2019). However, conspiracy theories cannot be easily categorized in Türkiye or anywhere else in the world. Accordingly, it can be concluded that conspiracy theories are intertwined. This generic, non-event-based approach to measuring conspiratorial ideation may overcome the theoretical and practical problems associated with measures that refer to specific conspiracy theories (Brotherton et al., 2013).

2. Academic Efforts to Measure Conspiracy Beliefs

Global consensus on the measurement of conspiracy beliefs has yet to be established (Butter & Knight, 2019). Despite ongoing efforts, a consistent measurement approach has remained elusive. Academic endeavors to address this issue manifest in two main methods of assessing beliefs in conspiracy theories in such studies (Brotherton et al., 2013; Granados Samayoa et al., 2022; Stojanov & Halberstadt, 2019; Swami et al., 2017). The basic method involves measuring beliefs in specific conspiracy theories by selecting from a myriad of conspiracy claims based on research objectives (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Darwin et al., 2011; Douglas & Sutton, 2011; Goertzel, 1994; Leman & Cinnirella, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2016; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Furnham, 2010). On the other hand, the alternative method assesses broader constructs, such as conspiracy thinking, mentality, mindset, or conspiratorial worldview, without focusing on specific theories (Brotherton et al., 2013; Bruder et al., 2013; Lantian et al., 2016; Stojanov & Halberstadt, 2019; Stojanov & Hannawa, 2022). In these scales, real events and names are excluded, and the overall nature of the claims is subjected to analysis and subsequently transformed into scale items.

2.1. Measuring Specific Beliefs

Studies examining specific conspiracy theories aim to determine whether participants believe in one or more conspiracy theories (Granados Samayoa et al., 2022). In general, such assessments employ two distinct methods. The first method measures these beliefs using single items. For example, Goertzel (1994) measured various beliefs, such as AIDS, economic, and health conspiracies, using separate items. In such studies, the significance of conducting validity and reliability tests is often underemphasized (Swami et al., 2017). The second method assesses specific conspiracy claims with multiple items typically using scales whose psychometric validity and reliability tests are given prominence. For example, Shapiro et al. (2016) examined vaccine conspiracy beliefs using the Vaccine Conspiracy Beliefs Scale (VCBS), which contains multiple items regarding the concept. Comparable studies include beliefs surrounding the July 7, 2005 London bombings (Swami et al., 2011), beliefs regarding the kidnaping of Natascha Kampusch (Stieger et al.,

2013), and commercial conspiracy theories (Furham, 2013). These measurements cover a variety of cultural, social, temporal, and spatial contexts based on the narratives of societies.

Although measures focusing on a specific topic with single or multiple items are more reasonable for validity and reliability, they are insufficient for understanding generic conspiracy thinking or mentality (Brotherton et al., 2013). Belief in a single conspiracy theory or topic does not necessarily indicate a generic conspiracist belief (Basham & Dentith, 2018; Granados Samayoa et al., 2022). Conversely, determining which conspiracy theory to measure can be challenging for researchers who examine generic conspiracist beliefs, possibly involving an arbitrary process. Scales based on events and people may exhibit hypersensitivity to time and space and may not function effectively as societies change (Brotherton et al., 2013). The extent to which such scales measure the inclination to believe in conspiracy theories remains unclear. To address specific scale limitations, researchers have begun developing generic conspiracist belief scales that focus on overarching tendencies rather than specific events (Stojanov, 2019). These scales introduce a second approach to measuring conspiracy beliefs (Bruder et al., 2013).

2.2. Measuring Generic Conspiracist Beliefs

Scales measuring generic conspiracist beliefs aim to predict an individual's propensity to believe in conspiracy theories as a whole and serve as predictive tools. Rather than separately assessing beliefs in a myriad of conspiracy theories, these scales seek to grasp the general tendency to believe in such theories (Granados Samayoa et al., 2022). Rooted in Ted Goertzel's discovery of the monological belief system, these scales have been built on the idea that belief in one conspiracy theory correlates with a likelihood of believing in others as well (Goertzel, 1994). Subsequent research affirms this tendency (Akcakaya, 2023; Alper, Bayrak, & Yilmaz, 2020 Swami et al., 2011); even suggesting that individuals may believe simultaneously in opposing theories (Wood, Douglas, & Sutton, 2012). The exploration of the monological nature of conspiracy theories has given rise to terms such *as conspiracy mentality, conspiracy ideation, conspiracy mindset, and conspiracy worldview* in research (Imhoff et al., 2022; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014; Milosevic et al., 2021; Moscovici, 1987; Stojanov & Halberstadt, 2019; Stojanov & Hannawa, 2022; Swami et al., 2011: 2017).

Recently, researchers have shifted their focus from individual conspiracy theories to measure the mentality underlying the belief in these theories. The term *conspiracy mentality*, introduced by Moscovici (1987), is commonly used in Turkish studies to describe a life comprehension approach (Akcakaya, 2023; Erdogan et al., 2022; Karaosmanoglu, 2009). Imhoff and Bruder (2014) posited that conspiracy mentality broadly indicates the inclination to believe in conspiracy theories. This philosophy guides contemporary scale studies that focus on the characteristic features of conspiracy mentality to understand generic conspiracist beliefs (Bruder et al., 2013; Lantian et al., 2016; Stojanov & Halberstadt, 2019; Stojanov & Hannawa, 2022). Although these scales are known not to provide precise data to explain specific beliefs, it is believed that they provide useful information to predict who is more likely to believe in specific conspiracy theories. In measurements investigating those with a conspiracy mentality, real events, names, and times are usually not included in the items (Bruder & et al., 2013; Lantian & et al., 2016). This situation strengthens generic conspiracist beliefs. The method mentioned above was also preferred in our scale.

Building on all of these, this study presents a scale to measure generic conspiracy beliefs in Türkiye. The current study's scale, the Turkish Conspiracy Mentality Scale (TCMS), was developed in line with the methodological and theoretical perspectives of the GCB (Brotherton et al., 2013). Although Stojanov and Halberstadt (2019) argued that conspiracy mentality is a unidimensional phenomenon, it is considered that this mentality consists of multidimensional components, as Brotherton and his colleagues (2013). Based on these principles, three analyses were conducted to validate and establish the validity and reliability of the TCMS.

3. Study 1: Exploring the Dimensions of Conspiracy Mentality in Türkiye

In Study 1, which was designed as a pilot study, we aimed to assess whether the Turkish Conspiracy Mentality Scale (TCMS) item pool is perceived or not by a low-educated sample and to explore the significant subdimensions of conspiracy mentality in Türkiye. It is suggested that studying these dimensions with a sample that includes individuals from different educational backgrounds will ensure that the TCMS items are understandable to a wide range of people.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and Procedures

Study 1 recruited participants using convenience sampling. The study included a sample of 112 individuals (57 female, 55 male, age M=32.26; SD=10.57), consisting of primary and secondary school graduates. The researchers

collected data through face-to-face interviews. Although the findings of this study are not applicable to descriptive and relational statistics, this is not a disadvantage because this study aims to carry out factor analysis.

3.1.2. Measurements

Two different measurement tools were used in the application phase of this study. The first measurement tool was the TCMS, which was developed for the purpose of this study. On the other hand, the second scale is the CMQ, which is the only Turkish scale likely to have a correlative relationship with the TCMS.

Turkish Conspiracy Mentality Scale Item Pool (TCMS): To measure conspiracy mentality, a 92-item pool was created from three sources. First, 43 items from the long form of GCB (Brotherton et al., 2013) were adapted to the TCMS. Then, 21 items were added to the item pool by conducting discourse and content analyses of four popular Turkish conspiracy theorists and reflecting the recurring themes (assassination, sexuality, homosexuality themes) in these books. Finally, another 28 items were added based on prominent themes in the academic literature on conspiracy theories (Bali, 2008; Ertür, 2016; Guida, 2008; Karaosmanoglu, 2009; Nefes, 2015; 2019). Like other generic conspiracy belief scales, items in the current scale avoid specific events and focus on a broad tendency to believe in conspiracies (e.g., *foreigners are making covert efforts to prevent the development of domestic capital*). The items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ): The CMQ was developed by Bruder and his colleagues (2013) to measure conspiracy mentality and has a Turkish version. The CMQ has relative validity and measures the tendency toward certain conspiracy theories using 5 items (α=0.80). Participants rated the likelihood of the accuracy of statements on a 10-point scale (0% to 100%). E.g., *I think that many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about*.

3.2. Results

Utilizing a monological belief system assumption (Goertzel, 1994), Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with promax rotation revealed 4 evident factors in the scree plot. After removing items that did not appear as significant factors and items with weak factor loadings, a factor structure of 18 items emerged. The 4-dimensional construct of the 18 items explained 69.1% of the total variance. In the 18-item analysis, KMO= 0.852, and Bartlet's test was significant (χ^2= 1193.187, p<0.001), indicating a sufficient sample size and correlational power for factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006).

The first factor, namely, the Sexuality Conspiracy (SC), comprises 6 items asserting secret manipulation toward homosexuality or sterilization attempts (α=0.90). The second, Deep State Conspiracy (DSC), is a Turkish-origin theme involving 5 items covering assassinations, terrorism, trials, and unsolved murders (α=0.82). Health Conspiracy (HC), the third factor with 4 items, encompasses medication, experiments, and mind control (α=0.84). The final factor, Foreign Powers Conspiracy (FPC), includes 4 items discussing claims of hindering mining by foreigners and evil pursuits by foreign capital (α=0.78). All item loads within the factor construct ranged from 0.41 to 1.02, and the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach's Alpha for the entire scale was 0.89.

In Study 1, strong correlations were observed between the CMQ and the TCMS. In addition, the subscales of the TCMS were significantly correlated with both the CMQ and each other (see Table 1). These figures strongly support the criterion validity of the TCMS.

Table 1. Correlations between TCMS and CMQ

	CMQ	SC	DSC	HC	FPC	TCMS
CMQ	1					
SC	0.273**	1				
DSC	0.452**	0.268**	1			
HC	0.431**	0.361**	0.519**	1		
FPC	0.193*	0.607**	0.267**	0.383**	1	
TCMS	0.453**	0.813**	0.671**	0.739**	0.726**	1

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

3.3. Discussion

The primary objective of Study 1 was to assess the perception of TCMS in a low-educated sample. Participants' limited education and unfamiliarity with the conspiratorial conceptual map led to their misunderstanding of some items. For example, some participants were unaware of the subliminal advertising claim. This demonstrated that the items needed to be generalized and simplified. The second aim of Study 1 was to explore the important subdimensions of TCMS. The result of the PCA was a 4-factor structure with 18 items. Termed deep state, health, sexuality, and foreign power conspiracies mirror prevalent themes of Turkey (Akcakaya, 2023; Bali, 2008; Guida, 2008; Gurpinar, 2020; Karaosmanoglu, 2009; Nefes, 2019). Each of the 18 items signifies a pivotal aspect of the Turkish conspiracy theorist mindset. The factor loads surpassed the acceptable criteria, and each TCMS factor exhibited highly reliable figures. Positive and significant correlations among subdimensions indicated that participants who scored high on one conspiracy theme tended to do so in others, supporting monological belief claims (Goertzel, 1994). The positive correlation between the CMQ and the TCMS supported the criterion validity of the TCMS.

4. Study 2: Psychometric Validity and Reliability of the TCMS

Study 2 was designed to test the validity and reliability of the TCMS, focusing on the dimensions explored in Study 1. In particular, to provide strong evidence of validity, participants in Study 2 were asked their belief in specific conspiracy theories, both real and fabricated.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants and Procedures

In Study 2, participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method. The data were gathered voluntarily through a two-stage process. In the initial stage, online data were collected from university students (N=220). Previous studies in Türkiye have revealed that educated groups are less likely to believe in conspiracies, while men in coffee houses [kiraathanes] and housewives in rural areas are more likely to believe in conspiracies (Bozkurt, 2022; Sayin & Bozkurt, 2021). For this purpose, especially in the second stage, face-to-face data collection occurred, targeting less educated individuals, predominantly men who lived in coffee houses and housewives in rural households (N=154). This procedure was preferred because the participants were less likely to participate in online studies. This resulted in a combined dataset consisting of 374 participants, including both less educated and relatively highly educated individuals.

4.1.2. Measurements

Six measurement tools were employed in the application phase of this study. Each measurement tool is a scale that can be used to demonstrate the validity of the TCMS.

Turkish Conspiracy Mentality Scale (TCMS): The 18-item scale we obtained after Study 1 was sent to 5 academics who are experts in the field of conspiracy beliefs (N=3), language (N=1), and psychometrics (N=1). The experts' advice was analyzed using the Lawshe technique and, as a result of the analysis, 4 items were rewritten with minor semantic and semiotic corrections. In addition, 2 new items were added according to the experts' suggestions. As a result, the second version of the TCMS was expanded to include 20 items.

Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ): Study 2 also used the CMQ (α=0.81), which was developed by Bruder et al. (2013). Despite these criticisms, the fact that the CMQ is the only psychometrically reliable measure in Turkey led us to use it in this study as well.

The Yunk Project (YP): The YP is a fake conspiracy story developed for this study. The story claims that foreign powers are obstructing the mining of a non-existent mine, Junk, in Türkiye. The reason for including YP in the measurements was entirely related to the Treaty of Lausanne. There was a widespread and unfounded claim that underground mines could not be mined in Turkey until 2023 because of the secret provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne. Participants rated *the likelihood of the story being true* (i), *the likelihood of a similar event occurring elsewhere* (ii), and *its overall logic* (α=0.87) on a 100-point scale (0=not likely, 100=extremely likely).

Bangladesh Project (BP): BP is a conspiracy theory proposed for this study. Many conspiracy theories have been produced in Türkiye about the internal dynamics of other nations. BP was designed to measure belief toward conspiracy allegations against countries about which participants had little knowledge, with Bangladesh being one of them. The story claims that Israeli Freemasons encourage homosexuality and destroy their fertility by sterilizing them. This conspiracy allegation also contains extremely fake data. Participants rated *the likelihood of the story being true* (i), *the likelihood of a similar event occurring elsewhere* (ii), and *its overall logic* ($\alpha=0.87$) on a 100-point scale (0=not likely, 100=extremely likely).

Specific Conspiracy Theories Form: After selecting specific and popular conspiracy theories in Türkiye, the participants were asked to what extent they agreed with 7 conspiracy theories (See Table 4). The selection was based on conspiracy claims discussed in academic studies (Gürpinar, 2020; Nefes; 2019; Bali, 2008; Guida 2008; Karaosmanoglu 2009) but not empirically measured. Statements were rated using a five-point Likert scale as follows: 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, and 5: strongly agree.

Conspiratorial Thinking Form (CTF): This is a 9-item (see Table 3) one-dimensional scale that was developed to measure the characteristic features of conspiracy thinking ($\alpha=0.86$). The CTS is not designed to measure the propensity to believe in conspiracy theories; rather, it aims to determine whether people have the worldview required to believe in conspiracy theories. In this sense, it is different from TCMS. Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale as follows: 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, and 5: strongly agree.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Descriptive Statistics

Considering the scores of the TCMS items separately, we found that conspiracy statements were generally endorsed by the participants. Among the items, the statement '*Some additives that change a person's sexual preferences are put in food*' had the lowest score (M=3.05, SD=1.33); and the statement '*The deep state hides most information about terrorist activities*' had the highest score (M=3.98, SD=1.08). The mean TCMS score was 3.63 (SD=0.68).

The mean score of the 5-item CMQ was 71.5 out of 100 (SD=18.0). BP (M=66.8, SD=25.3) and YP (M=66.9, SD=23.9) were generally perceived as credible, logical, and events that could happen in other countries of the world. Among the specific conspiracy theories, the most accepted one was '*Muhsin Yazicioglu lost his life as a result of an assassination*' (M=4.3, SD=1.2), while the least accepted one was '*the Treaty of Lausanne has secret clauses that will not be revealed for 100 years*' (M=3.3, SD=1.4).

Among the CTF items, the statement '*There are people who will not give up on dividing Türkiye no matter what*' (M=4.3, SD=1.0), which can be regarded as Sevres Syndrome (Guida, 2008), received the most agreement. The CTF statement that reflects the Manichean worldview that '*people are either good or bad; there is no in-between*' (M=3.4, SD=1.3) was the least accepted. The mean of all CTF items was 3.9 (SD=0.8).

4.2.2. Validity Findings

Content and face validity: Before conducting the measurements in Study 2, expert opinions were obtained to confirm the content and face validity of the TCMS. The experts were very positive about the validity of the scale and changed the sentence structure of 4 items and added 2 new ones. After this process, data were collected in Study 2 on a 20-item scale.

Construct validity: To assess construct validity, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using promax rotation and Principal Axis Factoring. It was found that the scale created after the expert opinion maintained construct validity without the need to discard the items. This construct explained 64.6% of the total variance. Factor eigenvalues were $\lambda=35.9\%$ (SC), $\lambda=14.9\%$ (DSC), $\lambda=7.1\%$ (HC), and $\lambda=6.5\%$ (FPC), demonstrating the factors' respective contributions to the overall variance. It was found that the item loadings ranged from 0.427 to 0.811; inter-item correlations were moderate; inter-factor correlations ranged from r=0.173 to r=0.563 (p<0.01), and there was no multicollinearity among items (Determinant=2,320 >0.0001). The Bartlett test of sphericity (χ^2 =1193.187; p < 0.05) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (0.898) indicated a high level of strength for the correlations and the sample (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006).

Criterion and Predictive Validity: To provide evidence for the criterion validity of the TCMS, in Study 2, we examined correlations among the CMQ (M=71.5, SD=18.0), BP (M=66.8, SD=25.3), YP (M=66.9, SD=23.9), CTF (M=3.9, SD=0.8), and specific conspiracy theories.

Table 2. Evidence of the Criterion Validity of TCMS.

	TCMS
CMQ	0.446[**]
BP	0.523[**]
YP	0.443[**]
CTF	0.551[**]

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

As shown in Table 2, all correlations were statistically significant. The results demonstrate that the proposed TCMS is valid in terms of criteria. When the correlations between the CTF items and TCMS were examined separately, it was found that they all had a statistically significant relationship (see Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation between CTF items and TCMS

		TCMS
1.	Nothing in life is as it seems.	0.497[**]
2.	Nothing in life is random.	0.405[**]
3.	Everything that happens in life is connected.	0.284[**]
4.	Everything in life should be doubted.	0.383[**]
5.	People, in general, should not be trusted.	0.283[**]
6.	People are either good or bad; there is no in-between.	0.317[**]
7.	Whoever benefits from a chaotic event has organized that event.	0.373[**]
8.	The person who utters a word gives us an idea as to whether it is true or not.	0.382[**]
9.	There are people who will not give up on dividing Türkiye no matter what.	0.574[**]

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

Furthermore, to understand the predictive validity of the proposed TCMS, the relationship between the TCMS score and beliefs in specific theories was examined. All correlations between specific conspiracy allegations and the TCMS were significant (Table 4, which supports the predictive validity of the TCMS.

Table 4. Correlations of specific conspiracy theories with TCMS.

		TCMS
1.	Muhsin Yazicioglu lost his life as a result of an assassination.	0.553[**]
2.	The coronavirus was deliberately removed from the laboratory.	0.550[**]
3.	Turgut Ozal died in an assassination attempt.	0.501[**]
4.	The mining of the Bolex mine in Türkiye is being secretly prevented.	0.470[**]
5.	5 big families rule the world.	0.437[**]
6.	Secret efforts have been made to divide Türkiye with the Greater Middle East Project [BOB].	0.410[**]
7.	The Lausanne Treaty contains secret clauses that will not be revealed for 100 years.	0.382[**]

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

4.2.3. Reliability Findings

Cronbach's Alpha: The internal consistency coefficient of the TCMS (Cronbach's alpha, was α=0.90. The subdimensions CSH (α=0.88), DSC (α=0.85), HC (α=0.83), and FPC (α=0.82) also had very good internal consistency coefficients.

Split-Half Method: When we divided the items into odd and even halves for the Split-Half method of the TCMS, we found that the correlation between the two halves was strong (r=0.873, p<0.01). The Cronbach's Alpha values of the two halves were 0.80 and 0.83, respectively. The Spearman-Brown coefficient, which is the reliability coefficient of the equivalent half method, was 0.93.

Guttman Method: When the reliability analysis was repeated using the Guttman method, it was found that all 6 different lambda values were high. Accordingly, each of the 6 different values among 0.85 (Lambda 1) and 0.93 (Lambda 6) provides evidence of the reliability of TCMS.

Item-total correlation: Considering the correlations of the scale items with the total scale score, it can be seen that these figures vary between 0.365 and 0.613 (p<0.01), which indicates that each item is compatible with the general logic of the scale; rather, the scale is reliable.

Discriminative item analysis: The 27% (N=101; M=46.6; SD=8.1) with the lowest TCMS score and the 27% (N=101; M=94.3; SD=3.2) with the highest score were divided into two groups. It was found that the TCMS scores of the groups differed from each other (t=34.3; p<0.05) and that the discriminative power of the TCMS was high.

4.3. Discussion

Study 2 was designed to understand the suitability of the TCMS in terms of validity and reliability. Based on this, we first obtained expert opinions to ensure content and face validity on the 4 basic dimensions we discovered in Study 1. After an expert opinion analysis using the Lawshe (1975) technique, a stronger measurement tool was obtained in terms of content and face validity. The experts' approval of each item strengthened the validity scale (DeVellis, 2017). However, measuring generic conspiracy beliefs can cause specific details to be overlooked (Bruder & et al., 2013; Brotherton, & et al., 2013; Stojanov & Halberstadt, 2019). The fact that the belief form measured here is monological (Goertzel, 1994) can overcome the disadvantages that scales might have regarding content validity.

In the EFA, an analysis was conducted to demonstrate the construct validity of the TCMS, and the same factors were obtained as in Study 1. As a result of the analysis, which explained 64.6% of the total variance, construct validity was demonstrated. In addition, the correlations of the CMQ, BP, YP, and CTF with the TCMS demonstrated criterion validity. The fact that all items of the 9-item CTF, which reflects the characteristic features of conspiracy thinking, correlated with the TCMS also strongly confirmed the criterion validity of the TCMS. Those who scored high on the TCMS implicitly assumed that nothing is as it seems, nothing is coincidental, and everything is connected, as pointed out in the literature (Barkun, 2003). In addition, Sevres syndrome (Guida, 2008), skepticism (van Prooijen, Spadaro, & Wang, 2022), distrust (Jennings & et. al., 2021), the tendency to look for perpetrators on the basis of cui bono (Osborne, 1999), a Manichean worldview (Buhari, 2021), and a way of thinking that includes logical fallacies (Akcakaya, 2023), which are prominent indicators of conspiracy thinking, showed significant relationships with TCMS scores. The fact that the TCMS correlates most with items reflecting the Sevres Syndrome among the CTF statements demonstrates that the TCMS is compatible with local sociological dynamics. This is because Sevres Syndrome is one of the most important predictors of conspiracy mentality in Türkiye (Guida, 2008; Akcakaya, 2023; Gürpinar, 2020; Nefes, 2015). Finally, the strong and significant correlations of specific conspiracy theories with the TCMS demonstrate the predictive validity of the scale.

When the reliability evidence of the TCMS was examined, it was found that Cronbach's alpha, Spearman-Brown coefficient, and 6 different lambda values obtained using Guttman's method reflected both excellent levels (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006). It was found that the item-score-total correlation was moderate and that there was a significant difference in discriminative item analysis. All of these analyses indicated that our scale is a psychometrically reliable measurement tool and that the TCMS is adequate in terms of internal consistency (DeVellis, 2017). However, the sample form in both Study 1 and Study 2 carries the risk of not reflecting many differences within society.

5. Study 3: Additional Validity and Reliability Evidence in a Representative Sample

Study 3 was conducted to provide additional evidence of the validity and reliability of the TCMS in a more representative sample.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants and Procedures

Study 3 was conducted using stratified sampling based on data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK). A sample size of 1110, with a 95% confidence interval and a 3% margin of error represented the Turkish population over 18 years of age. The categorical age distribution in Türkiye (M=36.0 SD=15.8), gender (female N=556 male N=554), and age by gender variables were proportioned according to NUTS 1 [Nomenclature D'unités Territoriales Statistiques] regions, which is the classification of statistical territorial units in Türkiye, to 1110 people. The data were collected face-to-face in 12 different provinces in 12 different regions by trained interviewers for an average fee of 15£.

5.1.2. Measurements

Turkish Conspiracy Mentality Scale (TCMS): The 20-item TCMS formed after Study 1 was used in its original form.

Conspiratorial Thinking Form (CTF): The CTF used in Study 2 was also used in Study 3 to determine whether the results could be confirmed in a representative sample of Türkiye.

Specific Conspiracy Theories Form: Respondents were asked about three specific conspiracy theories (Example theory: *The extraction of Carex in Türkiye is being secretly prevented*). The answers were collected on a Likert scale as follows: 1, strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree.

Conspiratorial Subject Scale (CSS): The CSS measures generic beliefs about whether popular figures are portrayed as conspirators in conspiracy theories 'disturbing the peace of Türkiye'. The CSS developed for this study included 22 different items/actors, such as freemasons, templars, and Jews (α=0.85). The scale does not specify an event but only asks whether or not the related actors disturb the peace in Türkiye. Those who believe that these people are disturbing the peace will also strongly believe in the conspiracies attributed to them. The scale has 5 sub-dimensions. The dimensions included internal or external actors, such as "esoteric conspirators" (α=0.93), "right-wing conspirators" (α=0.86), "foreign conspirators" (α=0.84), "left-wing conspirators" (α=0.84) and "institutional conspirators" (α=0.80). Respondents were asked whether these actors were disturbing the peace in Türkiye, and responses were scored as 1: not at all disturbing, 2: not disturbing, 3: neither disturbing nor not disturbing, 4: disturbing, and 5: very disturbing.

5.2. Results

5.2.1. Validity Findings

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): In Study 3, CFA was used to provide further evidence of construct validity. The fit indices could not be obtained at the desired level after analysis. One item was then removed, and the analysis was repeated (The removed item: *Some experiments are secretly carried out on the public without their knowledge and consent*). For the TCMS consisting of 19 items and 4 subdimensions, CFA was performed using the AMOS program with the maximum likelihood method. First, due to the large sample size in the proposed model, it was found that χ^2/sd (CMIN / DF) was 9.05, which was above the acceptable value (Hu & Bentler, 1999). However, other fit indices were found to be at acceptable levels. To bring the value of χ^2/sd to an acceptable level, covariances were drawn based on the M.I. values observed in the modification indices, and χ^2/sd was brought to an acceptable level with a value of 3.78 (Wheaton, Muthen, Alwin, & Summers, 1977), and the others were brought to good fit values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006; Schermelleh-Engel & Moosbrugger, 2003; Hu & Bentler, 1999). From Table 5, it can be seen that the goodness-of-fit index is generally above the acceptable limits, and the values we found are generally good. This indicates that the proposed 4-dimensional 19-item TCMS was confirmed by CFA (p<0.05) and that the TCMS is constructionally valid.

Table 5. CFA Fit İndices

İndex	Found Value	Acceptable Value
$[\chi^2/sd]$	3.782	$\chi^2/sd < 3$ (good); $\chi^2/sd < 5$ (acceptable)
RMSEA	0.050	RMSEA < 0.10
NFI	0.960	NFI ≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.935	0.85 ≤ AGFI ≤ 0.90
TLI(NNFI)	0.963	TLI(NNFI) ≥ 0.90
CFI	0.970	CFI ≥ 0.90
GFI	0.953	GFI ≥ 0.90

Convergent and Discriminant Validity: Convergent and discriminant validity was also assessed using the data obtained from the factor analysis results. Four separate values were examined to identify validity cases. For convergent validity, CR (construct reliability) is expected to be 0.70 and above, and AVE (average variance extracted) is expected to be 0.50 and above. For discriminant validity, the AVE must exceed the ASV and MSV. ASV should also be less than MSV.

Table 6. Convergent and discriminant validity scores

	SC	DSC	HC	FPC	Acceptable Value	Validity Type	Validity Status
CR	0.90	0.90	0.84	0.82	CR > 0.70,	convergent validity	all valid
AVE	0.62	0.65	0.57	0.53	AVE > 0.50, indicating	convergent validity	all valid
MSV	0.386	0.346	0.242	0.282	AVE > MSV:	discriminant validity	all valid
ASV	0.328	0.209	0.289	0.328	AVE > ASV:	discriminant validity	all valid

Considering Table 6, it is apparent that TCMS is valid in terms of both convergent and discriminant values. This shows that the factors both measure similar situations in relation to each other and measure values that are slightly different, which may reflect their own originality.

Criterion and predictive validity: To confirm the criterion validity, CSS, CTFs, and specific conspiracy theories were added to the measurement instruments. Accordingly, the mean CTF was correlated with the mean TCMS by 0.398 (p<0.01). Specific conspiracy theories were correlated with TCMS, ranging from 0.471 to 0.549 (p<0.01). These correlations confirmed the criterion and predictive validity of the TCMS.

Table 7. Correlations of CSS and subdimensions with TCMS

	TCMS
CSS	0.372**
Esoteric Conspirators	0.276**
Right Wing Conspirators	-0.016
Institutional Conspirators	0.398**
Left Wing Conspirators	0.208**
Foreign Conspirators	0.341**

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

The CSS showed a significant relationship with the TCMS in both mean scores and subdimensions. As Table 5 shows, the CSS and its subdimensions—esoteric, institutional, left-wing, and foreign conspiracy factors—are related to the TCMS. The items that make up these factors include NATO, foreign intelligence services, Jews, Freemasons, and communists. Participants' attitudes about whether these actors disturbed the peace of the country were closely related to their conspiracy mentality (according to their score on the TCMS). Although the CSS does not include a specific conspiracy claim, it is consistent with the TCMS scores. Here, respondents' belief that some actor is disturbing the peace of the country is linked to their conspiracy thinking.

5.2.2. Reliability Findings

Cronbach's Alpha: The Cronbach's alpha value of the internal consistency coefficient for the 19-item TCMS was α=0.91. The values of the subdimensions were CSH = 0.91, DSC = 0.88, HC = 0.86, and FPC = 0.80 at very good levels.

Split Half Method: When the 19-item TCMS was divided into two halves as odd and even item numbers, the correlation between the two halves was found to be strong (r=0.922). The internal consistency coefficient of the first of the two halves was α=0.82, while that of the second was α=0.83. The Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient of the equivalent halves is 0.95. Both the α value of the two halves and the Spearman-Brown value indicated that the TCMS was highly reliable.

Guttman Method: 6 different lambda values were found to be high, ranging from 0.86 (lambda 1) to 0.95 (lambda 6), providing evidence of the reliability of the TCMS.

Item-total correlation: The correlations of the scale items with the total scale score ranged from r=0.446 to r=0.681 (p<0.01). The items generally showed moderate correlations with each other. This indicates that each item is compatible with the general logic of the scale and that the TCMS is a reliable measurement tool.

The discriminative item analysis: The 27% (N=300; M=51.9; SD=8.9) with the lowest score and the 27% (N=300; M=87.5; SD=4.9) with the highest score were divided into two groups. It was found that the scores of the two groups differed significantly (t=60.2; p<0.05). The discriminative power of the TCMS was high, which is an important criterion for reliability.

5.3. Discussion

After excluding one item from the analysis, the CFA provided strong additional evidence for the construct validity of the TCMS. The goodness of fit indices were excellent. Considering the sample size and the relationship between the sample and the population, this study is superior to Studies 1 and 2 in generalizability. We also used the factor analysis results to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the TCMS. It was revealed that each TCMS factor can validly measure different themes in conspiracy theories. However, it was found that the themes in question cannot be completely distinct from each other, and that the finding of monological belief is a strong statistical reality.

In Study 3, the correlations of specific conspiracy theories, CTFs, and CSS with the TCMS confirmed the criteria and predictive validity. In particular, the relationship between the CSS, an instrument that focuses only on potential conspirators, and conspiracy mentality has not been tested in previous studies (Brotherton, & et al., 2013; Stojanov & Halberstadt, 2019; Stojanov & Hannawa, 2022; Bruder & et al., 2013). We use this new method to predict conspiracy beliefs by measuring attitudes toward popular groups (potential conspirators) in conspiracy theories. In contrast to other studies, we also focused on potential conspirators themselves and tested the criterion validity of the TCMS on actors who are considered potential conspirators.

When the reliability findings of the TCMS were examined, it was found that the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach's Alpha was quite good for both the total scale and its subdimensions. As additional evidence of internal consistency, the Spearman-Brown coefficient and 6 different lambda values were found to be high. The items were found to have moderate correlational relationships with the overall scale score, indicating that each item is compatible with the general logic of the scale and with each other (DeVellis, 2017; Tabachnick Fidell, 2006), and the TCMS is a reliable measurement tool. Additionally, discrimination analysis showed that the scores of the two groups differed significantly from each other, and the discriminative power of the TCMS was high.

6. General Discussion

In Study 1 for the TCMS, we generalized statements as much as possible and transformed them into easily understandable statements for everyone. In addition, based on the EFA results, we discovered four important dimensions of conspiracy thinking. These factors, which we call sexuality conspiracy (SC), Deep State Conspiracy (DSC), Health Conspiracy (HC), and foreign power conspiracy (FPC), have the flexibility to encompass hundreds of specific conspiracy claims. These dimensions are quite compatible with the conspiracy themes in Türkiye (Erdogan & vd., 2022; Bali, 2008; Akar, 2009; Ertür, 2016; Akcakaya, 2023; Baserdem, 2019; Buhari, 2021; Guida, 2008). The fact that the correlations between the factors were positively correlated confirms that respondents who scored high on one conspiracy theme tended to score high on another conspiracy theme (Goertzel, 1994).

Study 2 was designed to determine whether the TCMS is a psychometrically appropriate measure in terms of validity and reliability. In Study 2, expert opinion was obtained on the 4 basic dimensions identified in the previous study, and concerns regarding both content and face validity were minimized. In the EFA conducted to establish the construct validity of the TCMS, 64.6% of the total variance was explained, and construct validity was established (DeVellis, 2017). In Study 2, the correlations of the CMQ, BP, YP, specific theories, and CTF with the TCMS demonstrated criteria and predictive validity. The CTF in particular showed that many features of conspiratorial thinking were compatible with TCMS (Barkun, 2003; Guida, 2008; van-Prooijen, Spadaro, & Wang, 2022; Jennings & et. al, 2021; Osborne, 1999; Buhari, 2021; Akcakaya, 2023). The CTF has shown that some approaches to the nature of life and variables such as the Sevres Syndrome, skepticism, suspicion, the cui bono method, the Manichean worldview, and a way of thinking involving logical fallacies, which are frequently expressed in the literature and associated with conspiratorial thinking, are compatible with the TCMS.

In Study 3, additional evidence was revealed for the construct validity of the TCMS, with values obtained from CFA (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006). This study, in which careful attention was paid to both sample size and the relationship between sample and population, is superior to our previous studies in terms of generalizability. In addition, the correlations of specific conspiracy theories, the CTF, and the CSS, which measure potential conspirators in people's minds, with the TCMS served to demonstrate criterion and predictive validity. In contrast to other studies in the literature, this study included potential conspiratorial subjects on the agenda and showed that those who believed that these subjects disturbed the peace of the country scored high on the TCMS. This provides additional evidence for the criterion validity of the TCMS and a new scale study method for measuring generic conspiracist beliefs. The goodness-of-fit indices and reliability coefficients in Study 3 were good or very good, providing strong evidence of validity and reliability. Furthermore, unlike the CMQ (Bruder & et al., 2013), which has been criticized for measuring rational beliefs (Swami et al., 2017) and is the only Turkish-language scale, the items of our scale were mostly focused on general conspiracy theories.

7. Conclusion

The TCMS is a valid and reliable measurement tool for both measuring conspiracy beliefs on different topics with its subdimensions, which include CSH, DSC, HC, and FPC, and for measuring the degree of conspiracy mentality with its 19 items as a whole (see, Appendix). A minimum score of 19 and a maximum score of 86 on the 19-item TCMS reflect the degree to which an individual exhibits a conspiracy mentality. There are no reverse-coded items in the scale. The scores can be used to predict how much people believe in specific conspiracy theories.

Although there have been many studies on conspiracy theories in Türkiye, there is a lack of measurement tools for quantitative empirical research. The TCMS attempts to address this deficiency. Recently, studies, especially in Western countries, have focused on testing variables related to conspiracy theories, such as trust, anomie, and paranoia. However, in Türkiye, no instruments are available that measure this belief by considering local cultural dynamics. As a result, it has become methodologically difficult to determine the variables associated with conspiracy beliefs. In this context, the TCMS was developed, taking into account local dynamics such as sexuality conspiracy and deep state conspiracy and providing a resource for future studies.

ORCID :
Abdullah KOÇAK   0000-0001-6981-8482
Nuh AKÇAKAYA   0000-0002-1457-1379

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How cite this article

Appendix: TCMS Turkish Form [Türkçe Komplo Zihniyeti Ölçeği (TKZÖ)]

Bazı medya kurumları eşcinselliğin yayılması için gizli örgütlerle işbirliği yapmaktadır.

Dünya'da eşcinsellik kasıtlı olarak yayılmak istenmektedir.

Toplumu çökertmek için cinsellik üzerinden yürütülen gizli hesaplar mevcuttur.

Bazı ilaçlar cinsel sağlığı bozmak için kasten üretilmektedir.

İnsanları kısırlaştırmak için bazı gıdalara belirli kimyasallar konulmaktadır.

İnsanın cinsel tercihlerini değiştiren bazı katkı maddeleri gıdaların içerisine koyulmaktadır.

Derin devlet, bildiklerini konuşmaması için pek çok kişinin hayatına son vermiştir.

Faili meçhul cinayetlerin pek çoğunun sorumlusu, derin devletin müdahalesinden dolayı ortaya çıkartılamamaktadır.

Derin devlet, terörist faaliyetlere dair çoğu bilgiyi gizlemektedir.

Derin devlet, stratejik nedenlerden ötürü bazı terörist faaliyetlerin gerçekleşmesine izin verir.

Üst düzey politikacılar, utanç verici olayları halktan gizlemek için bazı insanların ölümünde rol oynamışlardır.

İnsanı insan yapan özelliklere karşı mücadele veren ve insanları robotlaştıran gizli çalışmalar vardır.

Yapay zekâ teknolojisi gizli amaçlar için insanların üzerinde test edilmektedir.

Zihin kontrol yolu ile bizi sürekli denetlemek isteyen gruplar vardır.

Yeni ilaçlar üretmek için halk üzerinde halkın bilgisi ve rızası olmadan gizlice deneyler gerçekleştirilir.

Bazı yabancılar dernek ve vakıf gibi kuruluşlar altında, bulundukları ülkeyi sömürme amaçlarını gizlemektedir.

Yabancılar yerli sermayenin gelişimini engellemek için gizli çabalar sarf etmektedir.

Türkiye'de petrol ve bor gibi madenlerin çıkartılması bazı yabancılar tarafından gizlice engellenmektedir.

Yabancı kurum ve kuruluşlara güvenmemek daima dikkatli olmak gerekmektedir.

Research Article

Strategies of Refugee Children in Response to Ethnic Categorization and Social Exclusion in Konya

Gamze KAÇAR TUNÇ[1] , Fuat GÜLLÜPINAR[2]

[1]Asst. Prof. Dr., Karamanoglu Mehmetbey University, Sociology Department, Karaman, Türkiye
[2]Prof. Dr., Anadolu University, Sociology Department, Eskişehir, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Gamze Kaçar Tunç
E-mail : gamzekt@kmu.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we focus on how refugee children from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan resettled in Konya, Turkey, use coping strategies in response to the ethnic categorization and exclusion policies of the local population. Employing ethnographic methodology combined with grounded theory, we conducted participant observations, as well as in–depth interviews with 65 refugee children. The family members of the children, as well as the local population, were also within the scope of the study. Furthermore, we conducted extensive interviews and observations in two different religious secondary schools attended by refugees. We aimed to understand their local experiences and intergroup relations by expanding the field. As a result, we observed that these children resisted societal pressure by developing various coping strategies such as emphasizing Muslim identity, attending schools as spaces for socializing, choosing to speak Turkish, standing with the strong, and building shared enjoyment or joining existing ones. These findings show that the refugee children do not passively submit to the conditions they find themselves in and do not simply embrace the impositions of power as they are.

Keywords: refugee children, social exclusion, ethnic identity, coping strategy, ethnography, Turkey

1. Introduction

Konya is a city that hosts many refugees from various countries. We conducted an ethnographic study focusing on the daily experiences of Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, and Sudanese refugee children living in a multi–ethnic area of this city. During the study, we observed tensions between the local population and refugee groups and children. Despite frequent daily encounters, close relationships were limited, influenced by widespread prejudice and often leading to the social exclusion of the refugees. We noted that exclusion and marginalization were primarily based on ethnic identities of the refugees. In this article, we discuss the strategies refugee children develop to counter prejudice and social exclusion related to their ethnic identities and how they position themselves within society.

Displacement poses significant challenges for migrants, especially children. Due to their age, children are often excluded from decision–making processes, increasing their susceptibility to exploitation. Research shows that after resettlement, refugee children and their families face economic difficulties, obstacles in accessing education and healthcare, and a lack of adequate social support, often due to discrimination during their adaptation to new cultures and living conditions (Al–Shatanawi, et al., 2023; Behrendt, Lietaert, Bal, & Deluyn, 2024; Thorleifsson, 2014).

Furthermore, ethnic relations and identity are frequently examined in migration studies to understand the dynamics between newcomers and locals. Refugee children, as members of an ethnic minority, often confront stigmatized ethnic identities in their new environment (Eroğlu, 2020). Thus, confronting and constructing their ethnic identity is crucial for their integration (Doğan & Buz, 2022; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Therefore, closely monitoring the experiences of children after they resettle and developing solutions for potential issues are essential for successful integration and the protection of children's rights.

On the other hand, refugee children do not remain passive and develop their own coping strategies to address social challenges. According to Benson, Sun, Hodge, and Androff (2012), younger refugees demonstrate higher coping skills. Other studies have also indicated that despite migration difficulties and traumatic events, children are more successful in coping and adapting (Groark, Sclare, & Raval, 2010; Kurt Akkoyun, 2020).

Coping generally refers to individuals' cognitive and behavioral responses to manage challenging situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Parker & Endler, 1992). In social psychology, these responses are often called strategies. De Certeau (2011, p. 50–54), however, distinguishes between tactics and strategies. According to him, strategies directly aim at gaining power or resisting authority to protect themselves from oppression, while tactics are integrated into daily life, allowing actors to exercise agency by interpreting rules and situations differently. Our research found that in response to ethnic discrimination, the refugee children both engage in strategies to gain power and use covert methods de Certeau calls tactics. Therefore, consistent with the literature, we use the term coping strategy to include both tactics and broader strategies.

According to the coping literature, the most commonly used successful strategies that children use to counter stress factors include avoiding negative situations or thoughts (Behrendt et al., 2024; Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Mooren, 2016); attending school (Al–Shatanawi et al., 2023); praying or relying on religious faith (Al–Shatanawi et al., 2023; Benson et al., 2012); and socializing with peers and receiving support from friends, family, other refugee groups, and the local community (Daud, Klinteberg, & Rydelius, 2008; Sleijpen et al., 2016). Negative coping methods include violence, social isolation, and drug use (Alzoubi, Al–Smadi, & Gougazeh, 2019; Finklestein, Laufer, & Solomon, 2012; Small, Kim, & Mengo, 2017).

Many studies, both in Turkey and around the world, have approached coping strategies from a psychological perspective (see Arenliu, Weine, Bertelsen, Saad, & Abdulaziz, 2020; Behrendt et al., 2024; Coşgun, 2019; Esenoğlu, 2021; Groark et al., 2010; Kok, Khor, Hon, & van Schalkwyk, 2021; Kurt Akkoyun, 2020; Leppna & Szente, 2013). Additionally, those studies have primarily focused on Syrian refugee children. Our study aims to contribute to filling this gap by not only focusing on Syrian children but also by trying to understand children within the context of their entire social relationships rather than individually. Our study, unlike others, focuses on social relationships and identity interactions. We discuss how children cope with challenges in their social relationships because such challenges after resettlement are significant for social integration and identity construction (Tippens, 2016; UNHCR et al., 2022). Although host countries claim to prioritize the best interests of refugee children, relationships between groups often have a more decisive impact on children's experiences (Kok et al., 2021). Support from family, peers, neighbors, and teachers is vital for adapting to a new society and building resilience (Sarıpınar, 2019; Sleijpen et al., 2016; UNHCR, 1994).

We examined the children's coping strategies from a social and cultural perspective, particularly regarding ethnic identity. We visited their residential areas and observed their ethnic relationships in neighborhoods, parks, and schools. Through interviews, we aimed to understand their experiences and responses to counter exclusionary attitudes, thereby

addressing the gap in the literature on micro–social relationships. This research focuses on the transformation of ethnic identity within children's experiences and highlights such transformation as a strategy. Hence, our research question can be summarized as follows: What is the role of ethnic identity in the experiences of Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, and Sudanese refugee children in Konya? What coping strategies do refugee children develop in response to negative judgements of their ethnic identity?

In the subsequent sections of this article, we will first briefly discuss ethnic group identity and children's ethnic identity constructions, and then we will delve into the methods and techniques employed during the research. Then, we will relate and discuss the findings in connection with the existing literature.

2. Ethnic Group Identity and Inter–Group Relations

Ethnic group identity, traditionally rooted in primordial attributes such as shared ancestry, language, religion, and culture (Geertz, 1963), has been scrutinized by numerous theorists who emphasize its construction through social relationships, often involving power and interest dynamics (Chandra, 2006; James, 1989). Consequently, the differentiation of ethnic groups and the attitudes and discourses developed toward each other are posited to emerge not solely from inherent characteristics but from inter–group relationships and expectations. In this context, it is noteworthy that groups engage in a process of mutual categorization, constructing their ethnic identities through these interactions (Barth, 1994). Thus, ethnic groups, echoing Tajfel and Turner's (1986, p. 283) perspective, serve not only as social categories but also embody a distinct form of social identity. Membership in a group, whether voluntary or assigned, entails specific identity for its participants. Thus, it can be asserted that individuals—voluntarily or involuntarily—participate in the dynamics of these groups in their social interactions.

The judgments, attitudes, and behaviors of ethnic groups exhibit toward one another are directly related to their social distance. According to Allport's (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory, the more prevalent prejudices and lack of contact between groups are, the greater the social distance between them. Consequently, as contact between groups increases and they come together around common goals or gain shared identities, this distance can be bridged. Although many studies support Allport's claim (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Selvanathan, Techakesari, Tropp, & Barlow, 2018), some argue that overcoming social distance is a particularly arduous process and that suitable conditions for groups to interact without prejudice are not always met (Fırat & Ataca, 2020).

Narrowing the focus to local residents' perspectives and immigrants/refugees, it can be argued that the securitization of immigrants/refugees and the fear of losing one's societal position among the local population incite hostility toward immigrants (Bauman, 2016, 2017; Paerregaard, 2019). In this case, overcoming this negative attitude, often described as xenophobia, is not always easy. Moreover, a single negative incident between ethnic groups can snowball, increasing the distance between them and making it easier for the more powerful group to exclude the other (Pettigrew, 1998). The rapidly growing tensions between local populations and refugee groups both in Turkey and around the world exemplify this phenomenon.

On the other hand, ethnic identity is often used interchangeably with national identity. This stems from the claim that nation–states share a common belief in ancestry or are built around a dominant ethnic identity (Hobsbawm, 1990; Wimmer & Glick–Schiller, 2002). This situation gives rise to distinctions between *original owners* and *others*, creating majority and minority groups within the country. The transformation of immigrants and refugees into minority groups is also a consequence of this phenomenon.

The characteristic imparting an ethnic character to groups can be chosen by the group's members or emphasized by others. For instance, individuals valuing their national identity may be highlighted more for their Muslim identity in the West, causing their other identities to become momentarily invisible. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), the attitude of majority society toward other groups or intergroup conflicts can lead these groups to cling more to their identities. The increase in claims for rights based on identity can also be attributed to this phenomenon (Yinger, 1997). However, the advantages and disadvantages of a prominently featured identity may lead to either adherence to or rejection of that identity. A more opportunistic approach is possible in this regard (Hechter, 1986; Hobsbawm, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

2.1. Children and Ethnic Identity

Analyzing inter–ethnic relations in a society is crucial for predicting whether social harmony or conflict will arise. In this regard, studies focusing on post–migration experiences have frequently explored ethnic group relations. However, the role of children in these discussions has long been obscured. Yet ethnicity as an identity is not a sole concern for adults. As belonging to an ethnic group often occurs through ascription, children inherit the identity of a particular

ethnic group from birth based on their parents' affiliations. Consequently, a child instantly inherits the history, pains, and aspirations of the group into which they are born (Grosby, 1994). Like every member, children also bear a share of intergroup conflicts.

The emphasis on highlighting the agency of children in structure–agency debates and acknowledging that children are individuals who are not only affected by but also influence the social world through their interpretations has gained prominence, particularly in the last two decades (Corsaro, 2005). Recent research has shown that children begin constructing their ethnic identity at a very young age, and this process significantly influences the attitudes that they develop toward each other, especially in local and refugee/immigrant child contexts. For instance, Oppenchaim and Thalineau (2023), in their research with children aged 7–8, observed that the meaning of French identity for children is socially constructed and intricately linked to power relationships. Veerman and Platt (2021), as well as Verkuyten and Thijs (2002), concluded that not only parents but also neighbors, teachers, and even school curricula play a significant role in constructing ethnic identities for children. Consequently, various segments of society, ranging from broader to narrower contexts, exert considerable influence on children's identity construction. This research stands out by focusing on the role of refugee children in power dynamics arising from identity constructions and by emphasizing the agency of children.

For many refugee children, the significance of ethnic identity in their social lives begins after migration when the local population exhibits negative attitudes toward their or their families' ethnic identities (Eroğlu, 2022). This confrontation can be particularly pronounced and painful for refugee children during adolescence. For refugee children, who are generally in the process of developing their identities, forced migration means dealing with the traumas they have experienced, adapting to a new society, and striving to develop a successful identity (Doğan & Buz, 2020). The need for self–recognition, validation, and a sense of belonging is greater in this group, making it crucial to focus on the experiences of adolescent refugees. Adolescents, compared to younger children, have the capacity to recognize and evaluate group identities and the positive and negative judgments attached to these identities by other groups (Phinney et al., 2001). Thus, their attitudes toward their ethnic identity vary depending on their experiences and coping strategies. This study examines the relationship between ethnic identity and refugee children aged 12 to 17 years.

3. Method

This study was conducted through a synthesis of the methodological stances of ethnography and grounded theory. To gain a deep understanding of and explain refugee children's experiences and social relations, it is essential to know the children and their lives intimately (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, we designed an ethnographic research approach closely related to the field. In anthropology, understanding each culture or community's experiences in their own context, known as the emic perspective, is also necessary for understanding refugee children. Barth's emphasis on the fact that even if the identity names of the same ethnic group remain the same when they come together with different groups in different geographies, their ways of life often change, is noteworthy here. It is quite natural that the experiences of a Syrian or Sudanese child after forced migration are influenced by the people they interact with daily or the socio–cultural dynamics of the neighborhood they reside in. We believe that this local perspective is essential for a close understanding of groups.

In addition to ethnography, there are several reasons why we also adopted grounded theory. First, we prioritized data rather than starting from a specific theoretical perspective (Charmaz, 2014). This approach aims to open the field to all possibilities for researchers rather than interpreting it according to a specific theoretical framework. Therefore, we adopted grounded theory as another research strategy (Glaser & Strauss, 2006 [1967]). In this way, we started with what the field suggested and by discussing the literature together with our findings, we reached our conclusions. Second, grounded theory has strategies for modeling a theory based on data, whereas ethnography provides the in–depth and long–digested data that grounded theory needs. Third, grounded theory becomes a valuable research guide when dealing with large amounts of data obtained through ethnography, allowing for more focused and planned data analysis when necessary (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Finally, the flexible and descriptive nature of ethnography helps soften the sometimes-static nature of grounded theory. These reasons enabled us to combine the strengths of grounded theory and ethnography and tolerate their weaknesses (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2007).

Our ethnographic stance was predominated when accessing participants and collecting data. However, grounded theory came into play when making strategic decisions, such as deciding on new research areas, delimiting participant groups, and analyzing and interpreting data. Thus, we conducted a flexible and strategically focused study.

3.1. The field

The field research was conducted in four adjacent neighborhoods of Konya, a city located in central Turkey and one of the cities with the highest number of migrants and refugees in the country (GİB, 2023). Konya is a city with a developed industry and agriculture, making it open to labor migration. Additionally, as a city with significant religious conservatism, the idea of *religious brotherhood* initially ensured that immigrants from Muslim countries in the Middle East were mostly welcomed with tolerance (Koyuncu, 2014). The studied neighborhoods are in the city center and close to tourist attractions. During the research process, it was observed that these neighborhoods were shared by locals. The refugees frequently encountered locals—and even tourists—in their daily lives, indicating that these neighborhoods were not secluded or closed spaces.

Throughout the research period, in the four neighborhoods visited, refugees from the countries we could reach and more, internal migrants from the eastern and southeastern regions of the country, those who had immigrated from different countries many years ago and settled here, recently increasing Roma and Abdal groups,[1] and a few local groups who have been living in Konya for generations all lived together. During the research process, we always tried to understand the relationships that children established with other ethnic groups. Therefore, in this study, we included not only the refugee children but also their parents, schoolteachers, and local adults and children—specifically Turkish, Roma, Abdal, and Kurdish individuals—who frequently interacted with the refugee children in the neighborhoods. At the same time, places can tell us a lot about children and their practices. Thus, neighborhood streets, the children's homes, neighborhood parks, aid centers, and two middle schools located in the area were intensively observed in the field.

3.2. The Fieldwork Process

The researcher[2] visited four neighborhoods in the center of Konya, which are located side by side and have a high concentration of refugees, frequently over a period of 11 months between May 2019 and April 2020. The most important techniques used in this process were participant and non–participant observations and in–depth interviews, which are essential for ethnographic research. Focus group discussions were also used when necessary.

Our main target population was refugee children aged 12–17 from any nationality living in the research field. Sixty–five children from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan were included as participants. Holding temporary protection status (the Syrian children) and conditional refugee status (the Afghan, Iraqi, Sudanese children) and living in Konya with their families, these children were awaiting either return to their home countries or resettlement in a third country.[3] They did not have a permanent status, yet many had been living in Turkey for several years. Except for three Afghan families who settled in the city 2–6 months ago, the asylum experiences of the others in the country ranged from 2 to 8 years.

Some aid organizations and soup kitchens that the refugees frequently visit were our locations for access to the field. The time the researcher spent here provided opportunities for observation, meeting potential participants, and communication. Instead of directly contacting the children, she first contacted their families and obtained their consent. This approach built trust, provided prior knowledge about the child, and facilitated the conversation with the child. Before the interviews, she met the children and informed them about the research, emphasizing the importance of their individual consent for participation.

To ensure adequate representation of the groups, we aimed to reach at least 10 children from each refugee group included in the research, and we stopped looking for new participants when the data had reached sufficient saturation. The researcher visited the homes of each participant child and conducted face–to–face in–depth interviews with 16 Afghan (2 Pashtun, 6 Hazara, 5 Tajik, 3 Uzbek), 20 Syrian (Arab), 24 Iraqi (7 Turkmen, 17 Arab), and 5 Sudanese (Arab) children. The small number of Sudanese people in Konya compared to other groups limited the number of Sudanese participants. Nevertheless, we included these interviews as important data sources because they are representative of the field. The researcher also interviewed at least one of each child's parents (50 adults in total).

The children's experiences and relations with different ethnic groups, both local and foreign, living in the study area were the focus of the fieldwork. This led to the diversification of the participants. Thus, during the research process, 12 children and 18 adults from the local community, including Turks, Kurds, Roma, and Abdal individuals living in the same neighborhoods, were included in the study. The researcher conducted in–depth interviews with each participant in various locations, sometimes in their homes and sometimes in public spaces in the neighborhood. She spent two months in two religious (*imam hatip*) secondary schools where refugees attend intensively and conducted interviews with 27 teachers. Six focus group discussions were also held with 41 refugee students from all three countries mentioned above.

3.3. Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using the theoretical analysis method of grounded theory, incorporating data analysis from the moment data collection began (Charmaz, 2014; Emerson et al., 1995). All the data gathered from various segments of the society revealed the everyday experiences and interactions of the refugee children in a multi–ethnic society. Due to space constraints, this text focuses solely on the daily strategies these children employ as they establish themselves in society and encounter power dynamics. In the following section, we discuss these strategies. We used pseudonyms for the participating children whose statements are described below.

4. Findings and Discussion: Strategies Against Ethnicization

During our observations and interviews, we observed that the social pressure and exclusion experienced by the refugee children were primarily based on their ethnic identities. Most of the refugee children were unaware of the profound significance of being Syrian or Iraqi in their lives before migrating. Nor could they fully anticipate being deprived of many of their fundamental rights when crossing borders. Geographical displacement rendered ethnic identities highly relevant, while at other times, they were relatively unimportant (Bauman, 2014).

We observed that each child was ethnically categorized and excluded based on these identities, especially by the local children. Instead of being recognized for their individual traits or other types of group identities, they were primarily classified as Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, and Sudanese instead of migrant, foreign, or refugee adjectives. Thus, even though they might not self–identify as such, they become natural members of a group, often marginalized or unwanted. These dynamics were accompanied by a distinction between *hosting* and *guesting*. Despite their heterogeneous composition, when it came to refugees, the local population perceived themselves as a homogeneous group—the host of the city and the country. For instance, in terms of power hierarchy, the Roma and Abdal communities, positioned at the bottom rung of the society, exhibited a considerable level of intolerance toward newcomers, often employing the rhetoric of "*This is our home!*" most vocally. In particular, reactions toward the refugee children by the Roma and Abdal children often escalated to physical violence in Konya. This can be observed in neighborhood streets, parks, and schools.

Among the children, those who were primarily of Afghan origin had previously become aware of the burdens that came with being Afghan; most of them, except for a few, were born and raised in Iran and had their first experience of displacement there. As a result, during the research process, we observed that they were quite cautious and reserved as a strategy compared to the others, as if they were trying not to attract attention within the community. There was no possibility for them to return to their home country, but for others, if everything improved, they could return to their homeland.

The children's discourse and everyday experiences clearly demonstrated where they placed themselves. When facing discrimination, they were compelled to hold onto their group identities and defend their rights based on these identities (Goulbourne, Reynolds, Solomos, & Zontini, 2010). This was sometimes in the form of a separate positioning, such as for Syrians or Iraqis,[4] and sometimes in the form of unification around an Arab or Persian identity. For example, although ethnic and class divisions between Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazaras in Afghanistan occasionally became more accentuated, in Konya they were united under their nationality and supported each other. In some cases, regardless of ethnic identity, all refugee children were aware that they were part of a common group and perceived themselves as unwanted by the host community.

Nevertheless, during the research process, we also noticed that these children were not confined to these foregrounded ethnic identities, and they questioned their societal positions through their different identities and experiences. We found that they employed certain strategies during their integration into the society and in their interactions with power. The children managed to preserve a part of themselves from the oppression of power, created a space where they could exercise their agency to some extent, and sometimes challenged the rules of power through specific strategies and games (de Certeau, 2011). Additionally, although they shared many similarities, we also found that they did not undergo identical experiences. According to the research findings on how children navigate this ethnicization process and attempt to carve out a space for themselves within the society, the following headings can be mentioned.

4.1. Emphasizing Muslim identity

All the refugee children emphasized their Muslim identity, which they enjoyed highlighting. This was because it created a sense of commonality with the local community, allowing them to become a part of the power. While some studies have mentioned spirituality and worship as the most important coping strategies (Abraham, Lien, & Hanssen, 2018; Alzoubi et al., 2019; Benson et al., 2012), here, the refugee children's approach to religion was more about shared identity. Islam was the primary reason that many of their parents chose Konya as their settlement destination. Some

studies have indicated that the chosen city influences the religious attitudes of refugees and migrants (Akkır, 2019). In this sense, Konya, with its religiously conservative atmosphere, contributed to the reinforcement of religious beliefs. It was the easiest way for the refugee children to establish connections with their local communities. For example, Afghan–Tajik Zeynep (F, 12–year–old, 6m)[5] felt safer when she received a response to her religious greeting from Turkish children playing in the street:

> "It had been about a month since I came here. We went outside, and a few kids were playing with a ball on the street. I said, 'Selamun Aleykum,' and they replied, 'Aleykum selam.' I was happy. I asked my aunt how they understood me, and she said, 'They're Muslims, just like us'."

During the summer months when schools were closed, mosques became significant gathering places for children, often guided by their families (Güdürü, 2021). According to Goodall (2015) and Martinez and Sarmiento (2022), religious communities and centers are important places where refugees can find support. In neighborhoods, mosques can be cited as examples of such religious organizations in terms of their functions. On the other hand, according to Güdürü's (2021) research conducted in different cities in Turkey, refugee children struggle in Quran courses because of language and cultural differences and are often excluded by local children and parents because of their ethnic identities. However, our field observations revealed that both refugee and local children found an environment where they could come together for Quranic reading and religious education. Additionally, the concept of brotherhood in Islam provides a conducive atmosphere for children to become acquainted with each other. Furthermore, for Arabic–speaking children, the ability to read Arabic texts more comfortably created a space for self–expression. Therefore, going to a mosque, showcasing their religious skills, and emphasizing their Muslim identity became an important existential strategy for them. For instance, Sudanese Idris (M, 12–year–old, 5y)[6] explained that the children in the neighborhood had become accustomed to him during the Quranic reading course, and they no longer teased him about his skin color:

> "Now I am going to the Quran course. My mom told me to go every year, but I hadn't gone before. I started this summer... but it's nice. I love it. Now, I'm getting along better with the kids from the neighborhood. They don't tease me at all, and I enjoy going to the course."

However, it can be argued that while the concept of Islam and religious brotherhood retained its significance for refugee children and adults, it had lost its meaning for the local population.

4.2. Attending Schools as Spaces for Socializing

Schools, rather than just providing education, served as a means for refugee children to venture outside their homes, socialize, interact with local children and adults, learn the language, and acquire a student status, allowing them to obtain an identity beyond their ethnic background (Arıcıoğlu & Avcı, 2021). Schools have provided safe spaces for the refugee children to engage with the local community and have facilitated their inclusion in social networks alongside their student identities (Guo, Maitra, & Guo et al., 2019; Matthews, 2008). For family members as well, the student status of their children offered them an opportunity to build social capital through interactions with teachers, school administrators, and other parents.

We observed that many children had limited experiences outside their home, especially during their early days in the city, unless they were working. This was sometimes due to the family's protective attitude, and at other times, it was due to language barriers and a sense of foreignness. However, school played a significant role in introducing children to the outside world and facilitating their socialization. The primary reason for the children to attend school was to meet up with their friends. In fact, they did not like it when schools closed for holidays. Raziye (F, 13–year–old, 4y), an Iraqi, was a cheerful child with a fluent Turkish accent and an outgoing personality. When discussing how she spent her time, she expressed her dislike for schools being closed:

> "I'm very happy at school because I have my friends there. I'm talking to everyone, Turkish, Kurdish, Abdal, Syrian, you name it. I get along with everyone. We can spend the whole day together. It's quite bad when schools are closed. Even if I go outside, there aren't many friends around, and I get very bored."

There were variations in experiences according to gender. Boys had more freedom to experience the outside world than girls; therefore, they knew the city (at least their immediate neighborhood) better and encountered more people of different ethnic groups. For boys, going outside was generally not a problem for their families, except for some security concerns. However, girls adhered to the spatial and temporal limitations imposed by their families (Löw, 2016). The association of women with the private sphere in society also influenced the experiences and identity formation of refugee girls (Abraham et al., 2018). They began to embrace a form of femininity deemed appropriate by their families and group cultures. As highlighted in previous research in Turkey, the risk of early marriage increased, especially after menstruation, and the refugee girls were often confined to domestic life, preventing them from socializing (Bircan &

Sunata, 2015; Seta & Theirworld, 2017). The best place that allowed them to go outside was school. Therefore, those who could attend school were considered fortunate.

The school had transformed into the most conducive space for girls' socialization. The education allowance provided by the Ministry of Education (slightly more for girls) encouraged families, particularly sending their daughters to school (Serim, 2019). Many female students saw this as the sole reason why their fathers allowed them to go to school. The Syrian families especially exhibited a more conservative attitude toward the socialization and education of their daughters. For instance, during one of the focus group discussions with some Syrian children, the following conversation took place between two female students:

> *Meryem (F, 13–year–old, 5y)*: "My father didn't want to send me to school, but I think he allows me to come because they [the government] give money. Otherwise, he wouldn't send me."

> *Sara (F, 13–year–old, 5y):* "Yeah. In our families, they usually don't send girls to school, but I don't think they will send us to high school either."

4.3. Choosing to Speak Turkish

Among all the strategies, one factor was even more influential: speaking Turkish. For those at the beginning of their experience in Turkey, this was challenging, but those who had spent some time and learned the language preferred to speak only Turkish to avoid revealing their ethnic identities to those in power. For example, the Syrian and Iraqi children could not conceal their attributed Syrian identity among those who knew them, but when they were out in public, they spoke Turkish and tried to behave like local children to avoid being identified as outsiders. This strategy was developed in response to the pressure of authority. Seniha (F, 13–year–old, 3y), a Syrian, explained that she never experienced any difficulties outside because she and her siblings spoke Turkish:

> "We don't experience any bad things outside because we speak Turkish. When we walk along the street, we never speak Arabic. We speak Turkish so that the Gypsies will not treat us badly or bother us. When they realize that we are Syrians, they start bothering us. But if they think we are Turkish, they don't do anything."

Even though Hazara, Uzbek, and Sudanese children spoke the language fluently, hiding their identities was impossible because of their phenotypic features. However, among them, those who spoke Turkish well still preferred to speak Turkish outside. According to Sudanese Maria (F, 16–year–old, 6y), this was a way of saying, "*Look, I'm not different from you, if we speak, we can understand each other*".

Chambers (1994, p. 45–50) asserted that language and history are processes that operate independently of us; therefore, our identities are complex and structured. Recognizing this reminds individuals that there are other possibilities and allows them to see other stories in their narrative. Language, of course, is not a certain way to transcend identity and reach power (Fanon, 2008), but as Chambers advises, the refugee children realized how much their identities were dependent on external factors and how much they were trying to function against their will. Being able to speak Turkish helped them to lessen the emphasis on forced identities. Iraqi Nur (F, 6–year–old, 6y) questioned identity divisions while also discussing the contributions of speaking Turkish to her *Turkification*:

> "I don't want to be this or that. (. . .) Being Iraqi is sometimes a problem here, but I think I can overcome those problems by speaking Turkish. At least I can express myself. I can explain my ideas. The problem is not that I am an Iraqi, I was not born here. I am a foreigner. Everything was difficult before I spoke Turkish. Then I felt like a foreigner too, but now I don't."

Speaking Turkish was also perceived among refugee children as a means to acquire status, advance in class, and get closer to the powerful. This perception extended to make fun of those who did not have a full command of the language or who struggled with its usage. For instance, during a focus group discussion with Syrian students, despite their limited proficiency, the children insisted on speaking Turkish. Subsequently, chuckles and laughter were directed at those with imperfect Turkish.

Moreover, children who were fluent in Turkish spoke Turkish with their siblings even at home. Syrian sisters Hayal (F, 12–year–old, 4y) and Farah (F, 14–year–old, 4y) said they felt more Turkish in this way. Hayal spoke very little Arabic, and Turkish had substituted her mother tongue as follows:

> "I express myself more easily by speaking Turkish. My sister translates my conversations with my mother. I mean, even if I say three or five sentences, I always use Turkish words. (. . .) You know, for me, Turkish is my mother tongue, and Arabic is like a second language. I think it is about where you grow up. I feel more Turkish now."

Hayal's statement questioned the place of identity and the emphasis on the mother tongue. For these children, speaking Turkish had not only become a daily life strategy but also showed them (and us) how fluid identities can be.

Finally, those who could not speak Turkish were creating micro spaces with other group members where they could

sustain their daily lives without the need for language (e.g., extended family networks, ethnic markets, etc.). Although they did not have the power to fulfill all their interests overall, they were able to perform their daily practices in these confined spaces. We can also interpret those who were learning Turkish and those who preferred to speak it as those whose interests and desires were growing within the dominant structure (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

4.4. Standing with the Strong: Excluding the Roma and Abdal Communities

The Roma and Abdal children were also marginalized groups in the society. They were concerned that their societal status would be further destabilized with the arrival of newcomers, and they exhibited the most discriminatory attitudes toward the new "others" within the community (Gencer, 2019; Paerregaard, 2019). Simultaneously, they attempted to align themselves with the dominant white Turkish identity to stand with the powerful. In a similar vein, the refugee children were aware that these groups did not have a good reputation in society and, as a strategy, distanced themselves from these groups to feel closer to the Turks. This situation often resulted in violence between the refugee and the Roma/Abdal children. During the times of conflict, the refugee children positioned themselves as part of a collective whole rather than segregating themselves based on their specific ethnicities or country of origin. Emir (M, 14–year–old, 6y), a Sudanese, thought that a Syrian boy in one of the neighborhoods had been stabbed by those children, and as he recounted the incident, he ceased to be a Sudanese and became just one of the foreigners in the city:

> "For example, a friend of mine here, a Syrian, 17 years old, was stabbed to death. My friends told me about it, and I also saw it on the TV news. I mean, those who stabbed him were younger than him. They wanted to take his belongings, and when he refused, they stabbed him and ran away. They were Gypsies. (...) Actually, I don't know him, but he is like us; a foreigner."

The refugee children had chosen to exclude the Roma and the Abdal just as they had been excluded by the authorities. As Allport (1954) suggested, for the refugee children, just like for the Roma and Abdal children, having a common enemy with the authority group could help bridge social distancing. When we examined Turkish children, we often observed that they supported the Roma and Abdal children, but when they had an issue with them, they appeared to support the refugee children. On the other hand, it was evident in the research that the Turkish student population in the research schools and neighborhoods gradually decreased. Therefore, encounters and mandatory interactions between the Roma, Abdal, and refugee populations were more frequent throughout the day.

The prominence of the children's ethnic identities primarily occurred when they faced discrimination or xenophobia. Schools were particularly significant sites where this phenomenon was evident (Ersoy & Turan, 2019). The schools in the field were predominantly attended by refugee children, and the limited number of local children delayed their integration, leading to the conversion of these schools into essentially refugee schools. The high number of the refugee children within the schools not only caused discomfort for the local students and teachers but also disrupted the educational processes of all involved. Factors such as refugee children conversing in their own languages, increased clustering, and teachers struggling to deliver the same curriculum to both local and refugee children contributed to the foregrounding of the children's ethnic identities, both for local and refugee children (Göktuna Yaylacı, Serpil, & Yaylacı, 2017; Sarman, 2022).

The media also influenced the children's experiences in schools and on the streets. Anti–immigrant discourses appearing in the media quickly found resonance within the schools and the streets (Burnett, 2013; Windle, 2017; cf. Pinson & Arnot, 2010). Apart from such situations, they were not inclined to define themselves solely by their ethnic identities or hold them tightly. On the contrary, they exhibited a positive attitude toward Turks who occupied the top of the power hierarchy. In fact, most families encouraged their children to do so. Particularly after becoming friends, they had no issues with local children (and even the Roma and Abdal children). Factors contributing to these friendships included attending the same school (despite some difficulties), speaking Turkish, and engaging in shared games. Team sports, in particular, have proven highly effective in breaking down identity barriers and fostering a friendly environment (Çağış, 2022).

4.5. Standing with the Strong: Avoiding Syrian Identity

In their experiences in Konya, the children were predominantly associated with their ethnic identities, often involuntarily. Defending their ethnic identity as a strategy was not always comfortable, and this was particularly evident among the Syrian children. When it came to migrants or refugees, the Syrians were the first group that came to mind, resulting in them being subjected to various negative stereotypes. It had reached a point where being labeled as Syrian began to greatly discomfort the children because being called Syrian also meant being labeled as "lazy," "dirty," "quarrelsome," "errand boy," or "undesirable" (Erdoğan, 2022). Hacer (F, 13–year–old, 3y) described how both she and her friends felt uncomfortable being called Syrian and how they responded to the situation:

"They are always shouting 'Syrian, Syrian'. I hate this word. Do I tell you to come here by calling you Turks or gypsies? My friends get angry too. The other day we were walking on the street, we were going to school, we were chatting at work and an aunt shouted from the window, 'Syrian, hey you, Syrian'. It's like it's written on my forehead that I am Syrian. I said, 'What's wrong, aunt?' She said something I didn't understand. Then I realized she was pointing at the underwear on the ground. I think she was saying, 'Hand it to me'. I was going to throw it, but my friend told me not to. She got angry because this woman had said Syrian. We didn't give it to her, she said something behind us, but we didn't understand it anyway."

Tajfel (1974, p. 69¬–70) discusses that the tendency to disengage from one group and seek a place for oneself in another group when evaluating intragroup relations and social identity is proportionally related to the positive contribution of the new group to one's social identity. When the group they belong to does not provide them with the desired satisfaction, individuals begin to seek it in other groups. The negative atmosphere developing in society toward Syrian identity often led Afghan, Iraqi, and Sudanese children to avoid Syrian children and instead adopt a strategy of trying to befriend Turkish children. In fact, the Syrian children have also tried to establish local friendships as much as possible and distance themselves from the Syrian label. Making Turkish friends was seen as a form of social advancement at one point. Betül (F, 14–year–old, 5y) was like a local child with fluent Turkish. She had just completed middle school. Betül explained that she had to choose between her Syrian and Turkish friends when speaking about her school friends:

"There were some Syrians in the class, but I did not really communicate with them. It's not because there was a problem, but the Syrians created their own environment in our school. They do not have a great relationship with Turks. So, I chose my Turkish friends. I had no communication with them [the Syrians]. (...) Even for the teachers, I was like a Turkish student."

There was also competition between the Syrians and the Afghans. Even if they lived in the same neighborhood, they tried to live a distant social life. However, school brought all the children together, even if only for necessity. The fact that the Afghan children were fewer in number, were new to the city than the Syrians, had a more temporary legal status than the Syrians, and spoke a different language than Arabs pushed them to the bottom of the hierarchy. Although the Syrian children never mentioned it, the Afghan children often said that they could not get along with the Syrian children and that they were mistreated. Physical violence was frequently employed among refugee children, particularly by Syrian children, to attain power in society or as a way of expressing themselves, just as it was observed among the Roma and Abdal children (Arıcıoğlu & Avcı, 2021).

4.6. Building Shared Enjoyment or Joining Existing Ones

We frequently encountered refugee and local children playing football while walking along the streets. Engaging in the sports that the local children enjoyed, playing the same games as them, and achieving success in school competitions were important ways for the refugee children to make friends with the local ones and to carve out a place for themselves. For example, football opened an important door for the boys to build friendships with the local children. When successful in this area, they became sought–after players in team sports. Bora (2014, p. 14) asks what is within football beyond the number of goals scored and who the winner is, emphasizing that football has meaning in and of itself. In this research, we also observed that football had a magical effect of bringing together children from diverse groups. Although the refugee children did not know Turkish and the local children did not know Arabic or Farsi, they met and communicated in the common language of football. Ali (M, 13–year–old, 9m), an Afghan–Tajik, could not speak Turkish yet, but he had quickly formed friendships with the local children. When we asked him how he had met his new friends, he replied that he liked football:

"While I was at school here, during break time, my friends were playing football in the courtyard. I was watching them, and the ball came to my feet, so I passed it. Then they told me to be come and play with them. After that, when I played well, they always wanted to play with me [he was also smiling and straightening his shoulders as he spoke]. My Turkish friends encourage me and say, 'You're playing well.'... It's better now [compared to the life in Iran]."

According to Elsner (2014, p. 30), football requires interpersonal collaboration; therefore, strong communication is essential for the success of a game. The refugee children who could play football were more open to communication with the locals. The lives they built in Konya also gave them more enjoyment. Emir (M, 14–year–old, 5y) from Sudan had encountered football here. Emir described the place of football in his life as follows:

"I never thought I would love football this much. I mean, it wasn't common in Sudan. When I arrived here, I was introduced to football, and I loved it. Then we started playing outside. ... The Turks taught my brother and I how to play football. Now when I go out, I immediately gather with my friends who live around me, and we play matches."

While football has become a sport that women also play, it is deeply entrenched in male dominance (Eliasson, 2015). Therefore, we observed that girls tend to engage more in games like jump rope. The refugee children always carried the

necessary equipment for games with them, if available, and this was a strategy that attracted the local children to play with them. Zehra (F, 13–year–old, 2y), an Iraqi Turkmen, explained that she always brought her jump rope to school, and when the local Turkish and Roma girls saw her rope, they wanted to play with it:

> "Even if they don't normally talk to me, when they see the jump rope, they come over and say, 'Let's play together.' I have made a lot of friends in this way. I always carry the rope with me."

Digital games provided the children with another space where they could play together and discuss their experiences. During the research, there was a game called *PUBG* which had gained worldwide fame and popularity among the children. Regardless of gender, many of them had an idea about this game and had already played it. Sometimes, they organized with their school friends to play together, and at other times, they competed based on their scores.

Additionally, they tried to stand out with their specific talents at school, such as achieving awards in art competitions or chess tournaments, and they participated in free social activities to make themselves visible and make friends. For example, Syrian girl Hayal (F, 12–year–old, 3y) had become a devoted follower of chess lessons at the school and had won a medal in a chess tournament. This not only boosted Hayal's self–confidence but also increased her friends' interests in her.

> "I was very happy when I received the medal. The principal applauded me at school. My friends in class also applauded. Then my friends came over and congratulated me. It was very nice. After that, everyone at school started to get to know me. Now I can say I am friends with everyone."

In addition to these, supporting the same sports team, following Turkish dramas and listening to the songs of the same groups and singers were other ways in which refugee children connected with local ones. All these allowed them to build common bonds with the local children.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the role of ethnic identity in the experiences of Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, and Sudanese refugee children in Konya and their coping strategies in response to negative judgments and attitudes. Our field observations revealed that ethnic identity pervades refugee children's daily lives, often leading to discrimination. However, many instances have demonstrated that they are not suppressed by power. Refugee children develop strategies by creating micro–spaces and responding to local community rules, sometimes even to exclusionary attitudes.

Ethnic class and foreignness were identified as factors preventing refugee children from being fully accepted in society. Each child was ethnicized, thus overshadowing their other identities. Their ethnic identities had negative connotations, and local residents did not want these ethnic groups in *their homes*.

Many refugee children learned to live with their ethnic identities and reshaped their lives in the face of ethnic influence after migrating to Turkey. Negative experiences sometimes united them based on their ethnic or refugee identities, leading to a reactive attitude. They strategically chose which identity to embrace in their struggles, never rejecting their ethnic identity but questioning its negative meanings in the society. Despite early research suggesting that exclusion promotes marginalization, these children engaged in defiance rather than retreat. They were more than their ethnic identities (Kaya, 2002; Şimşek, 2016), and we can list the most important strategies that children often developed in response to exclusion, rather than clinging to these identities: emphasizing Muslim identity; using schools as spaces for socializing; choosing to speak Turkish; standing on the side of power and rejecting the other; and building shared enjoyment or joining existing ones.

These observations demonstrate us that refugee children do not passively surrender to their conditions or embrace power impositions. They seek to stand out by their distinctive characteristics and develop social capital by forming friendships with local children. According to our observations, shared experiences reduce tensions between children of different groups and increase friendships (Allport, 1954). These efforts also help their families integrate into society and improve their living conditions. Overall, we suggest that like all children, refugee children are active agents in their social relationships.

More research is needed to understand and improve the experiences of refugee children in Turkey. Our study only reflects the experiences of a few neighborhoods in Konya. Although these findings are not generalizable, they offer comparable insights for similar settings. Based on our findings, we propose the following recommendations for administrators and policymakers: consider refugee children's experiences and listen to them directly; recognize their agency and create spaces to enhance and support their strategies (e.g., strengthening language education or improving school atmosphere); provide opportunities for them to showcase their talents; organize sports and arts activities that unite refugee and local children around common goals; consider the social environment to strengthen families and communities; and prioritize small–scale, locally–driven research when developing policies. Child–centered and direct

engagement approaches, along with further research, can contribute to the well-being of refugee children and help manage social exclusion in society.

Endnotes

1. The group referred to as *Abdal* forms a sub–branch of the *gypsy community*, much like the *Roma* people. The perception of Abdals in the city indicates a lower social position than that of the Roma community.
2. The field research was conducted by the first author. The co–author contributed to the analysis of all data and provided input for the theoretical interpretations.
3. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (YUKK) was adopted in Turkey in 2013, and migration and asylum management took its current form. According to this law, the temporary protection status is defined as follows: "Foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, who are unable to return to the country from which they left, who arrive at or cross our borders en masse in search of emergency and temporary protection" (YUKK, Article 91). Syrian asylum seekers have thus been granted temporary protection status based on the principle of temporary protection.
4. Unless otherwise stated in this text, all Syrians and Iraqis should be considered to have an ethnic Arab identity.
5. (F, 12–year–old, 6m): Female, 12 years old, living in Turkey for 6 months.
6. (M, 12–year–old, 5y): Male, 12 years old, living in Turkey for 5 years.
7. Our description of the children in this way throughout the text is merely a sociological categorization. We recognize that they are more than these adjectives and are different from them.

ORCID :

Gamze KAÇAR TUNÇ   0000-0001-6291-8683
Fuat GÜLLÜPINAR   0000-0003-3661-7232

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Research Article

Resilience and Adaptation Impact of Covid-19 on Female Entrepreneurship and Motivation in Gaziantep-Türkiye

Emel TOPCU[1] ⓘ, Tuba BÜYÜKBEŞE[2] ⓘ, Ayda BAKAN[3] ⓘ

[1]Hasan Kalyoncu University, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Gaziantep, Türkiye
[2]Hasan Kalyoncu University, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Gaziantep, Türkiye
[3]Hasan Kalyoncu University, Graduate Education Institute, Gaziantep, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Emel Topcu
E-mail : emeltopcu2007@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to thoroughly investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the domestic obligations and commercial ventures of female entrepreneurs in Türkiye. Furthermore, this research aims to examine the motivational variables that propel these women at various stages of entrepreneurship: before, during, and after the pandemic. The study used a qualitative case study methodology involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a sample of 25 female entrepreneurs. The data analysis entails using MAXQDA2020 software in conjunction with hermeneutic analysis. The investigation reveals a significant surge in domestic responsibilities for entrepreneurs during the pandemic. However, there is also evidence of increased entrepreneurial motivation and reinforced dedication to their firms. To address the difficulties presented by the pandemic, these women have adopted a range of tactics, including implementation of hygiene protocols and cost-cutting measures, while also embracing digital technology solutions to a greater extent. This study, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, is unique because it focuses on female entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial motivation. This study is the first attempt to explore the entrepreneurial motivations of female entrepreneurs in different types of entrepreneurship. This study provides a new perspective for researchers in this field by synthesizing existing approaches with a hermeneutic and comparative perspective. This research significantly contributes to the realm of entrepreneurship by conducting an interpretive investigation of how the pandemic has affected female entrepreneurs' motivation and adaptive strategies. The results highlight the ability of these women to recover quickly and adjust to new circumstances, providing a vital understanding of how gender, entrepreneurship, and crisis response interact.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Turkish women entrepreneurs, business endeavors, motivational variables, entrepreneurship phases, entrepreneurial motivation, crisis reaction

1. Introduction

Over the past 4 decades, there has been a shift in the focus of entrepreneurship studies from men to women. This trend was initiated by Schwartz's influential 1976 paper titled "Entrepreneurship: A New Female Frontier." (Greene et al., 2003; McAdam, 2013). However, there is a scarcity of academic studies focused on female entrepreneurship, which is generally analyzed from a perspective that prioritizes male experiences. Substantial social and economic obstacles hinder women's involvement in entrepreneurial activities globally (Bird and Brush, 2002; Greene et al., 2003; De Bruin et al., 2007). Although there has been some research on the challenges and benefits faced by female entrepreneurs, there is still a significant lack of information, especially in developing countries where cultural norms and financial limitations hinder women's ability to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Allen and Truman, 1993; Santos and Moustafa, 2016; Saviano, Nenci, and Caputo, 2017). Consistent with these findings, the study conducted by Calic et al. in 2023, which incorporated the literature on gender role congruity and risk preference, examined almost 300,000 microloans funded through the kiva.org platform. This study reveals that women need more time than men to obtain business loans of the same value on kiva.org.

The COVID-19 crisis has worsened pre-existing gender inequalities, specifically affecting women's involvement in professional and entrepreneurial activities in Türkiye (Büyükbeşe et al., 2021; Yavuz et al., 2023). During the pandemic, there has been a decrease in scholarly output among women in academia, whereas male academics have seen an increase in publishing rates (Parlak et al., 2021). This study explores the effects of COVID-19 on gender dynamics and entrepreneurship in Gaziantep. This study scrutinizes the city's shift from an Aleppo-affected commercial center to a flourishing hub for entrepreneurs since the 1960s. Although women have been active in family enterprises since the 1990s, their involvement in entrepreneurship has not reached the anticipated level. The challenges that women face worldwide further exacerbate this situation. This study examines the impact of the pandemic on the household duties and entrepreneurial drive of women in Gaziantep. This study aims to address a notable research gap in the field of women's entrepreneurship, as identified by Bird and Brush (2002), Green et al. (2003), and De Bruin et al. (2007).

This study examines the impact of the pandemic on female company owners by conducting qualitative interviews with 25 participants. The collected data is then analyzed using MAXQDA2020 and hermeneutic analysis. This study examines the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic using Goffee and Scase (1992) conceptual framework, which classifies female entrepreneurs into four categories: innovators, traditionalists, radicals, and housewife entrepreneurs. Each category employs distinct strategies to overcome the challenges of the pandemic.

The research question guiding this study is as follows: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the relationship between family responsibilities and entrepreneurial pursuits for women in Türkiye, specifically across the four categories of innovators, traditionalists, radicals, and housewife entrepreneurs as classified by Goffee and Scase (1992)? What factors have motivated Turkish female entrepreneurs during this period?

This research enhances scholarly discourse on the challenges and perseverance of female entrepreneurs in Gaziantep during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a deeper understanding of gender-specific dynamics in entrepreneurship during periods of strain. The primary aim of this study is to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the balance between family responsibilities and entrepreneurial endeavors among women in Türkiye, while also identifying the main factors that motivated Turkish women entrepreneurs during the pandemic.

After the introduction, the essay will discuss 'female entrepreneurship' within the conceptual framework. The next section will examine "motivation for entrepreneurship" to study the intricate connection between gender and entrepreneurial mindset. The methodology section provides a comprehensive explanation of the qualitative study design and processes. The findings and discussion will analyze and evaluate the data, ultimately providing valuable insights into the determination and strategic creativity of female entrepreneurs in response to the global health crisis.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. *Female Entrepreneurship*

R. Cantillon coined the term "entrepreneurship" in 1755, emphasizing initiative and risk-taking (Jonsson, 2017). It goes beyond starting a business to making money during economic uncertainty. Development requires acquiring finance, discovering resources, maintaining commerce, and creating new markets (Drucker, 1985; Gurnani, 2016). Uddin and Bose (2012) described entrepreneurship as the seizing of opportunities to produce value. Entrepreneurs build and operate firms while controlling risks.

The term "female entrepreneur" refers to women who independently start firms in unpredictable markets (Carranza et al., 2018; Gomes & Leite, 2023). These entrepreneurs sometimes leave their jobs due to financial constraints and grow their businesses slowly. This cautious approach prioritizes work-life balance and avoids high-risk activities (Carranza et

al., 2018). Life stages, career paths, family roles, personal preferences, and core values motivate female entrepreneurs. Understanding how these factors affect decision-making is vital (Solesvik et al., 2019; Latifi, 2022). Second-wave feminism has raised questions about workplace bias and cultural influences on business ownership (Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). De Vita et al. (2014) studied the global challenges that female entrepreneurs face, their impact on development, and their impact on poverty reduction. However, Agrawal et al. (2023) and Sharma et al. (2023) found significant hurdles for female Asian and African entrepreneurs. Despite these challenges, female entrepreneurs employ different methods (Nziku & Struthers, 2018; Franzke et al., 2022), and African and Asian nations are increasingly supporting female entrepreneurship (Muhumad, 2016). Despite facing barriers to employment such as leadership, financial, professional, and gender prejudices (Cho et al., 2020), women continue to pursue entrepreneurship while managing family obligations.

Female entrepreneurs in Türkiye face obstacles such as obtaining funding and managing the demands of running a business while fulfilling family obligations and societal norms (Halac & Celik, 2019; Koyuncu et al., 2012; Yenilmez, 2018; Özdemir, 2010; Karataş-Özkan et al., 2011). Notwithstanding these obstacles, Maden's (2015) demonstrated that Turkish female entrepreneurs demonstrate tenacity, resolve, resilience, foresight, and ingenuity. Their choice to engage in entrepreneurship frequently arises from grabbing distinctive opportunities, making contributions to society, and embracing autonomous decision-making (Maden, 2015). Kacar et al. (2023) emphasized the current social, political, and institutional circumstances in Türkiye that provide favorable conditions for women to engage in business. Specific policies have had a beneficial effect on the rates of women's employment, indicating a favorable climate for female entrepreneurship (IKV, 2019). Nevertheless, women's participation in the workforce encounters a variety of complex obstacles, encompassing legal and political impediments as well as household and psychological limitations (Durukan, 2021).

In 1992, Goffee and Scase created a classification system to categorize female entrepreneurs into four distinct types: innovators, radicals, traditionalists, and housewife entrepreneurs. Innovators place high value on achieving exceptional quality in their enterprises, whereas radicals want to question and challenge societal expectations and assumptions about gender roles. Traditionalists adhere to cultural norms and expectations, whereas homemaker entrepreneurs emphasize family objectives over commercial endeavors. This study uses this framework to examine female entrepreneurs' incentives and attributes.

2.2. *Motivation for Entrepreneurship*

According to Johnson (1990), entrepreneurial motivation refers to the drive to independently start and oversee new company endeavors, which is a fundamental element of entrepreneurship. Fayolle et al. (2014) categorized motivational forces into two categories: intrinsic, stemming from internal urges to overcome personal challenges, and extrinsic, spurred by external incentives like monetary rewards or public recognition. Nathalie et al. (2014) discovered disparities in entrepreneurial motivation based on gender, specifically noting discrepancies in passion and confidence levels among male and female students studying entrepreneurship. These findings mirror wider gender-related professional stereotypes and disparities in confidence.

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Conduct (1992) suggests that a combination of motivational resources, including financial, temporal, and skill-based resources, along with strong behavioral intentions may increase the probability of engaging in entrepreneurial conduct. Zeffane (2012) observed that individuals with elevated entrepreneurial goals are more inclined to initiate new company ventures. Nevertheless, there is a disparity between genders when it comes to these aspirations, as women generally demonstrate a lesser tendency toward entrepreneurship compared to men (Wilson et al., 2004; Gupta et al., 2008; Zhao, Seibert, & Hills, 2005). Regional differences exist in the perception of women's entrepreneurship. Urban narratives often portray such endeavors as courageous and daring endeavors, whereas rural ones tend to associate them with strength in the face of challenges and hardships. Key motivational reasons for female entrepreneurs include financial attainment, fervor for their profession, enthusiasm for invention, aspiration for independence, and the desire for artistic self-expression (Kagider, 2019).

3. Method

This study uses a case study design with qualitative methods, specifically adhering to Creswell & Poth's "Single Instrumental Case Study" technique (2017). This study specifically focuses on female entrepreneurs in Gaziantep aged 18 and older who have experienced the impact of COVID-19. The objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences by evaluating a diverse group of participants within a specific environment.

This study examines various business strategies and obstacles encountered by female entrepreneurs during the pandemic. The study employs meticulous data collection techniques, such as conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews while wearing masks and strictly following safety precautions. We use the MAXQDA program for analysis to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, focusing on concepts like credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, as outlined by Cypress (2017). This study combines MAXQDA with hermeneutic analysis by applying theme-based coding. It then interprets individual codes and themes in relation to the entire range of data using the hermeneutic circle technique (Grondin, 2017). This method recognizes wider cultural, societal, and individual factors that influence the interpretation of written content, thereby improving comprehension. Furthermore, the inclusion of a "rich description," as described by Geertz (1973), and a comprehensive recording of the study process, as recommended by Green et al. (2007), improves the significance and practicality of the findings.

The validation process was conducted by employing triangulation approaches, which involved cross-referencing interview transcripts and incorporating the insights of multiple experts in the fields of qualitative research and management (Stahl and King, 2020). The rigorous technique employed ensured a comprehensive analysis of the data, thereby ensuring the overall validity of the study.

This study employs an analytical framework to classify female entrepreneurs into four distinct groups: innovators, traditionalists, radicals, and housewife entrepreneurs. This study investigates the effects of COVID-19 on these groups and examines the factors that motivate entrepreneurship. The study analyzed six specific subthemes, which encompassed the obstacles posed by the pandemic, tactics employed to cope with these challenges, the availability of possibilities, lessons derived from experience, changes in behavior, and motivation to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors after the pandemic. Twenty-five female entrepreneurs in Gaziantep were interviewed using the "criteria sampling method" inside purposive sampling. These entrepreneurs were selected based on specific criteria, such as owning a micro-enterprise and actively participating in entrepreneurship (Palinkas et al., 2015). Out of the 29 initial interviews, 25 were selected for thorough examination, while a few were omitted due to inadequate information, possibly affected by voluntary participation or time limitations.

Between March 1 and March 31, 2022, the study upheld participant anonymity and rights with significant importance. The duration of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to slightly more than an hour. Kaiser (2009) suggested a coding technique that we employed to maintain anonymity. Each interviewee received a unique code for ethical considerations, which signified their unique style of entrepreneurship and numerical identity. For example, the first innovative entrepreneur is labeled I1 and the fifth traditional entrepreneur is labeled T5. This ensured the systematic organization of data while preserving the identities of individuals. The Ethics Committee of Hasan Kalyoncu University approved the study, which adhered to ethical standards. This study admits the restricted applicability of qualitative research but offers useful perspectives on entrepreneurship (Kaiser, 2009).

4. Findings

The findings are categorized in alignment with the following research question: "How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the relationship between family responsibilities and entrepreneurial pursuits for women in Türkiye, specifically across the four categories of innovators, traditionalists, radicals, and housewife entrepreneur as classified by Goffee and Scase (1992), and what factors have motivated Turkish female entrepreneurs during this period?" The study classifies its findings into four main categories: innovative female entrepreneurs, traditional female entrepreneurs, radical female entrepreneurs, and housewife entrepreneurs. Among the 25 female entrepreneurs surveyed, 13 were classified as innovative, 9 as traditional, 2 as radical, and 1 as a domestic entrepreneur.

Based on the interview responses, the basic classifications were further divided into subcategories to obtain a deeper understanding of the research question. These subcategories include demographic information, entrepreneurial motivation, the impact of COVID-19 on businesses and coping strategies, perceptions of equal opportunity, behavioral changes, and post-pandemic entrepreneurial motivation. We will assess the female entrepreneurs in each category comparatively based on the characteristics outlined in these sub-titles.

4.1. *Innovative Entrepreneurial Women*

Among the 25 participants, 13 were identified as innovative female entrepreneurs. Aligned with the classification system created by Goffee and Scase, these individuals place significant value on achieving exceptional quality in their enterprises. They exhibit a strong self-identity that is closely tied to their professional achievements and demonstrate a high level of dedication to their goals. These entrepreneurs primarily work in female-dominated fields, are mostly aged under 50, and many hold university degrees.

Table 1 demonstrates that a substantial proportion of young, creative female entrepreneurs who are under the age of 50 and possess a strong educational background in areas such as tourism, esthetics, and business administration are leading the way in diverse industries. The high prevalence of college degrees among these entrepreneurs indicates a connection between higher education and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Table 1. Demographic Structure of Innovative Entrepreneurial Women

Codes	Occupation	Birth Date	Educational Status	Number of Employees	Date of establishment of the company	Monthly Turnover (TL)
Innovative1	Tourism Operator	1981-1990	High school graduate	3	2009	8.000 -10.000
Innovative2	Beautician	1981-1990	High school graduate	4	2012	10.000+
Innovative3	Beautician	1961-1970	High school graduate	1	2009	5.000
Innovative4	Business Manager	1981-1990	Bachelor's degree	25	2010	10.000+
Innovative5	Furniture store owner	1991-2000	Associate graduate	1	2016	4.000-6.000
Innovative6	Hairdresser	1981-1990	Bachelor's degree	3	2015	8.000-10.000
Innovative7	Shopkeepers(Bagger)	1981-1990	Bachelor's degree	2	2016	-
Innovative8	Nursery Operator	1971-1980	Bachelor's degree	14	2009	8.000-10.000
Innovative9	Confectioner	1981-1990	Associate graduate	10	2000	10.000+
Innovative10	Cafeteria Operator	1-1980	Bachelor's degree	8	2010	6.000-8.000
Innovative11	Beautician	1991-2000	High school graduate	2	2013	10.000+
Innovative12	Beautician	1991-2000	Bachelor's degree	15	2012	10.000+
Innovative13	Nursery Operator	1981-1990	Bachelor's degree	8	2017	10.000+

Innovative female entrepreneurs prioritize financial freedom, personal fulfillment, and adaptability. They value independence and expertise. The pandemic caused financial losses, operational disruptions, health concerns, and psychological stress. They responded by using government subsidies, enhancing web presence, decreasing costs, and taking safety precautions. These enterprises faced cultural and familial demands that were exacerbated by the pandemic. These experiences taught them about efficacy, innovation, fiscal administration, and crisis management, which led to increased savings and work-life balance. After the outbreak, committed business owners plan to expand, use new technology, and access untapped markets, resulting in a bright prognosis for economic recovery.

4.2. *Traditional Entrepreneurial Women*

The nine study participants were classified as "traditional entrepreneurs" according to the classification system created by Goffee and Scase. These individuals adhere to cultural norms and expectations, follow social standards, and work in gender-specific fields such as culinary arts and cosmetology. Unlike innovators, traditional entrepreneurs are older and less likely to earn academic degrees. Their adherence to conventional gender roles characterizes them as "traditional."

Table 2 presents these traditional female entrepreneurs' trends. It shows that many are above 50 years old and few have gone to college. This shows a link between education and entrepreneurial behavior.

Table 2. Demographic Structure of Traditional Entrepreneurial Women

Codes	Occupation	Birth Date	Educational Status	Number of Employees	Date of establishment of the company	Monthly Turnover (TL)
Traditional1	Goose farmer	1961-1970	High school graduate	1	2018	4.000
Traditional2	Food factory owner	1971-1980	High school graduate	12	2009	10.000+
Traditional3	Hairdresser	1991-2000	High school graduate	4	2011	6.000-8.000
Traditional4	Waffle shop owner	1971-1980	Elementary school	6	2013	4.000-6.000
Traditional5	Homemade food shop owner	1961-1970	Bachelor's degree	3	2013	10.000+
Traditional6	Beautician	1981-1990	High school graduate	4	2018	6.000-8.000
Traditional7	Dress shop owner	1981-1990	High school graduate	12	2013	4.000-6.000
Traditional8	Beautician	1971-1980	Elementary school	2	2012	6.000-8.000
Traditional9	Bag shop owner	1981-1990	High school graduate	4	2016	4.000-6.000

Self-sufficiency and social recognition motivate traditional entrepreneurs, with financial independence serving as a significant driving force. The pandemic's economic impact varied across sectors, with some sectors experiencing minimal disruption while others facing significant challenges. Entrepreneurs adapt by implementing new health measures, embracing digital marketing, and adjusting operations. Innate social attitudes influenced mixed perceptions of equal opportunities. The crisis highlighted the importance of health, family bonds, emergency preparedness, and prudent management. Changes in behavior included a heightened focus on cleanliness and a more cautious approach to business strategies. The emotional responses ranged from increased stress to a deeper appreciation for personal and professional lives. Looking ahead, traditional entrepreneurs maintain a cautious yet optimistic outlook, aiming to maintain or improve their businesses, with some considering incorporating family support into their strategies.

4.3. *Radical Entrepreneurial Women*

The study classified a small subset of participants, specifically two individuals, as "Radical Women Entrepreneurs" according to the classification system created by Goffee and Scase. These individuals are characterized by their desire to question and challenge societal expectations and assumptions about gender roles. Their involvement in nonconventional business models and their challenge to traditional gender norms distinguish them as radicals. As Table 3 illustrates, both radical entrepreneurs belong to the same age group, born between 1991 and 2000. However, their educational backgrounds differ, with one holding a high school diploma and the other completing a bachelor's degree.

Table 3. The Demographic Structure of Radical Entrepreneurs

Kids	Occupation	Birth Date	Educational Status	Number of Employees	Date of establishment of the company	Monthly Turnover (TL)
Radical1	Oil station owner	1991-2000	High School Graduate	8	2018	10.000+
Radical2	Next-generation digital marketers	1991-2000	Bachelor's Degree	4	2019	10.000+

Radical female entrepreneurs are intrinsically motivated to challenge traditional male-dominated sectors. For example, R1 entered the oil station industry, which is traditionally dominated by men, while R2 pursued digital marketing opportunities. The pandemic brought both challenges and opportunities. R1 encountered operational disruptions during lockdowns, while R2 saw increased demand for digital marketing services and adapted accordingly.

In response to the pandemic's impact, both entrepreneurs expanded their services. R1 incorporated a convenience store and demonstrated adaptability and flexibility in business management. The adoption of digital technologies was pivotal in sustaining and growing businesses during the pandemic. These radical entrepreneurs encountered amplified challenges compared to their male counterparts, especially in societies with rigid gender roles that became more apparent during the pandemic.

In the post-pandemic era, both entrepreneurs displayed an optimistic shift in their business and personal outlooks, with renewed purpose, expanded teams, and diversified business scopes, demonstrating resilience. These insights highlight radical female entrepreneurs' firm commitment to sustaining and growing their businesses after the pandemic, underscoring their strong entrepreneurial drive.

4.4. Housewife Entrepreneurs

Hoursewife entrepreneurs often pursue entrepreneurship to achieve goals beyond traditional employment. According to the classification system created by Goffee and Scase, housewife entrepreneurs prioritize their family's objectives over their commercial endeavors. Utilizing their skills and proficiency, they create their own job opportunities, with family priorities preceding career advancement. In this study, one participant exemplified these traits.

Demographic Overview: The individual under spotlight in this segment is a female entrepreneur under 40 who holds a high school diploma and has started a business specializing in the production and sale of handmade balaclavas.

Starting with support from her spouse, she began her enterprise by marketing her hand-knitted goods, eventually extending her operations into her garage. Many women who manage households have embraced entrepreneurship as a means to achieve objectives that traditional employment may not fulfill, using their innate talents and artisanal skills to generate employment opportunities for themselves while still prioritizing their family responsibilities.

Her business unexpectedly flourished during the COVID-19 lockdown, as the craft of knitting saw a resurgence. The pandemic also heightened consumer appreciation for handcrafted goods, which resonated with their personal tastes. Moving beyond the pandemic, her dedication to her venture has intensified, with ambitions to establish a café that showcases hand-knitted products. She reflects on the pandemic as a period that not only reinforced her drive for entrepreneurship but also transformed obstacles into avenues for expanding her business.

4.5. *Entrepreneurial Motivations*

Entrepreneurial motivations vary significantly according to the type of entrepreneurship. For example, the motivations of innovative entrepreneurs generally focus on achieving success by emphasizing professionalism through strong personal identity, and they exhibit a motivation to work with dedication to reach their goals. In this context, for instance, I1 states, "After mastering my role... I decided to establish my own business," highlighting a critical transformation based on self-confidence and skills. Similarly, I2 reflects the ambition to transition from an employee to an employer by saying, "After working, I decided to open my own salon." For I6, environmental influences, personal circumstances, and financial challenges lead to entrepreneurship. I12 sees entrepreneurship as the realization of a childhood dream. Family and role models shape goals; as I10 noted, "A meaningful interaction with a successful businesswoman inspired me to start my venture." On the other hand, the desire for social appreciation motivates traditional entrepreneurs without significantly disrupting social norms. For instance, T4 finds motivation in the pursuit of public recognition and financial independence. However, the motivation for radical entrepreneurs focuses on demonstrating that women can succeed in various jobs by challenging traditional gender roles in society. Radical entrepreneurs such as R1 and R2 challenge societal expectations; R1 is motivated by the success of women in the oil industry, while R2's interest in digital marketing stems from a lifelong entrepreneurial spirit. We find that these motivations significantly shape each individual's entrepreneurial narrative, specific to their type of entrepreneurship.

4.6. *Impact of COVID-19 on Businesses and Coping Strategies*

Entrepreneurs face significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges had a substantial impact on nearly every type of entrepreneur, but they developed different methods to cope with them. For instance, despite acknowledging their significant impact, innovative entrepreneurs expressed their inability to implement numerous creative strategies to manage the crisis. This is generally reflected in their responses. For instance, I3 stated, "We were severely affected," expressing the financial stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic's restrictions. I5 similarly underscored the economic challenges, stating, "Our impact was substantial." After my business closed, I used my savings to pay the rent." These stories highlight financial disadvantages caused by the loss of primary revenue sources. I7 emphasized the dual impact of the crisis, saying, "COVID-19 devastated my business. The increasing number of cases and curfews had a negative impact on sales," illustrating the situation's complexity.

However, the pandemic did not significantly affect traditional entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector, whereas those in other sectors reported experiencing the effects. However, they coped with the pandemic by strictly adhering to government hygiene rules, mobilizing team efforts, or, unexpectedly, for traditional entrepreneurs, using social media platforms and digital tools in an innovative manner. For instance, T1, who works in agriculture, said, "We weren't

as affected by COVID-19," while T3 mentioned, "I was significantly affected. I struggled to pay both myself and my employees during the lockdowns." T1 noted that they "took specific measures to navigate the curfews" and used team management apps. T2 improved hygiene standards, T3 reorganized company practices to align with health requirements, and T3 managed to reach customers by utilizing social media more effectively. T5, who put some employees on unpaid leave and used financial methods to stay afloat, demonstrated financial creativity. T8 understood the importance of digital marketing in increasing online visibility and building consumer trust.

Radical entrepreneurs come from different business backgrounds. One of them mentioned that the lockdowns negatively impacted R1's physical stores, while another, R2, said, "Yes, everything worked out," noting an increase in internet marketing during the crisis.

A homemaker entrepreneur unexpectedly gained commercial benefits from the pandemic. This traditional housewife entrepreneur used social media platforms to sell organic products, thereby expanding her business. These stories highlight the resilience of entrepreneurs and the importance of digitalization and adaptive business operations during the pandemic. Different types of entrepreneurs reacted differently during crises, taking unexpected innovative steps and turning the crisis into an opportunity.

4.7. *Perceptions of Equal Opportunity*

The study reveals that almost all categories of female entrepreneurs face gender-based inequalities in entrepreneurial opportunities due to societal norms and pandemic-related challenges. They say gender roles have made it more difficult and increased discrimination. Only two female entrepreneurs from the traditional category provided a different response, stating that they encountered a more balanced work environment, which sets them apart from the general trend. However, two other traditional female entrepreneurs share the common view that discrimination and biases have intensified. For instance, Entrepreneur I1 emphasizes the dual burden of managing both home and business, while I2 highlights the issue of insufficient recognition for female entrepreneurs. I7 underscores the persistent challenge of gender inequality. Institutional biases are evident, and entrepreneurs like I10 face skepticism in the face of systemic structures. Patriarchal norms further hinder progress by introducing more barriers for women, as noted in I6. Traditional female entrepreneurs have differing views on equality. T1 and T9 believe that biases have increased during the pandemic, whereas T5 and T6 perceive a more balanced entrepreneurial environment. Radical entrepreneurs in male-dominated sectors face even greater challenges. R1 acknowledges the challenges within the industry but emphasizes the importance of support. R2 describes the struggle to balance business and family, especially during crises like the pandemic.

4.8. *Behavioral Changes*

The pandemic triggered significant behavioral changes and mental recalibrations among entrepreneurs, with women in different entrepreneurial categories developing various responses. During the pandemic, women in the innovative entrepreneur category exhibited behavioral changes by becoming more attentive to intensified hygiene conditions, but they also experienced psychological issues related to their work and lives. Because these innovative women view their personal identity and work as intertwined, the crisis led them to reflect, causing them to experience personal impacts. They learned about the importance of agility when adapting to market fluctuations, as well as the role of digital infrastructure. The pandemic emphasizes the necessity of preparedness and adaptability for business resilience. Women belonging to the traditional category also experienced personal impacts. However, radical female entrepreneurs responded very differently, showing behavioral changes that were geared toward more positive thinking and a more proactive approach. For example, Entrepreneur I13 stated, "Heightened hygiene... became second nature during the pandemic," highlighting the emergence of increased hygiene practices. The crisis reinforced the value of efficiency and crisis management. I10 incorporated crisis planning into her regular business strategy, stating, "I've integrated crisis planning... to optimize budgeting." T5 recognized the need for careful resource management. T3 discussed the psychological strain, saying, "I encountered panic attacks and tension, but this reinforced my dedication to my business and the essence of our life's norms." In contrast, radical entrepreneurs displayed positive shifts; R1 spoke of releasing negativity, while R2 noted proactive expansions, indicating a positive adjustment in her approach.

4.9. *Post-Pandemic Entrepreneurial Motivation*

Entrepreneurial women have different strategies for improving their post-pandemic jobs. While innovative women try to ensure continuity by improving the variety of products and the diversity of technologies they use, traditional entrepreneurs focus more on measures to limit spending with savings and ecological measures. Radical entrepreneurs, on the other hand, develop their strategies by following global trends and acting accordingly. For example, innovative

female entrepreneurs are making resilient plans for the future after a pandemic that seeks to expand their product lines and enter new markets. I7 continued: "Despite passing this stage, the risk continues. My goal is to expand my products and increase sales through more advertising." Their determination signaled potential growth. "I plan to invest in new machines and expand my workshop, and I hope that this will benefit more people." Traditional entrepreneurs are carefully optimistic. T5 continued: "As we continue to come, we aim to maximize the use of products with minimal waste and try to manage our spending more sensitively. For now, we've decided to involve the family in our business." The constant growth continues to motivate radical entrepreneurs. "With the ever-changing online world and technology, new opportunities will continue to emerge," he said. This reflects their resistance and willingness to embrace new opportunities. In general, female entrepreneurs are strategically preparing for the post-pandemic business environment, each with different hopes and plans for the future.

Table 4. Comparison of the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Female Entrepreneurs by Characteristics

Dimensions	Innovative	Traditional	Radical	Housewife
Entrepreneurial Motivations	External factors influence entrepreneurial motivation (economic reasons, individual and familial factors)	The desire to be visible in the public sphere and to stand on one's own feet have influenced entrepreneurial motivations.	Internal factors have influenced entrepreneurial motivations (they emphasize that they engage in entrepreneurship by nature, and the reasons that draw them to entrepreneurship are their own characteristic features rather than external pressures)	Supporting family and economic reasons has influenced entrepreneurial motivation.
Impact of COVID-19 on Businesses and Coping Strategies	Implemented hygiene protocols, adopted cost-saving strategies, leveraged digital tools, and made various adjustments in their workplaces.	Reduced the service capacities of their businesses.	Seized opportunities to manage crises.	Seized opportunities to manage crises.
Perceptions of Equal Opportunity	They face more difficulties than male entrepreneurs because of gender, societal prejudice, family roles, and the patriarchal structure of society.	The gender composition of the market (whether it is male-dominated or female-dominated) affects traditional female entrepreneurs' perceptions of equal opportunity.	Women in entrepreneurship struggle with time management because of their meticulous and rule-oriented nature and the familial responsibilities they bear.	Women struggle more than men entrepreneurs.
Behavioral Changes	They developed behaviors such as saving, maintaining hygiene, understanding and patient in the face of events, and living life to the fullest.	The uncertainty of the pandemic has caused negative psychological effects among female entrepreneurs, including anxiety, stress, panic, and a tendency toward controlling behaviorsç	Negative behaviors and emotions were transformed into more optimistic and strategic approaches with the onset of COVID-19.	They are worried about their family's health and financial situation.
Post-pandemic entrepreneurial motivation	They aim to grow their business volume, favor a cautious approach, show a preference for online sales, and are focused on maintaining the current state of their operations.	They intend to preserve the current state of affairs.	The increase in entrepreneurial motivation is expected to persist.	The pandemic has boosted entrepreneurial motivation.

5. Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the many impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's entrepreneurship, utilizing the classification framework proposed by Goffee and Scase (1992) as a perspective. This study investigates how female entrepreneurs, categorized as innovators, traditionalists, radicals, and housewife entrepreneurs, have effectively addressed the economic, operational, and psychological challenges of the pandemic.

These findings indicate that the motives and experiences of entrepreneurs during the pandemic varied significantly depending on the type of business. Resolute and innovative entrepreneurs driven by a strong professional identity and commitment to excellence have demonstrated their capacity to adjust and surmount financial obstacles by embracing novel technology and digital approaches. Traditional entrepreneurs, particularly those in gender-specific businesses, adhered to cultural norms and made prudent yet effective adaptations, with a focus on cost control and improving hygiene protocols. Radical entrepreneurs who challenge existing social norms and gender stereotypes face greater challenges, especially in male-dominated industries, but they remain determined to overcome these obstacles. Housewives entrepreneurs tendencies are influenced by variables such as family support and economic considerations.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and strategies for mitigating its effects with a focus on innovative entrepreneurs. They developed hygiene protocols, adopted cost-saving measures, employed digital technology, and made various improvements in their workplaces. Traditional entrepreneurs reduced the operational capacities of their businesses. Entrepreneurs who are both radical and housewives actively seek opportunities to efficiently manage crucial events.

When it comes to conceptions of equal opportunity among innovative female entrepreneurs, they face more difficulties than their male counterparts because of issues such as gender, societal bias, familial duties, and the patriarchal structure of society. The gender composition of the market-male or female-affects the perception of equal opportunity among traditional female entrepreneurs. Radical female entrepreneurs face challenges in managing their time because of their precise and rule-oriented personality and the familial duties they carry. Female entrepreneurs face more significant obstacles than male entrepreneurs.

This paper highlights significant changes in the behavior of entrepreneurs who have increased their focus on hygiene, resource allocation, and strategic disaster preparedness. In light of the worldwide health emergency, companies are being forced to reevaluate their approaches, giving greater significance to sustainability, efficiency, and adaptability. Women entrepreneurs who independently operate their enterprises from their homes. They are concerned regarding the welfare and financial situation of their family.

As the first impacts of the pandemic begin to decrease, the demand for entrepreneurship remains strong. Innovators seek to expand their product offerings and explore new, unexplored areas, while traditionalists prioritize sustainability and appropriate financial management. In contrast, radicals are strategically positioning themselves to capitalize on emerging opportunities in the constantly evolving digital domain.

The findings highlight the resilience and adaptability of female entrepreneurs in navigating the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. This valuable insight can be used to support and enhance women's businesses in the post-pandemic era.

Leveraging Heidegger's hermeneutics, the study interprets the complex relationship between the personal experiences of entrepreneurs and the pandemic's economic impact, integrating new insights to refine the understanding (Grondin, 2017).

The literature underscores obstacles hindering women's business entry and sustainability, including a lack of management skills, access to capital, networking opportunities, skilled workforce, infrastructure, gender discrimination, and fear of failure (Cho et al., 2020). Specialized entrepreneurship education is crucial for overcoming these challenges (Cho et al., 2020). Balancing work with family responsibilities and societal gender expectations further increases complexity (Halac & Çelik, 2019; Koyuncu et al., 2012). These challenges intensified during the pandemic, posing greater difficulties for female entrepreneurs. Despite this, the pandemic has spurred women, particularly housewives, to start new businesses that leverage online platforms with minimal capital. This has prompted innovation and the exploration of new market niches. In Gaziantep, most female entrepreneurs fall into traditional and innovative categories, reflecting a balance between pushing social boundaries and maintaining traditional roles.

During the pandemic, businesswomen reflected deeply, reassessing their priorities. For many, it underscored the importance of well-being and family ties. As noted by Cho et al. (2020), managing professional ambitions alongside domestic responsibilities poses challenges that contradict societal gender norms. One radical female entrepreneur responded, R2, "Balancing our businesses and personal lives has become tougher in this health crisis."

During this challenging period, female entrepreneurs reevaluated their professional aspirations while reinforcing their commitment to family and personal values. T3 shared, "The stress led to anxiety... but reaffirmed my resolve for my business and the values central to our lives." Emotional responses varied, with some participants experiencing anxiety while others gaining a deeper appreciation for their work and personal lives. Many, especially from traditional sectors, prioritized hygiene to meet family and societal expectations. While balancing hygienic rules at home, managing businesses, and ensuring family health caused significant stress, it also fueled a renewed dedication to both business and family roles. Creative solutions have emerged to address these challenges (Nziku & Struthers, 2018; Franzke et al., 2022).

These women recognized the importance of their businesses in maintaining family stability, fostering confidence through achievements, and engaging with a broader society, despite facing gender inequality. This research echoes findings by Abdulla & Albattat (2023) findings, shedding light on the social, familial, and structural barriers faced by women in business. Experiences shared by I1 and I2 underscore the additional pressure from societal and family expectations. Similarly, entrepreneurs like I10 confront deep-seated biases and social doubts, as highlighted in studies by Agrawal et al. (2023) and Sharma et al. (2023), which also identified similar challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in Asia and Africa. The contrasting journeys of traditional and innovative female entrepreneurs in their pursuit of equality illustrate the intricate dynamics of gender roles in business.

Post-COVID-19, Turkish female entrepreneurs are optimistic about the future. Some are committed to sustaining current business models, while others prioritize efficient resource management and family involvement. T5 expressed their outlook, saying, "Our aim is to reduce waste and optimize product usage while managing expenses more prudently. We have also made the decision to involve our family in our business."

Radical entrepreneurs motivated by a strong desire for continuous growth and sustainability highlight the potential of the ever-evolving technological landscape. As articulated by R2, "Fresh opportunities will continually arise in the dynamic online world and technology," underscoring their readiness to seize emerging prospects and adapt continuously.

T5 expressed a significant lesson learned from COVID-19: "Previously, we may not have given substantial thought to our business development, especially in financial terms. However, we have now recognized the importance of careful planning and resource management for the future." Entrepreneurs such as I6 and T5 have implemented financial tactics like cost-saving measures and rent negotiations. A hermeneutic examination of the unique obstacles faced by women in entrepreneurship, analyzed through theoretical frameworks that consider social, familial, and systemic factors, deepens these insights.

Uddin and Bose (2012) proposed a conceptual framework that views entrepreneurship as a method to mobilize capital and manage risks, highlighting women entrepreneurs' resilience and adaptability during the pandemic. The emphasis on crisis management, resource optimization, and digital technology adoption resonates with the broader entrepreneurial emphasis on continuous learning and adaptability. This study highlights the importance of adaptability and resilience, as illustrated by the multifaceted business crises faced by entrepreneurs like I3, I5, and I7 who encountered significant economic and health-related challenges. Entrepreneurs like R2, who utilized digital marketing for adaptation, underscore the significance of strategic agility in entrepreneurship.

This research demonstrates Turkey's strong drive and motivation for entrepreneurship, drawing upon various theoretical frameworks of entrepreneurial motivation. This study explores factors that inspire female entrepreneurs, from innovating within established norms to completely breaking tradition. Through personal narratives and a broader examination of entrepreneurship, this research a comprehensive analysis of women's business endeavors, particularly during uncertain times like the pandemic. By exploring both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, this study highlights diverse motivations guiding female entrepreneurs, as exemplified by individuals like R1 and R2.

The narrative emphasizes that personal ambition, the drive to overcome challenges, skill mastery, and autonomy are key motivators for entrepreneurial activities. Individuals like I1 and I2 were driven by their aspirations for expertise and independence in their respective fields and transitioned from traditional employment to entrepreneurship, exemplifying this. The influence of family and role models, as seen in the entrepreneurial journeys of individuals like I10, highlights how observing successful businesswomen can ignite entrepreneurial ambition. Additionally, entrepreneurs like T4 pursue entrepreneurship for financial independence and recognition, highlighting the empowering nature. On the other hand, the desire to challenge societal norms and establish themselves in male-dominated sectors motivates trailblazers like R1 and R2.

The hermeneutic circle, with its iterative approach, enhances the reader's understanding by allowing them to integrate their own experiences with the broader socio-economic and cultural contexts presented in the research. The study concludes with an optimistic note, emphasizing a strong commitment to diversity, innovation, and resilience as guiding principles for the future of women's entrepreneurship post-pandemic.

6. Conclusion

Our research unveils the diverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Turkish women entrepreneurs in Gaziantep, classified into innovators, traditionalists, radicals, and housewife entrepreneurs. The results indicate that entrepreneurial motives and experiences during the pandemic were greatly influenced by the type of business. Innovators, motivated by their professional identity and commitment to excellence, effectively adjusted by embracing new technologies and digital tactics. Traditional entrepreneurs followed cultural conventions and used strategies to reduce costs and enhance hygiene. Radicals who challenged established social standards encountered increased obstacles, especially in industries dominated by males, but remained resolute in their determination to surmount these problems. Housewife entrepreneurs effectively managed their business endeavors while also fulfilling their household obligations and considering economic factors.

The pandemic had a diverse impact on perceptions of equal opportunity, particularly affecting innovative entrepreneurs who encountered significant challenges stemming from gender biases and cultural norms. Observable shifts in behavior were evident, characterized by a heightened emphasis on cleanliness, efficient use of resources, and readiness for emergencies. As the immediate impacts of the pandemic start to diminish, there continues to be a strong drive for entrepreneurship in all areas, with an emphasis on sustainability and efficiency and the strategic adaptation of new opportunities in the digital realm.

The use of hermeneutic analysis provided deeper insights into individual experiences in the middle of the broader economic ramifications of the crisis, offering a glimpse into the resilience and strategic adaptability of these women.

By categorizing female entrepreneurs and examining their distinct coping strategies and motivations, this study makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of gender dynamics in entrepreneurship during times of crisis in Gaziantep Türkiye and enriches academic discussions on the subject.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that the study's narrow focus on Gaziantep may limit its broad applicability. Additionally, relying primarily on qualitative data may not fully capture the pandemic's broader quantitative impacts on women's entrepreneurship.

Future research endeavors could expand the study's scope to encompass a more extensive geographic and demographic range, providing a more global perspective on the pandemic's effects on women in business. The integration of quantitative methods could provide a more comprehensive statistical overview to complement qualitative insights.

Moreover, investigating the lasting effects of the pandemic on entrepreneurial ventures and the evolution of motivational factors as the world recovers would be a valuable avenue for further research. Analyzing the role of digital technology and innovation in crisis management and business sustainability could provide valuable strategies for female entrepreneurs who face similar challenges worldwide.

ORCID :

Emel TOPCU	0000-0003-4606-5961
Tuba BÜYÜKBEŞE	0000-0003-4174-9870
Ayda BAKAN	0000-0002-4161-8937

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The Nexuses between Community Attachment, Tourism Support, and Cultural Heritage Protection in the Bektashi Faith Destination: The Roles of Perceived Tourism Impacts and Residency Length

Hatice ÇİFÇİ[1] , Senay BOZ[2] , Şehnaz DEMİRKOL[3]

[1]Doctorant, Department of Tourism Management, Institute of Social Sciences, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Türkiye
[2]Lecturer, Istanbul Gelisim University, Gelisim Vocational School, Department of Tourist Guidance, Istanbul, Türkiye
[3]Asst. Prof. Dr., Istanbul University, Faculty of Economics, Tourism Management Department, Istanbul-Türkiye

Corresponding author : Hatice Çifçi
E-mail : hatice.cifci@outlook.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the nexus between community attachment (CA), residents' perceived positive tourism impacts (POSI), residents' perceived negative tourism impacts (NEGA), and their attitudes toward support for tourism development (SUPT) and protection of cultural heritage (SUPCH) in the Bektashi faith destination with the moderating role of length of residency. Using a quantitative research approach through the questionnaire technique, 245 eligible questionnaires were analyzed by partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Findings confirmed the positive relationships among CA, SUPT, and SUPCH. However, only SUPCH positively mediated the relationship between CA and SUPT. Finally, length of residency (LOR) significantly moderated some relationships (i.e., CA and SUPCH; CA and POSI, NEGA and SUPT; and SUPCH and SUPT. Theoretically, this research concluded that CA and LOR are essential determinants of residents' SUPT and SUPCH. Practically, policymakers and practitioners of faith destinations can develop strategies and take practical future actions.

Keywords: Community Attachment, Perceived Tourism Impacts, Length of Residency, Faith Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Tourism Development

1. Introduction

Attachment is a relationship-based structure that expresses a person's emotional attachment to an object (McCool & Martin, 1994). With the spread of attachment theory, studies on attachment have been meritorious, and theories have been developed (Ouyang et al., 2017). For example, attachment theory is a conceptual perspective that originated from a mother and infant relationship purpose directed at exploring how emotional ties could be utilized in human life (Popper & Mayseless, 2007). The concept of attachment has attracted researchers' attention working on destinations or communities in tourism and hospitality (T&H; Cifci, 2022; Eluwole et al., 2022; Pichierri et al., 2023).

Whereas destination attachment refers to a strong bond people have toward a physical environment (Trimbach et al., 2022), CA relates more to the emotional bond that a person develops for a group to which s/he belongs. Anton and Lawrence (2014) stated that forming an attachment to one's home, region, or community is associated with many beneficial outcomes. People who are deeply rooted to their environments show higher social and political participation to the challenges that affect societies (Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2021).

The spiritual attachment to place and society is presumably related to duration of residence. Thus, LOR is also an essential indicator of CA (Man Cheng et al., 2022). Strong CA extends LOR by reducing individuals' intentions to leave the community (Kanakis et al., 2019). Increased duration of residency also strengthens social relations within the community, which makes individuals feel like they belong to the community and establishes a stronger bond with it (Ma, 2021). So far, certain researches (e.g., Eslami et al., 2019; Gannon et al., 2021; Papastathopoulos, 2020) have examined CA and tourism growth using various metrics. However, no study has examined the psychological impacts of faith tourism development and the protection of cultural heritage with the possible moderating role of LoR, leaving a gap and making this study noteworthy.

Residents' attitudes and perceptions about the impacts of tourism development on local communities are subscribed topic among T&H researchers (e.g., Moisescu et al., 2019; Šagovnović et al., 2022; Strzelecka et al., 2023). In this sense, CA has also been subject to the T&H context as a factor that influences residents' perceptions and attitudes toward the development of tourism (e.g., Dedeoğlu et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021; Man Cheng et al., 2022; Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2020). Nevertheless, the existing literature lacks sufficient evidence regarding residents' sentiments about the effects of tourism development on their faith (Cifci et al., 2023a) and how this sentiment influences their sense of attachment to their community, in which locals are most probably rooted in their religious convictions (Shtudiner et al., 2018).

In addition, despite its link to a sense of place, prior research has neglected to protect cultural heritage relationships when searching for CA and developing tourism in faith destinations. In areas where faith-based tourism is prominent, understanding individuals' perceived tourism value could better clarify why tourism and cultural heritage involvement is poor (Cifci et al., 2023a). Indeed, previous research has examined CA in sustainable tourism (Eluwole et al., 2022), national park (Nugroho & Numata, 2022), festival (Eslami et al., 2019), and heritage tourism (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019) settings; however, despite promising mainstream research, academic conversations around faith tourism destinations have received little attention insofar (Cifci, 2022; Cifci et al., 2023a; Tam et al., 2022).

As well shall note, faith destinations are sacred sites deeply intertwined with the culture and traditions of their communities (Terzidou, 2008; Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012). Belief in the sanctity of the place they live in and related experiences ensures that locals are spiritually connected to the place they live in and their communities (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004; Mu et al., 2019). Therefore, based on the community attachment theory developed by Nicholas et al. (2009), this current work examines how CA affects residents' perceptions and attitudes toward SUPT and SUPCH in the Bektashi (Türkiye) faith destination with the moderating role of LoR. Previous studies have observed that due to the complexity in the definition and functioning of the phenomenon of CA (Shen et al., 2019), it appears that the CA and tourism relationship has not been adequately harping upon the faith destination context, thereby, is an area that still needs to be researched.

The subsequent section includes a literature review and explains the method for CA, residents' perceptions of tourism, their support for it, and the influence of residency duration. And, then, the findings are presented, and the outcomes are examined. Finally, the conclusion discusses the study's theoretical and practical contributions, limits, and recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Community Attachment Consequences*

CA is the social participation of the individual in the community because of the feeling of belonging to a community and the idea that an individual shared past; hence, CA is an emotional link with the community (McCool & Martin,

1994; Šagovnović et al., 2022). However, the attachment of individuals to their community is generally associated with the length of residency in that community and being born in the geography of the community, that is, having a commonsense cultural heritage (Um & Crompton, 1987).

Research indicates that individuals living in longer-term places tend to have a greater sense of attachment, attributed to their strong social connections and shared memories (Hashemnezhad et al., 2012). On the other hand, studies have shown that even newly settled residents or short-term visitors could feel a strong attachment to place (Trimbach et al., 2022). It is also accepted that the CA of those who have lived or visited for a shorter time than long-term residents is influenced by their perception of environmental quality (Man Cheng et al., 2022).

Faith centers are sacred places closely related to their inhabitants' cultures, tradition, and heritage. Thanks to the increasing experience of people's beliefs and cultural values, their social attachment also increases. Moreover, as belief centers become tourist hotspots, the relationship between hosts and guests is strengthened (Cifci, 2022). The development of faith tourism in a destination leads to the development of many related industrial issues, both directly and indirectly, in the region (Terzidou et al., 2008), including supporting and accelerating the infrastructure and superstructure development of the area, contributing to the social development of the inhabitants, promoting cultural values and transferring them to future generations. On the other hand, developing tourism activities can harm the residents of faith destinations. According to Mu et al. (2019), when faith places become more accessible to tourists, spiritual values and cultural traditions can become overwhelmed by commercial concerns, leaving communities vulnerable to degradation. This circumstance may drive residents to acquire unfavourable opinions and attitudes towards tourists, raising concerns about cultural and spiritual deterioration.

2.2. *Residents' Supports for Tourism*

Studies have revealed a connection between the strength of a sense of CA and the support given to tourism (Gannon et al., 2021). Many theories have been used to examine how residents perceive the impacts of tourism and how they develop attitudes to support tourism because of this perception. For instance, the social exchange theory (SET), a leading theory that approaches issues from a sociological and psychological perspective, applies a risk-benefit analysis to maximize the benefits of the parties in a social relationship that is formed relative to the costs (Cifci et al., 2023a). According to the SET, residents are more likely to support tourism development when there is a prevailing positive perception of the impacts of tourism on their region (Ng, 2023).

Tourism development brings about positive or negative economic, sociocultural, and environmental consequences that impact residents' lives and their perspectives on the T&H industry. While the growing economy through tourism creates positive opportunities, such as higher employee wages, increased job opportunities, and improved quality of life, it can also lead to adverse outcomes, such as rising living costs and increased property prices. Sociocultural developments such as development of recreation and leisure facilities and the promotion of local culture to the outside world can offer residents positive opportunities. On the contrary, increasing visitor numbers can adversely affect local life, such as traffic congestion and security problems. Furthermore, the pollution and depletion of natural resources caused by excessive and unsustainable consumption and the disruption of the local ecosystem can also have negative impacts on tourism (Gursoy et al., 2002).

CA includes positive, negative, and complex emotional relationships between residents and their environment. This situation can play an essential role in affecting residents' perceptions and behaviors toward the development of tourism (Kil et al., 2012). Some studies have argued that a positive relationship exists between strong CA and perceptions of support for and being affected by tourism (Ganji et al., 2021; Choi & Murray, 2010). Others argue that the relationship between CA, supporting tourism, and being affected by tourism has a negative direction (Gursoy et al., 2010; Um & Crompton, 1987). Consequently, it remains uncertain whether the direct relationship between CA and SUPT in faith-based destinations is positive or negative (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Nugroho & Numata, 2022). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H$_1$: Residents' CA significantly influences their behavioral intentions toward SUPT.

2.3. *Residents' Support for the Protection of Cultural Heritage*

Heritage is a vital element that connects individuals with their cultural origins, fosters a sense of belonging, and instills a feeling of being part of a community (Mbaiwa & Gladys, 2023). The concepts of community and heritage are interrelated and mutually strengthening. Communities come together due to their accumulated heritage, and in turn, they continue to develop their heritage after forming a community. Shared solid cultural values and the significant heritage of a region contribute to a sense of community belonging. Common values inherited from the past strengthen

individuals' emotional connection to the place they live and make them more sensitive to preserving their heritage values (Waterton, 2014).

From the tourism industry's perspective, destinations' cultural values are fundamental driving factors that influence consumers' travel decisions. Therefore, destinations consider their cultural heritage as a means to stand out and promote themselves (Stone et al., 2023). Additionally, locals can support tourism because it can serve as an efficient intermediary in preserving cultural heritage assets and promoting them to the outside world (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019). On the other hand, worrying about the destruction of cultural values and heritage and a destination's traditional and natural structure may decrease social support for tourism. From this perspective, some studies have revealed that as social attachment increases, support for tourism decreases due to concerns that cultural and environmental values and heritages can be damaged (Um & Crompton, 1987; Gursoy et al., 2010). Thus, CA, residents' SUPT, and SUPCH are subjects that need to be boiled down; therefore, the following hypotheses were set;

H₂: Residents' CA significantly influences their behavioral intentions toward SUPCH.

H₃: Residents' behavioral intent toward SUPT significantly influences their behavioral intention toward SUPCH.

2.4. *Residents' Perceived Tourism Impacts*

Residents who feel a spiritual attachment to their communities and geography may have either positive or negative feelings toward tourism movements (Gursoy et al., 2002, 2010; Dedeoğlu et al., 2023). Residents favor tourism in terms of economics because it is a crucial tool for regional development (Cifci et al., 2023a; Olya, 2023). The factors that cause residents to have negative attitudes toward the tourism industry are usually tourism's socio-cultural and environmental impacts. Sociocultural impacts are directly linked to residents' social connectedness. Tourism can cause significant changes in sociocultural elements, such as residents' daily lives, values, and identities. Protecting socio-cultural character is essential in two ways: Firstly, the intention to preserve cultural character is closely related to social cohesion. Second, the fact that the socio-cultural nature of a region is a tourist attraction is also necessary for the continuity of tourism activities. In line with this information, the following hypotheses were developed:

H₄: Residents' CA significantly influences their attitudes toward POSI.

H₅: Residents' CA significantly influences their attitudes toward NEGA.

2.5. *Mediating Role of Residents' Perceived Tourism Impacts*

Residents' understanding and support for tourism are essential for developing tourism in the region and improving the tourist experience (Phuc & Nguyen, 2023). Therefore, understanding residents' attitudes toward tourism development is crucial (Hadinejad et al., 2019). One of the critical models regarding residents' attitudes toward tourism is Doxey's Irridex Model (Suharyanto et al., 2023) which based on the social–economic–environmental changes. According to Doxey, the attitudes of locals toward tourism activities in a region can be categorized into four stages: euphoria, apathy, annoyance, and antagonism. In the initial stage of euphoria, residents experience enthusiasm about the socio-economic benefits of tourism. As tourism continues to grow in the area, their attitudes progressively shift from apathy to annoyance, ultimately leading to antagonism (Fan, 2023).

Numerous factors also affect residents' perceptions of tourism, such as their experience and knowledge of the tourism industry, how long tourism activities have been going on in the region, region of residence, length of residency, and demographic characteristics. Tourism perception varies across communities. Depending on the level of tourism utilization, some communities may have a higher tolerance for tourism, while others may have a lower tolerance (Lundberg, 2015). While the positive effects of tourism, such as economic development, are understood in the short term, its effects, such as environmental problems and sociocultural deformation, are understood in the long term (Dedeoğlu et al., 2023).

In addition, sharing cultural heritage elements, which are sources of pride for residents, with the outside world is a significant tourist attraction and an important tool for regional development. Heritage is the most crucial component of societies and geographies' economic and social empowerment through their introduction to the outside world. Events, civilizations, and cultures that develop over centuries or even millennia leave many elements to be desired in the future. These remains are vital for understanding and recognizing the past. The interest shown by tourists in the heritage of past cultures positively motivates the tourism industry related to heritage; thus, regional development is achieved. This issue positively impacts residents' preservation of heritage elements (Molina et al., 2023). In line with these ideas, the following hypotheses were developed:

H₆: Residents' attitudes toward POSI significantly influence their behavioral intent toward SUPT (**H₆ₐ**); behavioral intention toward SUPCH (**H₆ᵦ**).

H7: Residents' attitudes toward NEGA significantly influence their behavioral intent toward SUPT (**H7a**); behavioral intention toward SUPCH (**H7b**).

H8: Residents' perceived POSI mediates the relationship between residents' CA and their behavioral intent toward SUPT (H8a); as well as behavioral intention toward SUPCH (H8b).

H9: Residents' perceived NEGA mediates the relationship between residents' CA and their behavioral intent toward SUPT (H9a); as well as behavioral intention toward SUPCH (H9b).

H10: Residents' attitudes toward SUPCH mediate the relationship between residents' CA and their behavioral intent toward SUPT.

2.6. *Moderating Role of Length of Residency*

As the length of residence increases, social relations with the community deepen, which enables the individual to feel an emotional connection to the community (Ma, 2021). Beggs et al. (1996) noted that CA emerges depending on the duration of residence, the social status of the individual in the community, and the stage of the individual's life cycle. The intense emotional bond with the place concerns the long-term development of the place, and at this point, the long-term residence may be a factor; however, without a spiritual connection to the location, individuals are unlikely to care about its long-term benefits, regardless of how long they have lived there (Man Cheng et al., 2022).

Residents may have either positive or negative perceptions of the various developments brought about by the growth of tourism in a region. While the positive effects of these developments (e.g., economic impact) can be seen in the short term, the negative consequences (e.g., environmental problems, cultural degeneration, psychological effects, etc.) ordinarily occur in the long term (Gautam, 2023). The spiritual bond that develops in connection with the extension of the residence period also develops sensitivity to the developments in the region (e.g., Kanakis et al., 2019; Man Cheng et al., 2022; Papastathopoulos et al., 2020). While elements that will positively affect the interests of the region and its inhabitants are more readily adopted, factors that may cause the degeneration of the area and features that may cause damage and destruction of cultural heritage are firmly rejected (Dedeoğlu et al., 2023). In this regard, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H11: LoR moderates the relationship between CA and SUPT (**H11a**); CA and SUPHC (**H11b**); CA and POSI (**H11c**); CA and NEGA (**H11d**); POSI and SUPT (**H11e**); POSI and SUPHC (**H11f**); NEGA and SUPT (**H11g**); NEGA and SUPHC (**H11h**); SUPCH and SUPT (**H11j**).
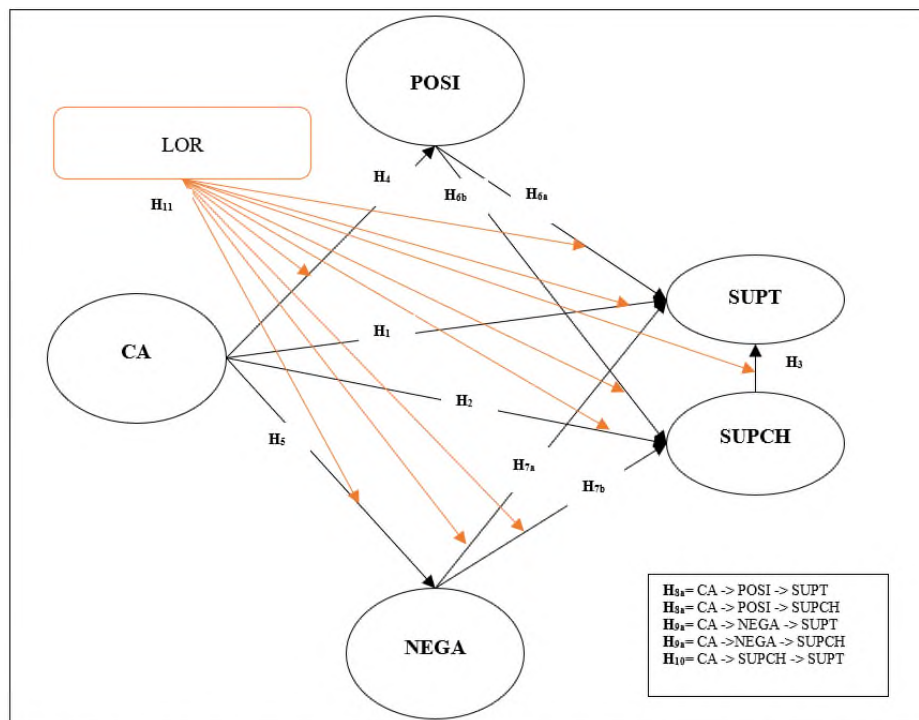
Note: CA = community attachment, POSI = positive impact, NEGA = negative impact, SUPT = tourism support, SUPCH=support for protection of cultural heritage, LOR= length of residency.

Figure 1. Proposed model

3. Method

3.1. *Research Instrument*

The quantitative research approach was used through a self-administered questionnaire technique that consisted of multiple-item scales employing a 5-point Likert-type response style, consisting of demographic details (e.g., gender) and residenpographic pieces of information (e.g., year of residency).

The primary components of the questionnaire were derived from previously validated measures. Initially, CA was assessed using a unidimensional scale of five questions adapted from Nicholas et al. (2009). Next, we evaluated the perceived effects of tourism, as Chen et al. (2017) specified, consisting of 10 items categorized into two categories (i.e., negative and positive impacts). Residents' attitudes toward the protection of cultural heritage were assessed using a set of six questions from a study conducted by Chui et al. (2011), and their behaviors related to supporting tourism were examined based on Nunkoo and Gursoy's (2012) study (see Appendix).

3.2. *Sample Design*

This research's sample comprises individuals belonging to the Bektashi faith as destination residents. Haci Bektash Veli, a prominent figure in Bektashism, established a dervish lodge in Nevsehir, Türkiye, during the 12th century, demonstrating his strong commitment to the Islamic faith (Cifci & Akova, 2016). The dervish lodge has been repurposed as a museum and has gained significant popularity, ranking as the fourth most frequent museum in Türkiye, with more than 500 K visitors (Municipality of Hacibektash, 2021).

Despite the considerable influx of visitors, the population of residents in the Hacibektash destination stands at 10,503 individuals, primarily due to substantial external migration (T.R. Nevşehir Special Provincial Administration, 2021). Consequently, we used purposeful sampling to collect data on the Bektashi faith destination between August 15 and 30, 2022. This sampling strategy is commonly used in tourism and social science research to identify reliable informants (Cifci et al., 2023).

3.3. *Data collection*

A panel of two academics with solid knowledge of the subject administered the questionnaire to ascertain its validity. The questionnaire had relatively minor wording revisions based on the comments received from the panel. Further, to ensure face validity, a pilot test was conducted to assess the accuracy of the scale items in June 2023. Forty samples were analyzed for this evaluation, and it was determined that no modifications were necessary. After administering the pretest, 263 closed-ended questionnaire forms were collected for data analysis in December 2023. Among the 263 questions collected, a substantial number of 245 questionnaires were considered appropriate for inclusion in the dataset. This quantity can be considered sufficient for using the Smart-PLS, as suggested by previous studies (Hair et al., 2019; Wong, 2013).

3.4. *Data Analysis*

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used as an appropriate method for assessing the supposed causal relationships among latent components. PLS-SEM has a causal character that facilitates the harmonious integration of explanation and prediction (Becker et al., 2023). This aligns well with the prevailing research landscape in the field of T&H, where the use of empirically validated hypotheses is crucial for policy recommendations. Therefore, PLS-SEM was considered suitable for this research, as it effectively improves the understanding of preexisting theoretical frameworks (Hair et al., 2019). This approach also enables greater numbers of indicator variables hence increasing the confirmed model validity and reliability, providing more insights for future research and managerial recommendations (Astrachan et al., 2014).

4. Results

4.1. *Respondents' Profiles*

Out of 245 questions, men answered 166 (67.8%) and women answered 79 (32.2%). One hundred twenty-seven residents, accounting for 52.9%, were between 35 and 64 years old, 17 residents (7.1%) were 65 years or older and 96 residents (40%) were aged 18 to 34. Married individuals comprised 58.4% of the respondents (n = 143), while 102 respondents (41.6%) were single. Among the 120 respondents (49%), 67 (27.4%) held undergraduate and graduate degrees, and 58 (23.7%) had completed elementary school. The 245 participants included 76 artisans (31%). Seventy-one respondents worked in the private and public sectors (29%) and 39 were unemployed (15.9%).

Additionally, 39 respondents (15.9%) were students, and 20 (8.2%) were retirees. Finally, 126 inhabitants (52.5%) had lived in Bektashi for more than 30 years, while 114 (47.5%) had lived there for less than 30 years.

4.2. *Assessment of the Model*

To assess the measurement model, this study analyzed convergent validity, discriminant validity, factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and HTMT values. Hair et al. (2022) suggested that the factor loading should not be below 0.7. However, when determining whether the loads affect the composite reliability, a range of factor loads between 0.4 and 0.7 is allowable (Rasoolimanesh & Ali, 2018). Hair et al. (2022) posited that the AVE of all the constructs in the study must exceed 0.5. According to Table 1 factor loads are not less than 0.5; coefficient of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) is above the recommended range; one of the mean-variance (AVE) values disclosed falls above or equals to 0.5; and composite reliability (CR) values are above 0.6. These values indicate that the concept of the proposed model is feasible.

Table 1. Model Assessment

Measurement Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Community attachment (Reflective)		0.809	0.824	0.876	0.642
CA1	0.660				
CA2	0.900				
CA3	0.832				
CA4	0.794				
Positive impact (Reflective)		0.821	0.835	0.874	0.581
POSI1	0.702				
POSI2	0.815				
POSI3	0.747				
POSI4	0.743				
POSI5	0.801				
Negative impact (Reflective)		0.817	0.903	0.872	0.581
NEGA1	0.826				
NEGA2	0.895				
NEGA3	0.776				
NEGA4	0.560				
NEGA5	0.713				
Support for tourism (Reflective)		0.735	0.740	0.834	0.559
SUPT1	0.733				
SUPT2	0.853				
SUPT3	0.696				
SUPT4	0.699				
Support for protection of cultural heritage (Reflective)		0.848	0.856	0.891	0.582
SUPCH1	0.851				
SUPCH2	0.861				
SUPCH3	0.810				
SUPCH4	0.826				
SUPCH5	0.629				
SUPCH6	0.541				

The next step consists of testing discriminant validity by adopting the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT; Hair et al., 2022), whose threshold should not exceed 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT values are presented in Table 2, and the analysis confirms that both convergent and discriminant validity are statistically significant. For the subsequent analysis of path coefficients, hypotheses, mediating effects, and moderating effects, the bootstrapping method was employed. In addition, PLS-SEM was employed to assess the common method variance (CMV) by means of a full linearity assessment. To this extent, all the factor level VIFs were below 3.0, disproving the inclusion of CMV in the study model (Hair et al., 2011).

Table 2. Discriminant validity

Constructs	CA	SUPCH	POSI	NEGA	SUPT
CA					
SUPCH	0.536				
POSI	0.411	0.238			
NEGA	0.136	0.076	0.253		
SUPT	0.394	0.699	0.263	0.112	

4.3. *Structural Model*

To compare the effects of structural model relationships, it is essential to first assess the model's goodness-of-fit index. However, PLS-SEM cannot produce concurrent global fitness indices. Consequently, prior research has recommended that r^2 scores should serve as the single test procedure for assessing the level of explanation of models (Cifci, 2022). The geometric mean of the averages of R^2 and commonality serves as a valuable regression technique for evaluating PLS path modeling through the computation of the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). In behavioral research, the following thresholds for GoF analysis are typically employed: GoFsmall = 0.1, GoFmedium = 0.25, and GoFlarge = 0.36 (Hoffmann & Birnbirch, 2012). As indicated in Table 3, the computed goodness-of-fit value was 0.309, which signifies a medium fit for the assessment.

Table 3. The goodness-of-fit value

Constructs	AVE	r^2
CA	0.642	
SUPCH	0.559	0.205
POSI	0.581	0.119
NEGA	0.581	0.007
SUPT	0.559	0.336
Average Scores	0.584	0.166
AVE*r^2	0.096	
(GOF = $\sqrt{(AVE \times R2)}$)	0.309	

To further test the significance of the path coefficients, all estimates were based on a two-tailed test; for bootstrapping with 5000 iterations within a two-tailed test, a critical value of *1.96 (p<0.05); **2.58 (p<0.01) was chosen (see Table 4).

Table 4. Hypotheses testings

Hypotheses	f^2	Partial mediation			Full mediation			Decisions
		Std. B	Std. Deviation	T Statistics	Std. β	Std. Deviation	T Statistics	
H$_1$: CA -> SUPT	**0.003**	0.046	0.072	0.707^{ns}	0.267	0.071	3.656**	Supported
H$_2$: CA -> SUPCH	**0.205**	0.432	0.071	6.023**	0.022	0.022	0.865^{ns}	Supported
H$_3$: SUPCH -> SUPT	**0.320**	0.514	0.093	5.540**				Supported
H$_4$: CA -> POSI	**0.135**	0.353	0.063	5.440**				Supported
H$_5$: CA -> NEGA	**0.007**	0.095	0.078	1.082^{ns}				Not- Supported
H$_{6a}$: POSI -> SUPT	**0.016**	0.114	0.060	1.853^{ns}	0.031	0.030	0.935^{ns}	Not- Supported
H$_{6b}$: POSI -> SUPCH	**0.003**	0.058	0.055	0.999^{ns}				Not- Supported
H$_{7a}$: NEGA -> SUPCH	**0.000**	-0.003	0.078	0.078^{ns}				Not- Supported
H$_{7b}$: NEGA -> SUPT	**0.022**	-0.124	0.061	2.033**	0.002	0.040	0.077^{ns}	Supported

T-values.   *1.96 (p<0.05); **2.58 (p<0.01) / ^{ns} not significant.

The authors assessed the mediating effects with 5000 iterations of the bootstrapping method within a two-tailed test; a critical value of *1.96 (p<0.05) and **2.58 (p<0.01) were chosen. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5. Mediating effects

Hypotheses	Std. β	Std. Deviation	T Statistics	Decisions
H8a: CA -> POSI -> SUPT	0.040	0.022	1.713	Not- Supported
H8b: CA -> POSI -> SUPCH	0.020	0.019	0.971	Not- Supported
H9a: CA -> NEGA -> SUPT	-0.011	0.011	0.965	Not- Supported
H9b: CA -> NEGA -> SUPCH	0.002	0.008	0.061	Not- Supported
H10: CA -> SUPCH -> SUPT	0.226	0.066	3.343**	Support

Note: bootstrapping based on n = 5000 subsamples (t-values. *1.96 (p<0.05); **2.58 (p<0.01)

The authors separated items on length of residency to find the median score for identifying two different groups, i.e., more length of residency time (above 30.00) and less length of residency time groups (below 29.99). The more than 30 years' group ($n^{(more)}$ = 126, 52%; Mean=47.56; Median=46.00; Std. deviation= 11.972), and the more than 30 years' group ($n^{(less)}$ = 119, 48%; Mean=17.01; Median=19.00; Std. deviation= 8.075). The statistical power of the groups was evaluated to examine the minimum r^2 value in the endogenous constructs (i.e., SUPT and SUPHC) at a 5% significance level (Hair et al., 2022). Moreover, to find out sample size for this study for two groups, the G*Power test was conducted (Kang 2021). From the power analysis, the sample size was estimated to be 40, the effect size of 3.78 and the power of 0.95. Thus, a sample of 245 completed questionnaires completed by participants was too large to conduct the hypotheses testing (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020).

To evaluate whether residents' length of life moderates the relationship between the two models for all path coefficients. As shown in Table 6, the authors performed an MGA analysis based on the Bootstrapping significance test estimated from 5000 sub-samples (Sarstedt et al., 2011).

Table 6. Moderating effects of length of residency (Less than 30 vs. more than 30)

Relationships	Std. β		Std. Deviation		T Statistics		Decisions
	Less	**More**	**Less**	**More**	**Less**	**More**	
H11a: CA -> SUPT	0.129	-0.102	0.098	0.109	1.242	0.615	Not- Supported
H11b: CA -> SUPCH	0.334	0.538	0.091	0.113	3.584**	4.713**	Supported
H11c: CA -> POSI	0.345	0.365	0.086	0.099	3.784**	3.540**	Supported
H11d: CA -> NEGA	0.149	-0.012	0.128	0.151	1.095	0.144	Not- Supported
H11e: POSI -> SUPT	0.101	0.139	0.099	0.088	1.028	1.452	Not- Supported
H11f: POSI -> SUPCH	0.127	-0.000	0.107	0.073	1.080	0.046	Not- Supported
H11g: NEGA -> SUPT	-0.182	-0.110	0.091	0.110	2.091**	1.091	Supported
H11h: NEGA -> SUPCH	0.027	-0.070	0.126	0.116	0.470	0.599	Not- Supported
H11j: SUPCH -> SUPT	0.494	0.572	0.110	0.173	4.523**	3.345**	Supported

Note: In the bootstrapping MGA approach, t-values: *1.96 (p<0.05); **2.58 (p<0.01)

5. Discussion

Findings showcase that Bektashi residents' attachment to their communities positively affects their support for tourism development and the protection of their cultural heritage. These findings are compatible with the results of community attachment theory (Nicholas et al., 2009), providing a better explanation for it. Additionally, residents' behavioral intent toward tourism support appears to influence residents' behavioral intention toward cultural heritage support, which aligns with Nicholas et al. (2009). CA also significantly affects residents' perceptions of the positive impact of tourism, but not their perceived negative impact.

Residents' perceived positive tourism impacts did not significantly influence their attitudes toward support of tourism development and the protection of cultural heritages implying with previous findings (Gursoy & Snyder, 2010; Gannon et al., 2020), but in contrast to SET. Given Doxey's Irridex Model, this may also be related to the fact that Bektash locals started to perceive the tourism development phase as an inconvenience. When examining the hypothesis regarding perceived NEGA and SUPT, it was revealed that the negative perceptions of the Bektashi residents toward tourism were negatively related to support for tourism development and not significant for the protection of cultural heritage.

Additionally, a meaningful relationship was found to be similar between CA, SUPT; and SUPCH, supporting previous studies. (e.g., Gannon et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019). In addition, the only mediating effect regarding support for the protection of cultural heritage between CA and SUPT is significant.

The results further revealed the positive influences of CA on SUPCH and POSI dimensions for residents who lived less or more than 30 years in the Bektashi faith destination, and these effects were significantly higher for residents with longer residency times (above 30). The results also demonstrated that perceived negative impact and support for tourism development had a significant and negative directional relationship. This result indicates that when residents with a shorter residency (below 29.99) perceive the negative impacts of tourism, they support tourism development more than residents with a more extended living (above 30). Lastly, the result shows that residents' attitudes toward protecting cultural heritage and supporting tourism development have a significant and positive relationship with residents with longer residency in Bektashi faith destinations. Contrary to this finding, Cheng et al. (2022), who examined the moderate effect of length of residence, found that the moderating effect of length of residence is ineffective for tourism development. Consistent with this finding, Sinclair-Maragh (2017) noted that the duration of residency does not significantly influence residents' perceptions of or support for tourism.

6. Conclusion

6.1. *Theoretical Contribution*

The scarcity of research on residents' perspectives and attitudes towards tourism in faith destinations, as well as the impact of residents' length of residency formed the basis of this study (Cifci et al., 2023a; Kim et al., 2020; Tam et al., 2022). The past literature fails to look at the psychological consequences of faith tourism development and cultural heritage protection on residents, with length of residency acting as a moderator, hence this study is unique to the subject of faith tourism. As a result, this study addresses an important gap in the literature by experimentally examining the influence of CA, perceived tourism impacts, and LoR on tourism development and cultural heritage protection in a developing faith destination.

When previous studies in the field of T&H are examined, although place attachment has been extensively emphasized (Dwyer et al., 2019), social attachment has been rarely highlighted (Eluwole et al., 2022; Eslami et al., 2019; Nugroho et al., 2022; Pichierri et al., 2023). Additionally, although there are studies on the mediating role of residents' perceived tourism impacts (Ganji et al., 2021; Gannon et al., 2021; Tosun et al., 2021), the moderating role of length of stay between those concepts of social cohesion, tourism, and cultural heritage has never been investigated, highlighting the importance of this study for one more time. By doing so, this study theoretically fills an omitted gap and contributes to tourism development strategies for faith destinations.

One of the striking and confirming findings of this study is that when the perceived negative impact of tourism is increasing, it continues to gain support from residents—the results of the study point in the opposite direction of Doxey's Irridex Model. According to the Iridex Model, residents should feel antagonism toward tourism activities because of the negative impacts of tourism (Fan, 2023). Our study shows that people living in faith destinations have a more favorable attitude when they perceive the negative effects of tourism; hence, they continue to support tourism. This situation demonstrates that residents may have believed that the negative impacts of tourism could be eliminated with development. On the other hand, the mediating role of attitudes toward the preservation of cultural heritage, put forward as a phenomenon between attachment to the community and development of tourism, contradicts residents' attitudes toward cultural heritage in the face of the negative effects of tourism.

Lastly, it is also observed that the length of residency increases the degree of separation between the extent of residents' community attachment and their perceptions toward development of tourism and protection of cultural heritage. With regard to these observations, the main proposition of this study, which was developed from the notion that there are positive correlations between LoR, CA, SUPT, and SUPCH, was affirmed and yielded a novel approach to enhancing the understanding of the community attachment theory.

6.2. *Practical Contribution*

Residents who are satisfied with their lives and have a high sense of belonging to their community or place ensure that tourists visiting the destination are welcomed with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Therefore, tourism leaders and local administrators must be committed to continuing policies and regulations to improve their quality of life. At the same time, residents need to be educated and supported about the changes they will experience by introducing tourism activities into their living spaces and how they can turn the tourism industry into an opportunity for themselves.

Faith tourism activities cannot continue without cultural heritage elements that preserve their unique identity. Faith-based tourism movements have an essential place in the tourism industry. For this reason, as Cifci (2022) noted, academic and practical studies should be conducted to understand and develop faith-based tourism activities in a multidimensional way.

The findings indicate that residents' CA plays a crucial role in facilitating tourism development and safeguarding cultural heritage. Furthermore, the results suggest a significant and positive correlation between residents' period of residence and their community attachment, as well as their support for tourism activities. Additionally, the study establishes a notable positive relationship between the LoR, CA, and SUPT. To increase social integration and equity, residents should be empowered and made to feel that they are an essential part of the community. It should be conveyed to residents that supporting tourism development is a crucial part of social and regional development.

Faith destinations have a strong relationship with local culture and traditions; thus, strengthen residents' attachment to their destination (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004), understanding their attitudes toward tourism activities in faith destinations and the reasons for such attitudes is essential for developing attractive faith destinations. Understanding how residents perceive tourism can help overcome the negative perception of tourism support and cultural heritage preservation and indirectly address the community's problems. In this context, faith destination authorities should facilitate strong links between residents and elements of faith such as cultural heritage and tourism. It is believed those destination authorities' interactions with faith leaders and leaders accepted by the community can strengthen the faith-community-tourism relationship.

6.3. *Limitations and Future Studies*

First, this research is confined to an Islamic-faith destination, Hacibektas, Türkiye . This issue determines the generalisability of the study findings. As a result, it would be beneficial to replicate our model by sampling various faith-based destinations for better comparison and generalisation.

Second, understanding residents' attitudes and behaviors toward tourism needs to be updated due to its dynamic nature. Based on these findings, the study examined the moderate effects of length of residency, a residency typography characteristic. Moreover, due to the method (i.e., purposeful) used in this study, the average life expectancy of the participants was 30 years. In future studies, qualitative or mixed methods can be used to determine precisely after which year life expectancy makes a difference in residents' perceptions. Future studies can also expand the study area by examining the effects of demographic characteristics (e.g., gender; Cifci et al., 2023b).

Lastly, the findings obtained using the community attachment theory developed by Nicholas et al. (2009) yielded different and notable results compared to SET and Doxey's Irridex model. Therefore, future academic research must further explore the links between CA, tourism, and cultural heritage.

ORCID :

Hatice ÇİFÇİ	0000-0002-9761-226X
Senay BOZ	0000-0002-0431-8994
Şehnaz DEMİRKOL	0000-0002-2122-4551

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How cite this article

Happiness of Working Women and Homemakers in Türkiye: The Role of Social Norms and Issues in the Work and Home Domains

Zeynep B. UĞUR[1]

[1]Assoc. Prof. Dr., Social Sciences University of Ankara, Department of Economics, Ankara Türkiye

Corresponding author : Zeynep B. UĞUR
E-mail : zeynep.ugur@asbu.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

In this study, we analyze the happiness levels of working and homemaker women in Türkiye. For this purpose, we utilized individual-level data from the Life Satisfaction Survey (LSS), covering a 19-year period from 2004 to 2022 with over 344,000 observations. Our findings reveal that even after controlling for various background factors, working women report significantly lower happiness levels than homemakers. The study examined the roles of social norms, work-related issues, and home-related issues. Social norms against women are not overwhelmingly prevalent, as nearly 80% of women does not report significant social pressure due to gender. However, gender-related social pressures partly explain the happiness gap between working women and homemakers. Problems in the work domain do not significantly drive this differential in happiness. Instead, issues in the home domain contribute to the happiness disadvantage, particularly in financially better-off households. This suggests that while societal norms play a role, the balance between work and home responsibilities, especially in wealthier households, is crucial for understanding lower happiness levels among working women. The findings underscore the importance of addressing home-related challenges to improve the well-being of working women.

Keywords: Women's Work, Gender, Happiness, Well-being
JEL Codes: J16, I31, J12

1. Introduction

Despite advancements in women's social status, particularly in developed countries through the women's movement, questions persist about the impact on overall happiness. Interestingly, women in traditional societies enjoy a happiness advantage (Meisenberg & Woodley, 2015), while this advantage has been shifting in favor of men in developed countries (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009).

The women's movement has brought about significant gains, including improved labor market outcomes and a narrowed gender wage gap in developed countries. In North America, East Asia, the Pacific, Europe, Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean regions, over 50% of women aged 15-64 are engaged in the labor market (World Bank, 2022). In OECD countries, the gender pay gap, measured as the difference between the median earnings of women and men relative to the median earnings of men, decreased from 18.1% in 2000 to 11.6% in 2020 (OECD, 2023).

Theoretically, improvements in labor market outcomes for women are expected to enhance their well-being by increasing their income and thereby broadening their range of choices. Additionally, securing employment or establishing a connection to the labor market can provide women with alternatives beyond traditional marriage roles. Increased economic independence can strengthen women's negotiating position within the household. Specifically, it allows women to have a more substantial fallback option, or a "threat point," which refers to the alternative they would pursue if negotiations within the home do not go favorably. By having a viable alternative, women can exert greater influence over household decisions and negotiations. (Duflo, 2012; Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 1997; Rodriguez, 2022). Thus, we expect to observe higher welfare for working women than for homemakers from a standard economic perspective.

There are other opinions on the impact on women who work outside the home. First, working women may not be better off if they also continue to engage in housework after returning from work. For instance, the famous book "The Second Shift" by Hochschild and Machung (2012) argues that women's entry into the paid workforce did not lead to a decrease in household responsibilities, resulting in them effectively working a "second shift". It is also known that some types of jobs and workplaces are also exploitative for women (Kabeer et al., 2018). Second, there seems to be a trade-off between the labor market and the marriage market for women. It has been documented that men do not prefer to marry women who are seen as ambitious and deeply connected to the labor market (Fisman et al., 2006; Hitsch et al., 2010). Promotions increase the odds of divorce for women but do not have the same effect on men (Folke & Rickne, 2020). Since compared to marriage, divorce reduces people's well-being significantly and even in the long-term (Lucas, 2005), we may observe lower subjective well-being for working women, especially in the higher ranks of the labor market. There is also evidence that women's employment increases domestic violence against women in Sub-Saharan Africa (Cools & Kotsadam, 2017), India (Eswaran & Malhotra, 2011), Spain (Alonso-Borrego & Carrasco, 2017) and Türkiye (Erten & Keskin, 2021).

Third, pervasive gender norms have deep historical roots (Alesina et al., 2013). According to these norms, women are expected to operate in the domain of the home, and men are expected to operate in the labor market to earn a living for the family (Alesina et al., 2013; Davidoff & Hall, 2018). These norms prevent women from working (Jayachandran, 2021), and even if they work, they may face negative consequences because they are not in line with those norms. Many studies have demonstrated that societies may sanction individuals when they fall into positions that are not in line with social norms (Clark, 2003). Thus, working women may feel unhappy because they face social disapproval.

It is also possible that while assessing their life satisfaction or happiness, homemaker women may consider only their family life, whereas working women may also take into consideration the circumstances surrounding their job. Even if the wage gap has closed in many countries, pervasive discrimination against women persists in the labor market. In addition, working women may take their male counterparts as a reference group (Başlevent & Kırmanoğlu, 2017). On average, women fare worse than men based on objective measures such as lower earnings. This may put a pressure on their wellbeing assessment because studies have revealed that having a relatively worse off condition reduces wellbeing (e.g. Clark (2003); Ugur (2021)). There is evidence that married women in Türkiye are often excluded from prestigious and traditionally male-dominated occupations (Ermiş-Mert, 2017). Therefore, working women may feel less satisfied with their lives due to unfavorable circumstances in their job. However, job problems do not explain the plight of working women because women generally have higher job satisfaction than men (Clark, 1997).

To clarify the concepts, throughout this article, when we refer to "working women," we address women employed or engaged in some form of work outside the home for which they receive financial or non-financial compensation. It is important to recognize that homemakers also contribute significantly through their work, although much of it may be unpaid and invisible (Daniels, 1987).

This study explores the happiness of women in Türkiye who work outside the home compared to those who are homemakers. Individual-level data obtained from the Life Satisfaction Survey between 2004 and 2022 were utilized. Additionally, the analysis explores whether working women and homemakers feel social pressure based on their gender or occupation and whether such pressure explains the happiness differential. Furthermore, to clarify whether problems in the work or home domain contribute to the happiness gap, we also study women's job and marital satisfaction.

To explain the context in which women working outside operate, we provide some indicators of working women's life in Türkiye. Opportunities in the labor market are improving for women in Türkiye. Figure 1 shows that women's labor force participation has been constantly rising, except for 2020 and 2021, the periods of the COVID-19 pandemic.
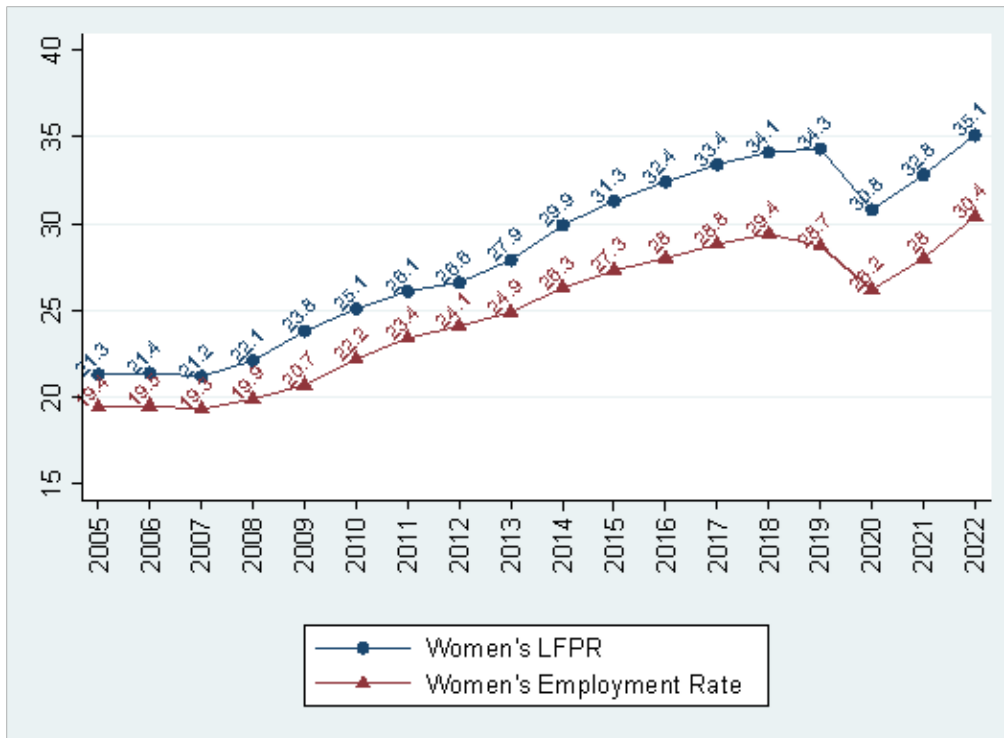
Figure 1. Labor Market Indicators for Women in Türkiye
Source: TURKSTAT (2023)

Despite women's participation in the workforce in Türkiye, household chores are not equally divided between men and women. According to the 2014-2015 Time-Use Survey by TURKSTAT, as of 2015, working men spent an average of 0.77 hours on household chores, while working women spent approximately 3.52 hours – nearly five times the amount allocated by working men. Homemaker women dedicate even more time, averaging 4.98 hours to household chores, compared to 1.12 hours dedicated by unemployed men (TURKSTAT, 2020). These statistics underscore the persistent gender imbalance in domestic responsibilities and hint at the plight of working women in Türkiye.

One can argue that individuals are supposed to maximize their happiness by engaging in endeavors that maximize their utility/happiness from a neoclassical perspective. However, evidence has shown that individuals may not always choose what is best for them (Gilbert, 2009). Thus, policymakers can influence happiness by altering the social environment in a way that favors happiness.

Subjective well-being measures are increasingly being used to evaluate the successes and failures of public policy throughout the world (Stiglitz et al., 2018; Stiglitz et al., 2009). Our results have significant implications for policymakers in Türkiye. Those who aim to increase women's contribution to economic output should be concerned with ways to improve the subjective well-being of working women.

The contribution of this research to the literature lies in demonstrating the happiness differential between homemakers and working women in Türkiye, a Muslim and patriarchal society that has had a liberal stance on women's rights since its founding. This study is relevant because it is based on the largest available and nationally representative dataset from 2004 to 2022.

2. Literature Review

To understand what affects women's happiness, we first review the results about women's overall happiness in different contexts. Some unexpected results have emerged from the literature. Countries where significant advancements have been achieved in the direction of gender equality, especially regarding women's access to the labor market, have also experienced a decline in female happiness. Blanchflower and Oswald (2004) examined happiness trends in the United States and Great Britain from the early 1970s to the late 1990s. Their findings suggested that during this period, women tended to be happier than men in both countries. However, a noteworthy observation from that study is the declining happiness trend among women in the United States. Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) further contributed to this discussion, highlighting that despite women having a life satisfaction edge over men in the 1970s in the United States, there was a systematic decrease in women's happiness. Intriguingly, women reported less happiness than men after the 1990s. A similar diminishing female happiness relative to male happiness is also noted for European Union countries (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). In Switzerland, working women have been found to benefit from living in places where people approve equal pay for equal work in terms of better labor market outcomes (Lalive & Stutzer, 2010). According to the same study, working women are less satisfied with life in communities where the approval of the gender wage gap is higher.

One line of research investigated a wide range of countries and found that women in traditional societies, where they are not economically active, report higher happiness. Tesch-Römer et al. (2008) identified a small negative correlation (0.10) between the female life satisfaction advantage over males and the relative female economic activity, as measured by the share of women aged 15 years and above participating in the labor market compared to men. Using World Values Survey data from more than 90 countries, Meisenberg and Woodley (2015) documented that a higher female-to-male labor force participation ratio and higher rates of female non-agricultural employment correlate with lower happiness among women than men. This negative impact also extends to average life satisfaction for women compared with men. Utilizing the Gallup World Poll dataset, which covers over 70 countries worldwide, Zweig (2015) found that the happiness advantage of women over men is more pronounced in lower-income countries and disappears in higher-income countries. Additionally, there is no observed relationship between women's rights, as measured by the proportion of seats occupied by women in legislative bodies, and women's happiness.

Another line of research directly documented the differences in subjective well-being among women with varying labor market statuses. Sato (2022) reported that homemakers in Japan are happier than working women, based on a panel dataset that accounts for individual fixed effects. Using longitudinal data from the Australian HILDA survey, Booth and Van Ours (2009) found that women working part-time express greater satisfaction with their working hours than those working full-time, and that the life satisfaction of partnered women decreases when they work full-time. De Rock and Périlleux (2023) reported higher life satisfaction among women working part-time in a Belgian dataset. Their study also documented that women who work part-time often undertake a higher share of unpaid domestic work, effectively resulting in a "second shift" at home.

Drawing on data from the International Social Survey Programme, which includes 28 countries, Treas et al. (2011) found that among women with partners (married or cohabiting), homemakers experience greater happiness than those working full-time, although the difference is marginal. At the same time, there is no difference in happiness between homemakers and those who work part-time. Most of the observations in the sample come from Western countries (Treas et al., 2011). Başlevent and Kirmanoğlu (2017) examined women's well-being using the European Social Survey dataset and found a negative impact of paid work on well-being compared to homemakers in settings with higher gender inequality. However, this negative impact is mitigated in places with greater gender equality.

Overall, the literature documents a negative relationship between women's happiness and higher participation in the labor market. This has been observed through country-level trends (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009), cross-country (or provincial) comparisons (Lalive & Stutzer, 2010; Meisenberg & Woodley, 2015; Zweig, 2015), and comparisons between homemakers and working women (Başlevent & Kirmanoğlu, 2017; Booth & Van Ours, 2009; Sato, 2022; Treas et al., 2011). However, most studies primarily provide evidence regarding comparisons between working and homemaker women within Western cultures, with the exception of Sato (2022), which focuses on Japan.

To the best of the author's knowledge, no study has thoroughly investigated the well-being of working women in comparison to homemakers in Türkiye. Although the broader literature attributes happiness differences to homemakers' conformity and working women's deviation from traditional gender roles, this has not been empirically tested. Moreover, previous studies have not distinguished between different types of paid work, such as public sector employment, which often offers better working conditions, versus roles like employee, employer, self-employed, or unpaid family worker.

We expect that the type of work affects working women's happiness because unpaid family workers might be perceived differently compared to those in other work statuses, potentially leading to better happiness outcomes for this group. In line with this, Sanin (2023) showed that paid work related to family output can reduce women's exposure to domestic violence.

3. Materials and Methods

The following regression models were established to examine the difference in happiness levels between working- and homemaker women.

$$HS_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Working_i + \beta X_i + u_i \dots \dots \dots \dots \dots \dots \tag{1}$$

The variable HS_i represents the happiness score of individual i, $Working_i$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the participant is working outside the home or not, and X_i is a vector representing variables such as age, marital status, education, and household income in brackets. X_i is a vector of background variables, such as age, marital status, education level, and household income, selected based on previous research in the domain of subjective well-being (e.g. Diener et al. (2002)).

We include dummy variables for each year to account for factors that might impact observations within a given year, such as random shocks.

Additionally, there may be unobserved differences between homemakers and working women that could affect the results. In other words, it is possible that homemakers have certain personality traits that differ from those of working women, and due to these differences, they may report different levels of happiness. For instance, personality traits that are positive for the labor market, such as ambition, are viewed negatively in the marriage market (Fisman et al., 2006; Hitsch et al., 2010). There are also findings indicating that even women from prestigious universities act in line with these expectations (Bursztyn et al., 2017), which may indicate personality differences. To address these differences, we control for values important to happiness, such as success, love, and money, and assess whether working women differ from homemakers in their value orientations. We also controlled for satisfaction with friendships and subjective health to capture these personality differences.

Working women contribute to household income, which may help alleviate family conflicts. Previous studies indicate that income has a small but significant impact on happiness in Türkiye (Ugur, 2021) and elsewhere (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). Therefore, in Model 2, we extend the analysis by including household income as an additional independent variable.

$$HS_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Working_i + \alpha_2 Inc_i + \beta X_i + u_i \dots \dots \dots \dots \dots \dots \tag{2}$$

In Model 3, we add $Public_i$ (public sector employment dummy variable) to differentiate between women working in public sector and private sectors.

$$HS_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Working_i + \alpha_2 Inc_i + \alpha_3 Public_i + \beta X_i + u_i \dots \dots \dots \dots \dots \tag{3}$$

In Model 4, the variable $Occup_i$ is introduced to represent the occupational status of female workers. This variable includes a set of indicators that specify whether a woman is an employee, employer, self-employed, or unpaid family worker. The purpose of incorporating $Occup_i$ into the model is to examine potential distinctions among different types of work.

$$HS_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Working_i + \alpha_2 Inc_i + \alpha_3 Public_i + \alpha_4 Occup_i + \beta X_i + u_i \dots \dots \dots \dots \dots \tag{4}$$

In this study, t-tests were used to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference between working and homemaker women with respect to control variables. T-tests are commonly employed for this purpose and are particularly suitable for comparing the means of two groups, as in our analysis.

The dependent variable, happiness score, is ordinal with only 5 possible values. Because the dependent variable is not continuous, ordered probit models are generally more appropriate. However, the coefficients obtained from the ordered probit models are not marginal effects. Research comparing OLS coefficients with ordered probit model coefficients indicates that they largely overlap (Ferrer-i-Carbonell & Frijters, 2004). Therefore, to facilitate interpretation, we used OLS for the primary analysis. Ordered probit results are provided in the appendix for comparison.

4. Data

The data used in this study were obtained from the Life Satisfaction Survey (LSS), which is conducted annually by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT). The LSS uses a stratified random sample that represents the non-institutionalized adult population (18 years and older) in Türkiye. In the 2004 survey, 6,714 participants participated, and in 2022, a total of 9,841 individuals were interviewed. The 2013 survey aimed for provincial-level representation, resulting in 196,203 observations. From 2004 to 2020, a total of 344,322 observations were collected.

The primary goal of the LSS is to assess people's quality of life, but it also covers various aspects related to life satisfaction. The survey is based on cross-sectional data. Until 2020, data were collected through face-to-face interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews in 2020 were conducted via telephone using the Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) method, which was used thereafter.

To measure the happiness of individuals, the survey asks: "When you think about your life as a whole, how happy are you?" Responses were categorized into five options ranging from 1 (Very Happy) to 5 (Not Happy at All).

Participants were initially asked if they had worked in the past week with the following response options: (1) worked, (2) not worked but still involved in work/job, (3) not worked. Those who indicated they did not work were then asked to specify their reasons with the following options: (1) Unable to find a job, (2) Seasonal worker, (3) Continuing education and training, (4) Engaged in household duties (including caring for children, elderly, or sick individuals), (5) Retired or stopped working, (6) Disabled or ill (incapable of working), (7) Elderly (not retired but considers oneself too old to work, 65+), (8) Have other income/no need to work, (9) Family and personal reasons, (10) Other.

We categorized individuals who indicated that they worked or were still involved in their job as working. Those who reported engaging in household duties were classified as homemakers.

The survey also collected information on whether individuals work in the public or private sector. Additionally, occupational status was recorded with the following question: "What is your status in the job you are working in?" The response options were: (1) Salaried/wage-earning/daily-paid, (2) Employer, (3) Self-employed, and (4) Unpaid family worker. These four occupational categories were used to differentiate between worker types.

Other background variables included age, marital status (never married, married, widowed, divorced), the highest level of education completed (elementary school or lower, secondary education or equivalent, high school or equivalent, and university or higher education), total household income (measured in five brackets), subjective health assessment (on a 5-point Likert scale), and satisfaction with friendship (on a 5-point Likert scale). Participants were also asked about their greatest source of happiness in life, which they had as options: (1) Success, (2) Work, (3) Health, (4) Love, (5) Money, and (6) Other. These variables were used as background variables in the regression analysis.

Starting from the 2009 survey, participants were asked about their experiences with social pressure. Specifically, to measure social pressure related to gender, the question was: "Do you experience any societal pressure due to your gender?" Response options included: (1) Never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Usually, and (4) Always. This question helps us understand whether social pressure contributes to the happiness disparity between homemakers and working women. Using a similar question structure and response options, working individuals were also asked whether they experienced social pressure due to their employment or job. This information allows us to document whether working women experience social pressure related to their employment.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked about their job satisfaction and satisfaction with their earnings. This data was examined to investigate whether the difference in happiness between homemakers and working women is related to issues in the workplace.

Married individuals were also asked about their marital satisfaction. This question was used to compare the marital satisfaction of homemakers and working women, potentially shedding light on any issues in the home domain.

5. Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the observations included in the analysis from 2004 to 2022. The first column provides the mean and standard deviation values for all women in the sample. The second and third columns show the mean and standard deviation values for the homemaker and working woman, respectively. A t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between working and homemaker women for the variables in each row. The significance of this difference is indicated by a star symbol in the third column.

According to Table 1, the average happiness score of working women (Mean = 3.56; SD = 0.86) is lower than that of homemakers (Mean = 3.60; SD = 0.48). The difference between the two groups is slight (a 0.04-point gap, but it is statistically significant. In terms of happiness categories, 9% of homemakers and 10% of working women

reported being very happy, which seems inconsistent with the higher average happiness of homemakers, although it is statistically significant. Among working women, 49% described themselves as happy, compared to 54% of homemakers. The proportion of working women who say they are neither happy nor unhappy is 27%, whereas this rate is 31% for homemakers. The proportion of working women who are unhappy is 8%, compared to 7% for homemakers. The proportion of individuals stating they are very unhappy is 2% for both groups.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Whole Sample	Homemaker Women	Working Women
Happiness Score	3.57 [0.86]	3.60 [0.84]	3.56 [0.86] ***
Very happy	0.09 [0.29]	0.09 [0.29]	0.10 [0.30] ***
Happy	0.52 [0.50]	0.54 [0.50]	0.49 [0.50] ***
Neutral	0.28 [0.45]	0.27 [0.44]	0.31 [0.46] ***
Unhappy	0.08 [0.27]	0.07 [0.26]	0.08 [0.26]
Very unhappy	0.03 [0.16]	0.02 [0.15]	0.02 [0.16] **
Age	43.64 [16.40]	43.60 [14.83]	37.47 [11.50] ***
Income Category	2.40 [1.40]	2.18 [1.28]	3.20 [1.50] ***
Education Level			
Primary School or less	0.65 [0.48]	0.76 [0.43]	0.41[0.49] ***
Secondary school or eq.	0.10 [0.30]	0.11 [0.31]	0.09[0.28] ***
High school or equivalent	0.14 [0.35]	0.11 [0.31]	0.18 [0.38] ***
University or more	0.10 [0.30]	0.03 [0.16]	0.32[0.47] ***
Marital Status			
Never Married	0.13 [0.33]	0.05 [0.22]	0.22[0.41] ***
Married	0.74 [0.44]	0.85 [0.36]	0.69 [0.46] ***
Widowed	0.11 [0.31]	0.08 [0.27]	0.03 [0.17] ***
Divorced/Seperated	0.03 [0.17]	0.02 [0.13]	0.06 [0.24] ***
Subjective Health	3.47 [0.93]	3.45 [0.92]	3.65[0.83] ***
Satis. with Friendships	3.99 [0.52]	3.99 [0.50]	3.99[0.54] **
Values perceived to bring happiness			
Success	0.05 [0.22]	0.03 [0.17]	0.07 [0.26] ***
Work	0.01 [0.12]	0.01 [0.11]	0.02 [0.13] ***
Health	0.74 [0.44]	0.76 [0.43]	0.69 [0.46] ***
Love	0.16 [0.36]	0.16 [0.37]	0.17 [0.38] ***
Money	0.03 [0.18]	0.03 [0.17]	0.04 [0.18] ***
Other	0.01 [0.11]	0.01 [0.10]	0.01 [0.11] *
N	189491		

Notes: mean coefficients; SD is in brackets, * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

There is a significant age difference between working women and homemakers, with working women being, on average, approximately 7 years younger. Additionally, the household income of working women is about one income bracket higher than that of homemakers. Both age and income level differences are statistically significant at the 1% significance level.

In the sample, working women are less likely than homemakers to have only a primary school education or less or to have completed secondary school. However, they are more likely to have completed high school or obtained a university degree or higher. The differences in all education categories are statistically significant at the 1% significance level. Regarding marital status, working women are more likely to be never married or divorced, while homemakers are more likely to be married or widowed. These differences are statistically significant at the 1% significance level.

According to Table 1, the subjective health rating for working women is 3.65 out of 5, compared to 3.45 for homemakers, with this difference being statistically significant. The t-test results show a statistically significant difference in satisfaction with friendship scores between homemakers and working women although the results are quite similar. When examining the values perceived to bring happiness, differences emerge: a higher percentage of working women expect happiness from success, work, love, and money, whereas homemakers are more likely to expect happiness from health than working women.

Given the small difference between homemakers' and working women's happiness differential, it is worth examining the happiness scores over time. Figure 2 presents the average happiness scores of working and homemaking women

across the sample years. According to Figure 2, before 2010, the happiness levels in working and homemaking were very similar. However, from 2010 onwards, the average happiness level of working women has been lower than that of homemakers. This indicates that the differences in Table 1 reflect not only the overall sample average but also a consistent pattern of higher happiness among homemakers over the years. Moreover, the gap between working and homemaking women has widened even further since 2020.
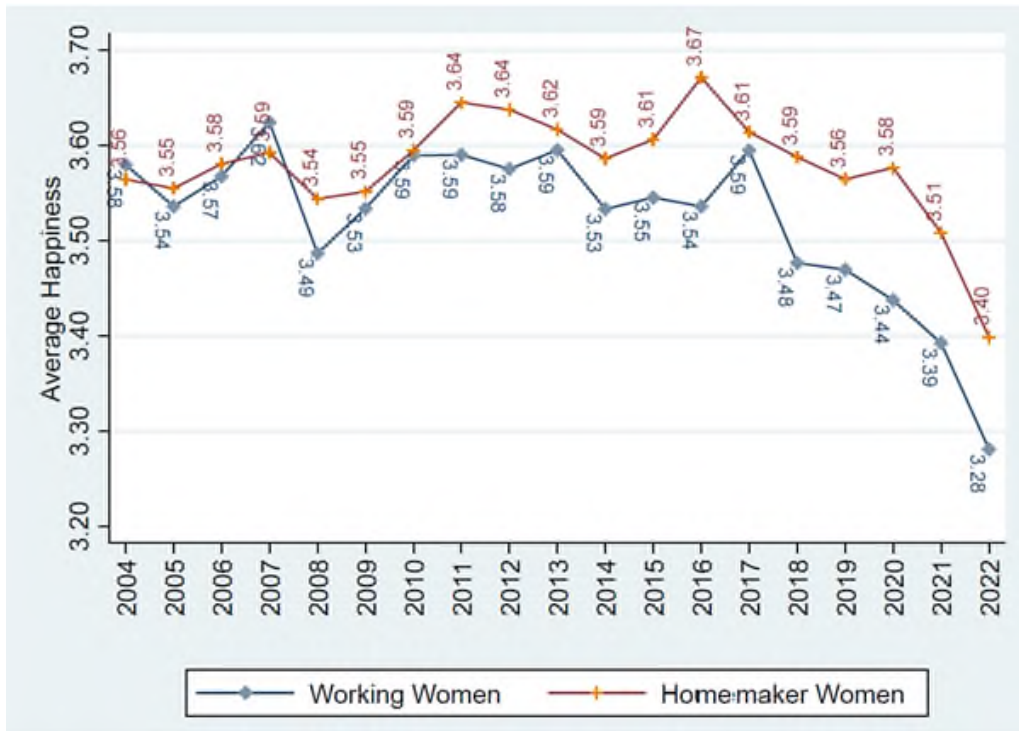
Figure 2. Average Happiness Score of Working and Homemaker Women

5.1. Regression Results

Table 2 presents the main results of the regression analysis conducted using the OLS model. The sample is restricted to homemaker women and women working outside the home in all models. In Model 1, we include only a dummy variable for working women. The working woman dummy variable and household income level are included in Model 2. Model 3 adds background control variables to those in Model 2 and includes dummy variables for each year, with 2004 as the reference year. Model 4 incorporates a dummy variable for the public sector, considering that working conditions and compliance with working hours might be better in the public sector. If the difference in happiness levels between women working outside the home and homemakers is due to factors like working overtime or varying working conditions, we expect the inclusion of the public sector dummy variable to reduce this differential. Model 5 tests whether the difference between women working and homemakers varies by employment type by adding dummy variables for employer, self-employed, and unpaid family worker categories, with employees as the reference category.

OLS models were used for ease of interpretation, and other studies have shown consistency between OLS and ordered probit results (e.g., Ferrer-i-Carbonell & Frijters, 2004). The same regression models estimated using ordered probit methods are provided in Table A-1 in the Appendix. Table A-2 shows the marginal effects calculated from ordered probit models, and these results broadly exhibit similar patterns to the OLS results.

Table 2 displays coefficients for the working woman dummy, household income, and other employment-related variables. The coefficients of the background variables are presented in Table A-3 in the Appendix.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Working Woman	-0.048***	-0.135***	-0.091***	-0.096***	-0.141***
(ref. Homemaker)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Income		0.084***	0.065***	0.065***	0.069***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Public Sector				0.007	0.001
				(0.009)	(0.009)
Employer					0.041
(ref. Employee)					(0.032)
Self-Employed					-0.000
					(0.018)
Unpaid family Worker					0.167***
					(0.012)
Basic Controls	-	-	+	+	+
R-squared	0.001	0.018	0.163	0.163	0.164
N	157122	157122	154126	154126	154126

Notes: Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The basic control variables: age, age squared, marital status categories (never married, married, widowed, divorced), education level, subjective health, satisfaction with friendship, and values thought to bring happiness (Success, Work, Health, Love, Money, and Others) and 18 dummy variables for each survey year.

The coefficient for the dummy for "working woman" is consistently negative and statistically significant across all five models. In Model 1, the results indicate that the happiness score of working women is approximately 0.05 points lower than that of homemakers. Model 2 includes the household income bracket, which has an expected positive coefficient. The addition of this variable further decreases the coefficient for the "working woman" dummy, suggesting that among women with the same household income level, working women are considerably less happy than homemakers. Model 3 adds dummy variables for each survey year along with a comprehensive set of control variables, such as age, education level, and marital status. The results continue to show that working women are less happy than homemakers.

In Model 4, the inclusion of a public sector employment dummy variable does not significantly alter the coefficient of the working woman variable, and the public sector variable itself is not statistically significant. This indicates that the relative unhappiness of working women is not likely related to adverse working conditions specific to the private sector.

Model 5 introduces dummy variables for employer, self-employed, and unpaid family worker categories with the reference category of employee,. The coefficient for the "working outside" variable in this model represents the difference between homemakers and women employed as employees. Results show that employed women have lower happiness than homemakers. The coefficients for self-employed and employer categories are not statistically significant, but the coefficient for unpaid family workers is notably large, positive, and statistically significant. This suggests that the happiness disadvantage for working women may be linked to issues within the home domain, as women working within family a family do not exhibit this same disadvantage.

5.2. Heterogeneous Effects

In this section, we examine whether specific characteristics or conditions amplify the impact of working outside on happiness by analyzing differences in happiness between working women and homemakers across various demographic groups. We estimated the coefficient of the working woman dummy variable in all regression models in Table 3, including the control variables from Model 5 in Table 2.

First, we investigate whether there is a difference in happiness between working women and homemakers across different age groups. In Panel A, the "Young" dummy variable is defined as 1 for those under 25 and 0 for everyone else. The "Middle-aged" dummy variable covers those between 25 and 44 years of age, and the "After-mid" dummy variable represents those between 45 and 65 years of age. Overall, the results indicate that the happiness of working women is lower than that of homemakers across all age categories, with the most pronounced difference observed in the 45 to 64-year age group. However, this discrepancy is not due to older individuals experiencing more health problems because we controlled for subjective health. It may instead reflect differing social values regarding the roles of women.

In Panel B, the sample is divided into three categories based on marital status: never-married, married, widowed, and divorced. We examine the link between working outside the home environment and happiness for each category in comparison to homemakers. The results show that in each category, women who work outside are less happy than homemakers. The negative relationship between working outside and happiness is most pronounced among married women. For never-married women, the difference in happiness levels between homemakers and working women was the

smallest and only weakly significant. Among widowed women, although the happiness difference between homemakers and those working outside is negative, it is statistically significant only at the 10% significance level. The negative relationship between happiness and working outside is similarly observed among divorced women.

Table 3. OLS Happiness Regression Results, Heterogeneous Effects

Panel A	Younger than 25 years	Between 25 and 44 years	Between 45 and 64 years	
Working Woman (ref. Homemakers)	-0.092*** (0.025)	-0.143*** (0.011)	-0.164*** (0.020)	
R-squared	0.151	0.159	0.165	
N	15594	75856	50366	
Panel B				
	Never Married	Married	Widowed	Divorced
Working Woman (ref. Homemakers)	-0.042* (0.023)	-0.159*** (0.010)	-0.115* (0.063)	-0.119*** (0.046)
R-squared	0.140	0.140	0.176	0.191
N	13915	125352	10579	4280
Panel C				
	Primary school/less	Middle school/equivalent	High school/equivalent	University/above
Working Woman (ref. Homemakers)	-0.148*** (0.016)	-0.152*** (0.032)	-0.139*** (0.021)	-0.146*** (0.019)
R-squared	0.061	0.060	0.081	0.074
N	46229	228483	21114	7838

Notes: Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. All models were estimated by including the following control variables: age, age squared, household income, marital status categories (never married, married, widowed, divorced), education level, subjective health assessment, satisfaction with friendship, and values thought to bring happiness (Success, Work, Health, Love, Money, and Others) and 18 dummy variables for each survey year.

Panel C investigates whether the relationship between working outside and happiness varies according to the educational level of women. The sample is divided into categories based on education level: primary school or less, middle school and equivalent, high school and equivalent, and university and above. The coefficients for the working outside dummy variable are presented for each education level. Results from Models 1 to 4 show that the working outside variable consistently has a large negative and significant coefficient. Comparisons of these coefficients indicate that the happiness disadvantage associated with working outside is not strongly related to educational differences.

Overall, the results suggest that working outside is associated with lower happiness, particularly among married women and older age groups. This implies that the unhappiness experienced by working women may be linked to societal pressures, especially for those in their older years. Additionally, the significant negative impact on married working women and the lack of a negative impact on unpaid family worker women suggest that conflicts in the home domain may also contribute to working women's unhappiness.

5.3. Role of Social Norms

To clarify the role of social norms in the happiness of working women, we examined their reports of experiencing social pressure related to their work or employment. As detailed in the data section, all participants were asked about societal pressures related to various aspects of their identity. Specifically, working individuals were asked whether they felt social pressure due to their employment. We would see a high percentage of women to report experiencing social pressure if society is generally opposed to women's employment.
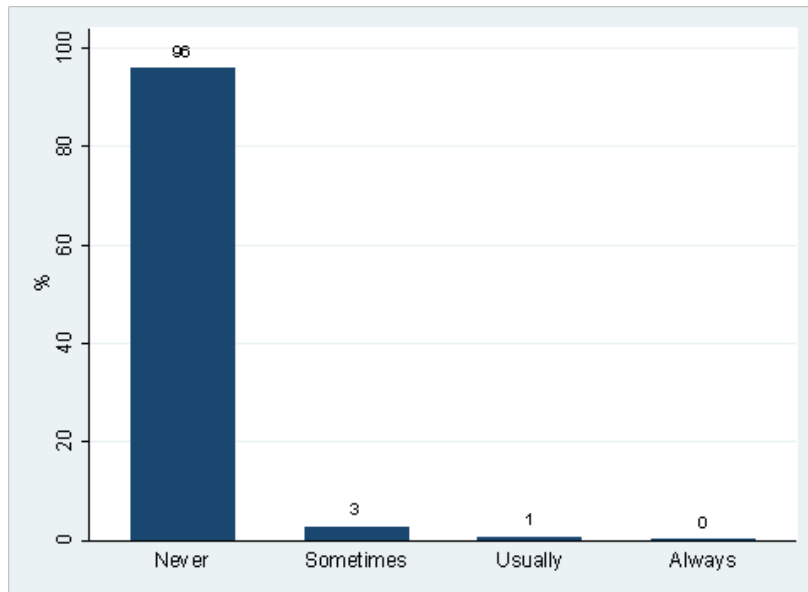
Figure 3. Perceptions of Social Pressure Experience Due to Work/Employment

Figure 3 illustrates the responses of working women regarding social pressure related to their employment/work. Notably, 96% of the working women reported never having felt social pressure due to their work, indicating that the majority of the working women did not experience social disapproval related to their employment.

Figure 4 compares feelings of social pressure due to gender between working women and homemakers. The blue bars represent the distribution of gender-related social pressure among homemakers, whereas the red bars depict this pressure for working women. According to Figure 4, 92% of homemakers and 80% of working women reported not experiencing social pressure based on gender, suggesting that most individuals in both groups did not experience overt gender-based discrimination. However, the percentage of working women reporting any social pressure is higher than that of homemakers. We conducted a one-way ANOVA test to determine whether the differences in social pressure between homemakers and working women were statistically significant. The test results ($F = 2905.21$; p-value < 0.01) indicate significant differences in the social pressure experiences of homemakers and working women. These results suggest that homemakers generally receive more social approval regarding their gender than working women.

Appendix Figure A-1 presents the rates of experiencing social pressure due to gender over the years, including those reporting feeling social pressure sometimes, usually, or always. The observation that working women report more gender-related pressure is consistent with the finding that they also report lower happiness.

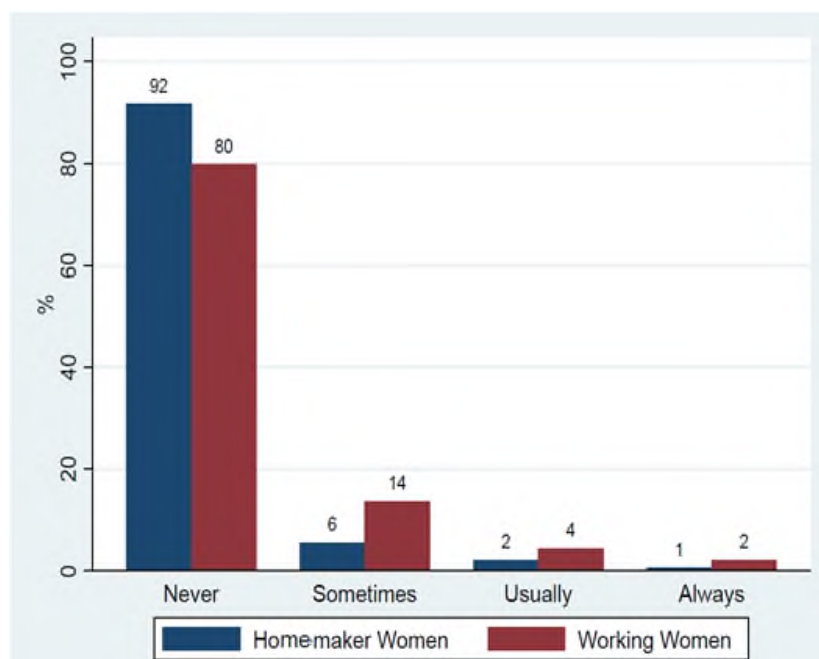**Figure 4.** Perception of Social Pressure Experience Due to Gender

The higher perception of gender-related social pressure among working women than among homemakers may be due to two reasons. First, working women might face a more gender-based treatment as they enter domains traditionally associated with men. Second, they may have a higher awareness of such issues compared to homemakers.

Because questions about social pressure due to employment were not administered to homemakers, we did not include this factor in the regression analysis. We conducted regression analysis including gender-related social pressure to observe its impact on the happiness disadvantage of working women. The regression models are similar to those presented in Table 2 but include feelings of gender-related social pressure.

According to Table 4, the coefficient for social pressure due to gender is large and negative, and the coefficient of working woman decreases with the inclusion of this variable in almost all models compared with the results in Table 2. These results suggest that gender-related social pressure plays a role in explaining the happiness disadvantage of working women.

Table 4. OLS Regression Results for Happiness Role of Social Pressure

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Working Woman	-0.021***	-0.115***	-0.088***	-0.096***	-0.136***
(ref. Homemaker)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Social pressure due to	-0.178***	-0.194***	-0.141***	-0.141***	-0.140***
Gender	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Income		0.087***	0.062***	0.063***	0.066***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Public Sector				0.010	-0.001
				(0.010)	(0.010)
Employer					0.063*
(ref. Employee)					(0.033)
Self-Employed					-0.001
					(0.019)
Unpaid family Worker					0.166***
					(0.012)
Basic Controls	-	-	+	+	+
R-squared	0.011	0.030	0.168	0.168	0.169
N	141143	141143	138147	138147	138147

Notes: Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses; * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. The basic control variables: age, age squared, marital status categories (never married, married, widowed, divorced), education level, subjective health, satisfaction with friendship, and values thought to bring happiness (Success, Work, Health, Love, Money, and Others) and 18 dummy variables for each survey year.

5.4. Potential Issues in the Work Domain

The notably lower happiness of working women, regardless of age group, educational attainment, or marital status, suggests that no subgroup of working women is immune to this disadvantage. These results imply that women may experience lower happiness due to issues related to either their work or home domains. In this section, we first examine job satisfaction among working women in Türkiye compared to working men to determine whether the work domain contributes to this happiness disadvantage. Over the entire sample period, working women's average job satisfaction score is 3.73 (SD = 0.79), while that of men is 3.69 (SD = 0.82). We conducted regression analyses using models similar to those in Table 2, but with a focus on comparing job satisfaction between working women and men. According to all five models in Table 5, except Model 2, working women report higher job satisfaction than men.

Table 5. OLS Regression Results for Job Satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Woman	0.036***	0.001	0.033***	0.034***	0.032***
(ref. Man)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Income		0.096***	0.091***	0.092***	0.088***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Public Sector				0.048***	0.051***
				(0.005)	(0.005)
Employer					-0.004
(ref. Employee)					(0.011)
Self-Employed					-0.131***
					(0.007)
Unpaid family Worker					-0.064***
					(0.010)
Basic Controls	-	-	+	+	
R-squared	0.001	0.030	0.098	0.099	0.102
N	126853	126853	123075	123075	123075

Notes: Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses; * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. The basic control variables: age, age squared, marital status categories (never married, married, widowed, divorced), education level, subjective health, satisfaction with friendship, and values thought to bring happiness (Success, Work, Health, Love, Money, and Others) and 18 dummy variables for each survey year.

We investigate the satisfaction of working women with their earnings compared to that of working men. On average, over the entire sample period, working women reported a satisfaction with earnings score of 3.40 (SD = 1.31), whereas men reported a satisfaction level of 3.06 (SD = 1.07). Using regression analysis with models similar to those outlined in Table 2, we compare the earnings satisfaction of working women with that of men. Across all five models presented in Appendix Table A-4, working women consistently report higher earnings satisfaction than their male counterparts. Therefore, it is unlikely that the lower happiness reported by working women is attributable to issues within the work domain.

5.5. Potential Issues in the Home Domain

As working women generally do not report significantly lower job satisfaction or satisfaction with earnings, these findings lead us to investigate whether the observed happiness disadvantage is linked to challenges within the home domain. There are indications suggesting that domestic issues, particularly related to marriage, is a factor. For instance, the coefficient for being a working woman on happiness is notably negative for married women compared to those with other marital statuses. Therefore, this section examines the marital satisfaction of working women compared to homemakers to understand the potential role of the domestic sphere in the observed happiness disparity.

To address this issue, we first narrowed the sample to married women and distinguished between those working outside the home and those in the homemaker role. The average marital satisfaction score for working women over the entire sample period was 4.04 (SD = 0.64), whereas that for homemakers was 4.03 (SD = 0.60). We performed regression analysis using models similar to those outlined in Table 2, and the results are presented in Table 6. Model 1 in Table 6 shows no significant difference in marital satisfaction between working women and homemakers. However, the last four models in Table 5, which account for income, reveal that working women experience lower marital satisfaction than homemakers. These results suggest that marital dissatisfaction may contribute to the happiness disparity between working women vis-à-vis homemakers.

Table 6. OLS Regression Results for Marital Satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Working Woman	0.005	-0.041***	-0.044***	-0.047***	-0.090***
(ref. Homemaker)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Income		0.046***	0.034***	0.034***	0.037***
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Public Sector				0.005	-0.004
				(0.008)	(0.009)
Employer					0.070***
(ref. Employee)					(0.027)
Self-Employed					-0.005
					(0.017)
Unpaid family Worker					0.146***
					(0.010)
Basic Controls	-	-	+	+	+
R-squared	0.001	0.010	0.092	0.092	0.093
N	127657	127657	125350	125350	125350

Notes: Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses; * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. The basic control variables: age, age squared, education level, subjective health, satisfaction with friendship, and values thought to bring happiness (Success, Work, Health, Love, Money, and Others) and 18 dummy variables for each survey year.

6. Discussion

In this study, based on Life Satisfaction Survey (LSS) data collected between 2004 and 2022, we demonstrate that working women are less happy than homemakers. This happiness gap in favor of homemakers is consistently observed across all survey years, particularly after 2010. Similar results have been found in studies conducted in various countries (see Başlevent & Kirmanoğlu, 2017; Booth & Van Ours, 2009; Sato, 2022; Treas et al., 2011).

The magnitude of the happiness gap between working and homemaker women was 0.048–0.148 on a 5-point scale. Booth and Van Ours (2009) estimated that working full-time reduces women's life satisfaction by 0.25 on a 10-point scale, accounting for individual fixed effects. Sato (2022) reported that homemakers in Japan experience a higher level of happiness than working women, with the difference ranging from 0.08 to 0.37 on a 5-point scale. Başlevent & Kirmanoğlu (2017) found a happiness disadvantage of 0.02 for working women in European countries after controlling for various background variables. However, this disadvantage is more pronounced in countries with lower Global

Gender Gap Index values, such as Albania, Hungary, and Italy. In Türkiye, the happiness gap between European and Japanese experiences—neither as high as in Japan nor as low as in Europe.

To contextualize the size of the happiness gap, being unemployed is associated with a 0.21–0.35 point decrease in happiness on a 5-point scale in Türkiye (Ugur, 2023). This suggests that the happiness disadvantage of working women compared to homemakers is about 25% of the gap between unemployed and employed individuals.

Başlevent & Kirmanoğlu (2017) attribute the happiness gap to working women comparing themselves to men, which hints at potential discrimination or dissatisfaction in the work domain. However, our results do not support this argument. Our study finds that working women in Türkiye are more satisfied with their jobs and earnings compared to their male counterparts (see Table 5 and Appendix Table A-4). This pattern was also observed in Clark (1997) for British women. Additionally, the public sector variable is not statistically significant, suggesting that the relative unhappiness with working outside the home is not related to adverse working conditions in the private sector. Furthermore, domain satisfaction with work does not significantly contribute to women's overall happiness compared to other domains such as family and health satisfaction (Milovanska-Farrington & Farrington, 2022).

Our findings also indicate that although social disapproval related to employment is not a widespread issue—96% of working women report not feeling social pressure—gender-based social pressure seems to contribute to the happiness disadvantage experienced by working women. This observation elaborates on Jayachandran (2021) analysis, which suggested that social norms may discourage women from working in the first place. Even when women choose to work, they may still be negatively influenced by social disapproval to some extent. Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure A-1, feelings of social pressure due to gender are increasing for both homemakers and working women, which is concerning.

Other researchers attribute the happiness gap between homemakers and working women to conflicts arising from persistent domestic responsibilities. Sato (2022) highlighted that this disparity is largely due to the presence of children and gender-biased parental responsibilities. Similarly, Booth and Van Ours (2009) observed in Australia that even in households where women undertake most of the market work, men do not significantly increase their share of housework. This pattern helps explain the challenges faced by full-time working women in Australia.

Our findings further support the notion that working women face significant issues in the home domain, as evidenced by their lower marital satisfaction, particularly in households with higher incomes (see Table 6). Married working women experience the greatest happiness disadvantage, whereas this gap is only weakly significant for widowed and never-married women. Another relevant finding is that the coefficient for being an unpaid family worker is large and positive, suggesting that working for the family is not problematic, whereas being an employee has a large negative coefficient. Consistent with this, Sanin (2023) demonstrated that working for family output reduces domestic violence, whereas employment is linked to increased domestic violence in sub-Saharan Africa(Cools & Kotsadam, 2017), India (Eswaran & Malhotra, 2011), Spain (Alonso-Borrego & Carrasco, 2017) and Türkiye (Erten & Keskin, 2021). Additionally, there is extensive literature documenting the trade-off between labor market success and marital outcomes, especially for women in high-status careers (Fisman et al., 2006; Folke & Rickne, 2020; Hitsch et al., 2010). Ermiş-Mert (2017) noted that married women in Türkiye were largely excluded from prestigious, traditionally male-dominated professions, and women in high-status jobs tended to have fewer children, possibly to maintain their competitive status.

Given that working overtime is common in the Turkish labor market (OECD, 2022) and that it undermines work-life balance in the Turkish context (Ugur, 2018) , working women may be particularly affected by the reduced time available for social relationships (Nomaguchi et al., 2005). Satisfaction with family life has the largest impact on overall life satisfaction (Milovanska-Farrington & Farrington, 2022; Rojas, 2006), suggesting that lower marital satisfaction significantly affects the overall happiness of working women.

Similar to Japan, Türkiye exhibits a significant imbalance in the sharing of domestic responsibilities between men and women within the household (TURKSTAT, 2020). Even women with high-status jobs are not exempt from this gendered division of domestic duties, which tends to persist and is difficult to change (Ugur et al., 2023). Therefore, it is understandable that women across different work statuses—whether working in the public sector, being employers, or self-employed—do not show substantial differences in levels of happiness.

These findings do not suggest that homemakers are free from challenges. Numerous studies highlight issues such as poverty, deprivation, violence, and limited access to resources affecting women in Türkiye and around the world (see Alesina et al. (2013); Erten and Keskin (2018); Yeşilsoy and Arslanoğlu (2022)). These problems may be exacerbated by the invisibility and undervaluation of homemakers' work (Daniels, 1987; Yeşilsoy & Arslanoğlu, 2022). The higher reported happiness among homemakers might be a result of socialization processes where these women were conditioned to find contentment in their roles. While economists often interpret revealed preferences as reflecting

individuals' best interests, it is important to recognize that feminists have long argued that these preferences are not formed in isolation; social expectations significantly influence women's preferences for paid work (Kabeer, 2020).

An individual with objectively better conditions may lead to a more comfortable and satisfying life than someone with less advantageous circumstances. However, Kahneman (1999) points out that people in better conditions might not recognize this because they might set higher aspirations for happiness. In this context, the tendency of working women to evaluate their own situations more negatively than homemakers could be attributed to high standards for happiness or to the phenomenon known as the 'hedonic treadmill effect' (Myers, 1992).

A notable criticism of these findings concerns the reliability of self-reported data when evaluating wellbeing. There may be concerns that the results could be influenced by homemaker women conforming to societal expectations, which might not authentically capture the homemaker woman's genuine happiness advantage. Nevertheless, Frey and Stutzer (2010) demonstrated that self-reported happiness outcomes generally align with objective measures of happiness.

Some limitations of this study should be noted. While the study provides an overview of general work life contours, it does not account for certain factors, such as specific professions, working hours, and earning disparities, which could be influential. The survey lacks questions on these aspects; thus, we cannot determine their impact on the unhappiness of working women compared to homemakers. Additionally, despite including a comprehensive set of variables in the regression analysis, there may be unobservable factors, such as personality traits, that differ between working women and homemakers. Moreover, due to the nature of the pooled cross-sectional dataset, causal relationships cannot be established. In other words, this study cannot conclude that working outside causally reduces women's happiness.

7. Conclusion

Examining Life Satisfaction Survey data from 2004 to 2022, our study reveals a persistent happiness gap favoring homemaker women over working women in Türkiye, a trend that has become notably pronounced since 2010. This finding contradicts the conventional expectation that working women, who typically have higher incomes, would experience improved personal and social standing due to increased bargaining power. Our results are consistent with similar findings observed in other countries.

Interestingly, our data show that working women report higher job and earnings satisfaction compared to their male counterparts, challenging the idea that issues within the work domain drive the happiness disparity. Instead, our study suggests potential challenges within the home domain, highlighting a possible trade-off between women's work and life quality at home.

The increasing number of women in the labor market reflects social change in Türkiye. The response to this shift is not overwhelmingly negative, as approximately 80% of working women report never feeling social pressure related to their employment or gender. However, the study indicates that social pressure contributes to the happiness disadvantage experienced by working women. Overall, the happiness differential reflects the costs of social change borne by working women.

As women's labor force participation is expected to rise in Türkiye, it is crucial to take steps to create a more equitable and supportive home environment for all women, including those who are working.

ORCID :

Zeynep B. UĞUR   0000-0002-5141-2529

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Appendix
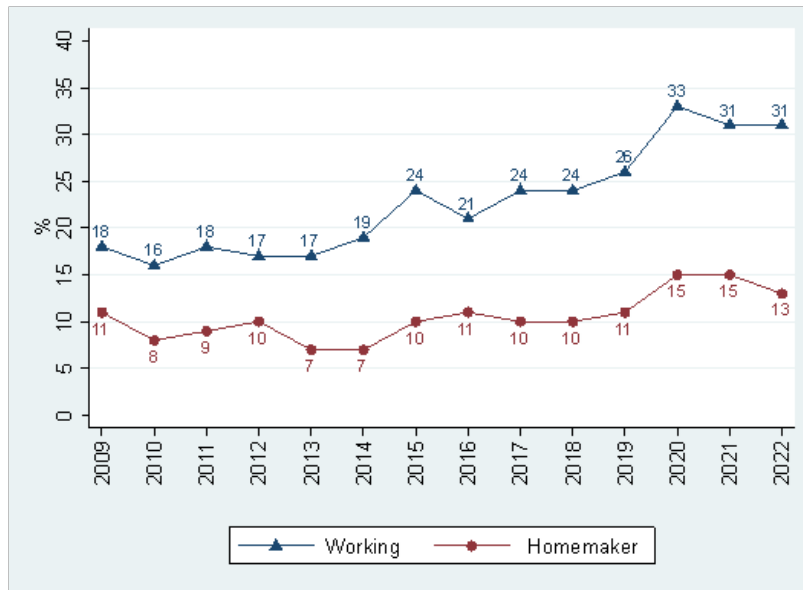
Figure A 1. Percentage of Feeling Some Social Pressure Due to Gender Over the Years

Table A 1. Ordered Probit Results for Happiness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Working Woman	-0.059***	-0.172***	-0.130***	-0.139***	-0.208***
(ref. Homemaker)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Income		0.108***	0.092***	0.092***	0.098***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Public Sector				0.015	0.005
				(0.013)	(0.013)
Employer					0.070
(ref. Employee)					(0.046)
Self-Employed					0.019
					(0.024)
Unpaid family Worker					0.249***
					(0.017)
Basic Controls	-	-	+	+	+
Pseudo R-squared	0.002	0.008	0.071	0.071	0.071
N	157122	157122	154126	154126	154126

Notes: Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The basic control variables: age, age squared, marital status categories (never married, married, widowed, divorced), education level, subjective health, satisfaction with friendship, values thought to bring happiness (Success, Work, Health, Love, Money, and Others) and 18 dummy variables for each survey year.

The marginal effects calculated from Model 1 in Table A.1 show that compared with homemakers, working women are 1% and 1.2% less likely to be very happy and happy, respectively. In addition, compared to homemakers, working women are 0.3% and 0.7% more likely to be very unhappy and unhappy, respectively. Working women are 1.2% more likely to be neither happy nor unhappy compared to homemakers.

Table A 2. Marginal Effects from Ordered Probit Results on Happiness

	Very unhappy	Unhappy	Neither Happy nor unhappy	Happy	Very Happy
Model 1					
Working Woman	.003	.007	.012	-.013	-.010
(ref. Homemaker)	(.000)	(.001)	(.001)	(.002)	(.001)
Model 2					
Working Woman	.009	.020	.034	-.035	-.027
(ref. Homemaker)	(.000)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)
Model 3					
Working Woman	.007	.015	.026	-.026	-.021
(ref. Homemaker)	(.000)	(.001)	(.002)	(.001)	(.001)

Table A 3. OLS Regression Results for Happiness, Other Coefficients

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Age			-0.029***	-0.029***	-0.029***
			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age squared			0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education level			0.002	0.002	0.010***
			(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Never married			0.264***	0.264***	0.264***
			(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Married			0.205***	0.205***	0.204***
(ref. Divorced)			(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Widowed			0.242***	0.242***	0.235***
			(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Satisfaction with Friendship			0.486***	0.486***	0.469***
			(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Subjective Health			0.162***	0.162***	0.153***
			(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Success			-0.001	-0.001	0.001
(ref. Other)			(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Work			-0.130***	-0.130***	-0.131***
			(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Health			0.109***	0.108***	0.107***
			(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Love			0.129***	0.128***	0.126***
			(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Money			-0.255***	-0.255***	-0.255***
			(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Constant	3.602***	3.417***	1.726***	1.725***	1.722***
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)
R-squared	0.001	0.018	0.163	0.163	0.164
N	157122	157122	154126	154126	154126

Notes: Robust standard errors appear in parentheses; * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$. For Models 3, 4, and 5, 18-year dummy variables for each survey year were added to the model, with the reference year set as 2004. We do not provide the coefficients of year dummies are not provided to save space.

Table A 4. OLS Regression Results for Satisfaction with Earnings

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Woman	0.336***	0.348***	0.348***	0.348***	0.032***
(ref. Man)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Income		0.121***	0.121***	0.121***	0.155***
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Public Sector				-0.008	-0.014*
				(0.008)	(0.007)
Employer					0.138***
(ref. Employee)					(0.013)
Self-Employed					-0.033***
					(0.008)
Unpaid family Worker					1.599***
					(0.018)
Basic Controls	-	-	+	+	+
R-squared	0.017	0.073	0.073	0.073	0.182
N	126853	123075	123075	123075	123075

Notes: Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses; * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. The basic control variables: age, age squared, marital status categories (never married, married, widowed, divorced), education level, subjective health, satisfaction with friendship, values thought to bring happiness (Success, Work, Health, Love, Money, and Others) and 18 dummy variables for each survey year.

Research Article

Sulukule Transition: Impact on Municipal Destigmatization and Stigma Stickiness*

Betül DUMAN BAY[1] , Zuhal GÜLER[2]

[1] Assoc. Dr., Humanities and Social Sciences, Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul, Türkiye
[2] Asst. Prof. Dr., Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University, Faculty of Department of Sociology and Methodology, Bolu, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Zuhal Güler
E-mail : zuhalguler69@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research article revisits the 'Sulukule' through the lens of destigmatization, where territorial stigma intersects with Roman ethnicity.' With reference to socio-spatial developments, this article unpacks the soft and hard components of destigmatization, from displacement to neighborhood renaming, and discusses its design and implementational shortcomings. Future socio-spatial change is the aim of municipalities' planning and design practices. Based on our observations from the 2018 field survey in Sulukule, we argue that the neighborhood's negative reputation persists, rendering it "ungentrifable." Consequently, the neighborhood developed its own spatial and social dynamics over time rather than producing the municipality's planned outcomes. The return of displaced Romani, the uncontrolled influx of refugees, rising tensions between non-Romani and Romani residents in Sulukule, and the flight of local middle-class residents to other districts all affected the outcome. In this context, we identified several flaws, such as the removal of territorial stigma and subsequent neglect of its overlapping nature; policy conflicts at both the central and local scales; and the prevalence of centralist and top-down urban governance. Directly addressing territorial destigmatization as a goal in all official documents and making those documents tangible through negotiations among stakeholders should be integral to the destigmatization process.

Keywords: Stigmatization, Destigmatization, Sulukule, Stickiness of Stigma, Planned Displacement.

1. Introduction

Territorial destigmatization comprises a series of deliberate interventions, processes, or methods implemented to diminish, eliminate, divert, or rectify the territorial stigmatization of certain locations (Schultz-Larsen & Delica, 2021). Stigma removal—making places favorable for outsiders to live and invest in—is a difficult and complicated task, as evidenced by various studies (Hasting & Dean, 2003; Mösgen, Rosol & Schipper, 2019). This led us to reevaluate Sulukule, a highly stigmatized inner-city neighborhood along the city walls of the Historic Peninsula in Fatih-Istanbul, due to its Romani inhabitants and high crime rates. Studies on Sulukule, capturing a snapshot between 2006 and 2012, have discussed territorial stigmatization as a strategy that paved the way to gentrification and described its gentrification in terms of the entire demolition of the historical neighborhood and the displacement of the Roma community (Islam, 2009; Islam & Sakizlioglu, 2015; Karaman & Islam, 2012; Kocabas & Gibson, 2011; Ozcan, 2015; Uysal, 2012). Lees, Shin, & Lopez-Morales (2015, p. 442) argued that capital-led restructuring of the built environment involving upper- or middle-income newcomers and the displacement of existing inhabitants are significant outcomes of contemporary gentrification. This study reconsiders the "Sulukule Case" through the lens of "destigmatization" and unpacking the soft and hard components, from displacement and physical upgrading to renaming the neighborhood. Based on our observations from the 2018 field survey in Sulukule, we argue that the stigma associated with Sulukule persists, rendering it "ungentrifable": (a) New middle-class buyers are not in-movers, indeed middle-class locals with long-term residency have moved to other districts; (b) Muslim refugees, the majority of whom are in precarious positions, characterize the neighborhood; and (c) tensions between the Romani, non-Romani, and the refugees, in addition to security concerns, have been intensifying. This article sheds some light on the shortcomings of destigmatization formulation and implementation in Sulukule as it continues to remain a socially unacceptable and "unsafe" neighborhood.

The article proceeds as follows: In the first section, we summarize the debates in the literature about territorial stigmatization, state, and urban policies. In this section, we contextualize state-led urban development, territorial stigmatization, and urban governance in Turkey. In the following section, we introduce the research site and methodology. After presenting the municipal destigmatization policy, we delve into its design and implementational flaws, analyzing how territorial stigma evolves over time and the various changes and dynamics that occur during this process. The article ends with a conclusion for policymakers.

2. Literature Review: Territorial Stigmatization and Destigmatization

Territorial destigmatization is a set of planned actions, processes, or methods used to lessen, get rid of, redirect, or fix stigma attached to a certain place (Horgan, 2018; Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2019, 2021). It is frequently associated with various urban policies and projects involving the renewal or gentrification of stigmatized housing estates, neighborhoods, and so on (Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021, p. 423).

Territorial stigmatization discredits and devalues urban residents not only because of their poverty, class position, ethnic origin or religious affiliation but also because of the places they associate with (Slater, 2017). According to Wacquant (2007), territorial stigma intersects with class-based and ethnic discrimination, but it must not be reduced to them because territory has its own dynamics and distinctive logics. "Spatial stigma acts as a form of symbolic violence that disgraces the resident of a neighborhood, devalues the place, and justifies disinvestment." (Paton, McCall, & Mooney, 2017, p. 584). Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira (2014) described how impoverished areas are stigmatized as havens for violence and social disorders. This justifies the need for increased control over these areas, which are purportedly the source of "threat" and trouble (Uitermark, 2014; Wacquant 2007, p. 69). It affects the physical state of locations in terms of their appearance, level of police presence, and economic value (Uitermark, 2014).

Some researchers have revealed an intense and direct relationship between the stigmatization of place and the process of gentrification (August, 2014; Kallin & Slater, 2014; Letsch, 2023; Sakizlioglu & Uitermark, 2014; Wacquant, Slater & Pereira, 2014). According to Kallin and Slater (2014, p. 1354), the blemish of a place or the activation of territorial stigma is the new role of the state to generate the 'rent gap'. However, this policy has some limitations because the terribly negative perception of a place can sometimes set a barrier to capital investments (Hammel, 1999). The literature on territorial stigmatization not only establishes a connection between stigmatization and profit (Paton, 2018) but also demonstrates the use of stigmatization to influence policy changes or secure consent for dispossession and displacement (August, 2014; Kallin & Slater, 2014; Sakizlioglu & Uitermark, 2014; Slater, 2018; Paton, 2018), thereby marginalizing residents while creating value for investors (Tyler, 2013; Wacquant, 2008).

Stigmatized places have a bad reputation as 'no-go areas' due to either their residents' identities or criminal activities. Outsiders' perception, labeling, and representation of places are critical to territorial stigmatization. Only rejected segments of society remained in stigmatized places (Wacquant, 2008, p. 29). State actors' intention for destigmatization

strategy is to positively change the perception of outsiders about the place and close the "reputational gap" (Kallin, 2017) for gentrification to occur. However, territorial stigma is a complicated issue, and destigmatization is thus a challenging task, as previous studies reveal how difficult it is to change a place's perceptions and reputation (Hasting & Dean, 2003; Mösgen, et al., 2019). Mösgen, Rosol, and Schipper (2019, p. 428) show, using the Frankfurt-Ostend case, that despite the state's earlier interventions, such as buying privately owned land and merging it into larger plots appealing to investors, the pervasive place-based stigma kept Ostend 'ungentrifiable' until the mid-2000s. Furthermore, while stigma is acknowledged as a problem in renewal and gentrification projects, it is rarely addressed in a targeted, evidence-based manner. Instead, it is sometimes erroneously presumed that destigmatization would happen because of other measures (Hastings & Dean, 2003).

Moreover, several studies have discussed how people and community groups experience, cope with stigma, and adopt various destigmatization strategies to gain recognition (e.g. Kirkness, 2014; Letsch, 2023; Wacquant, et al., 2014). For example, based on a long-term ethnographic study, Constanze Letsch (2023) examined the state's strategy of territorial stigmatization in Tarlabaşı- İstanbul and discusses how differently stigmatized groups try to fight the blemish of their neighborhoods. Furthermore, in a rare study on destigmatization strategy at the institutional level in Greater Copenhagen, Schultz Larsen and Delica (2012) identified the contradictory role of institutions at the central and local scales in the destigmatization process, describing this role as policy schizophrenia. This led to the persistence of stigma.

3. Context: Territorial Stigmatization, Urban Policies and Urban Governance

In Turkey, the neoliberal turn in urban development began in 1980 and gained pace in the 2000s, during which the state's approach and governance changed. Between 1980 and 2000, with the delegation of power, the municipality adopted an entrepreneurial urban policy designed to make Istanbul a global city. The expanding middle class coincided with the restructuring of the urban economy, leading to an increase in the share of the service sector. Suburban developments, gated communities, and the physical restructuring of city centers align with the concept of a global city. Gentrification first appeared in Kuzguncuk and Arnavutköy in the early 1980s and continued in Beyoğlu and Cihangir in the historical city center in the 1990s. Individual professionals and investors also gentrified certain historical buildings in the inner city and some neighborhoods (such as Ortakoy) along the Bosporus Strait (Ergun, 2004).

Until 2008, EU accession talks, the IMF agreement, and the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) need for national and international legitimacy provided opportunities for decentralization. However, neoliberal economic restructuring and the AKP's search for governing coalitions and political constituencies opened the way for centralization. On the one hand, centralization of housing policy was ensured by the Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ), with some provisions added to Law No. 2985 by Law No. 5162 in 2004: Expropriation, land privatization, zoning plans, and urban renewal programs in squatter settlements were among the unusual powers that TOKİ was endowed with. On the other hand, Law of 5366 gave municipalities the authority to designate "urban renewal areas" within the parameters of "outdated parts of the city" or "the historical and cultural fabric of the city". Urban renewal in Tarlabaşı and Sulukule is the product of this prudent, ambivalent, and oscillating period.

Following the 2001 and intensely 2008 financial crises, the AKP Government prioritized a property-led regime of capital accumulation based on the construction industry (Penpecioğlu, 2013), signaling the start of a period in which private firms and land developers heavily shifted their investments to the built environment, as Harvey describes it (Harvey, 1978). The introduction of large-scale projects, PPPs, and new financial mechanisms for real estate developments laid the groundwork for improving crony capitalist relations between political elites and private developers. State-led projects have created a polity centered on the material and speculative gains of urban development.

State-led urban renewal and gentrification have targeted informal settlements, citing a lack of legal documents, a low rent gap, and their reputation as hubs for crime and deterioration. Laws of 5366, along with the enactment of Law 6306 in 2012 in disaster-prone areas, turned the metropolis of Turkey into a huge construction site. Both laws favor the "demolish and rebuild" type of physical renewal over regeneration, which addresses social, spatial, and economic factors.

These laws allow the state to formalize a property regime, incorporate it into the market, and facilitate property transfers in these regions. Thus, the state deploys its territorial stigmatization strategy to create a "rent gap" and reduce crime in inner-city "problematic neighborhoods" at the cost of displacement of lower-income groups. The size of the declared disaster-prone areas indicates that district and metropolitan administrations lack control over a large part of their service areas, a sign of centralization of urban governance. In these areas, central authorities oversee the determination of the site's boundaries, planning, expropriation and compensation, as well as determining who to

relocate to or move. In this particular situation, more recent studies on gentrification have focused on the changing role of the state and the right to city mobilizations in the gentrification process (Islam & Sakizlioglu, 2015, p. 246–247). Further, recent studies show that activation of territorial stigma by state actors produces consent in ethnic or informal neighborhoods in Turkey (e.g., Sakizlioglu, 2014), goes beyond an economic strategy for capital reinvestments and appears as a state-led political strategy that targets insurgents (e.g., Yardimci, 2020).

The other pillar of centralist and authoritarian urban governance is the complete exclusion of participation and expert knowledge. Many urban transformation projects have been undertaken without, and often even in disregard of, expertise from site selection decisions to planning. However, citizens are typically notified about projects at a later stage, and projects are predominantly carried out and executed via private networks, avoiding public scrutiny. Cronyism also enabled the AKP government to intervene in urban life to form Islamic-conservative districts.

The transition from a parliamentary system to a "Turkish style of presidential system," which primarily concentrates authority over the President, has left limited autonomy for municipalities, including those from the ruling party. Nevertheless, the victory of opposition parties in the 2019 municipal elections has intensified competition and disputes between central and local governments[1]. Despite their central management, opposition party mayors began to assert their control, particularly over urban flagship projects by garnering public backing[2].

Meanwhile, the ruling party mayors, who had safeguarded their constituencies during the elections, seized the opportunity to address certain issues that had caused unrest and strain in the local environment.

4. Research Site and Methodology

Sulukule, located within Istanbul's historic wall protection zone, is one of the marginally stigmatized neighborhoods in Fatih District and a home for the Roman community. The Neslişah and Hatice Sultan Neighborhoods (Sulukule) were declared a Renewal Area by the Decree of the Council of Ministers on April 22, 2006, under the Law of Conservation by Renovation and Use by Revitalization of the Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Immovable Property (5366). Fatih Municipality implemented the renewal in partnership with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and TOKI, as per a protocol signed on July 13, 2006.

After a reasonable period following the implementation of the planned changes, Sulukule offers a compelling case study for discussing the success of the destigmatization process. This study traces socio-spatial developments following the initiation of a new life in Sulukule and presents an outcome at one point in time. However, destigmatization is not an end state; rather, it morphs over time.

We built a destigmatization strategy on Sulukule people's (in Sulukule and Taşoluk) accounts and experiences, with whom we conducted interviews as part of data collection in TUBITAK 1001 project No: 117K296. We received approval from the Istanbul University Ethics Committee on December 26, 2016. For triangulation purposes, we also gathered data from multiple sources. We conducted structured interviews with three types of actors on separate dates in July, September, and October 2018. Interviews with three official representatives of Fatih Municipality and the neighborhood mukhtar began in July and concluded on September 23. With the assistance of an Arabic-speaking translator, we interviewed ten residents (new buyers, rights holders, refugee tenants, and shopkeepers) in the renewal area on September 24, 2018, including Romani and Turkish residents as well as Muslim migrants, including Syrian, Palestinian, and Iraqi residents. Finally, on January 17 and 28, 2018, and then again on October 21, 2018, we interviewed nine former Sulukule residents living in nearby areas (see Supplemental Material 1). Respondents in the last two groups were recruited through a neighborhood real estate office using snowball sampling. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. We informed the residents about the study's aims and duration of the interview, assuring them of the confidentiality of the interviews and their voluntary participation in accordance with ethical considerations. In this study, we concealed their real names and assigned numbers. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

We collected data on the implementation and timeline of interventions from blogs such as Sulukule Gunlugu, Fatihaber, court cases, municipal reports, strategic plans, and annual activity plans. Residents also mentioned the municipality's governance tools, such as urgent expropriation, sales through political networks, and neighborhood stigmatization. However, the officials blamed the Roma community for the neighborhood's persistent negative reputation. To cross-validate the data on stigmatization, we analyzed existing studies on Sulukule and interviewed shopkeepers, who are often the first point of contact for outsiders. We also searched newspapers for allegations of

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[1] For a detailed and comprehensive discussion of center-local competition and dispute within the context of urban transformation, see Duman Bay and Polat (2023, p. 13–23).

[2] For example, on July 15, 2021, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change approved the 1/5000-scale Master Development Plan and 1/1000-scale Implementation Development Plan Amendment for Istanbul Province, Yenisehir Reserve Construction Area (Canal Istanbul Project) Phase 1. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality objected to this amendment and brought the matter to the court. The municipality won the case, and the court cancelled the development plans (Gençdal, 2024).

political favoritism and an evolving perception of the neighborhood. For demographic changes, we used TUK and refugee statistics from IOM and the municipality. Respondents, without exception, described increasingly hostile and conflictual social relations in their neighborhood, as well as the neighborhood's ongoing negative reputation.

5. From Municipal Stigmatization to Destigmatization

5.1. Stigmatization

The majority of Romani believe that state actors have tried to stigmatize the area and its population to promote renewal, even though Sulukule had long been the target of disinvestment and deprivation. The Romani community entertained guests at their homes until police raids in the 1990s shut them down under the pretext of engaging in immoral and unlawful activities. The Romani, having lost their primary means of income, struggled to make a living (Foggo 2007, p. 41–42; Yilmaz, 2009), and some committed illegal activities. This laid the groundwork for the finding that outsiders and authorities tarnished the neighborhood reputation.

> Initially, they framed our neighborhood by visiting our "entertainment houses" with hidden cameras, acting like customers, and spreading false news about prostitution to public attention. After that, police raids began. Authorities exaggerated these instances to justify urban renewal. (Interview 1, January 2018)

News about prostitution, drug trafficking, substandard housing, and marginality further tarnished the neighborhood's reputation as a "no-go place." Unsurprisingly, territorial stigmatization paved the way for an urgent urban renewal project in Sulukule. The central government discourse aligns with this, labeling neighborhoods like Sulukule as "tumors of the city" and demanding their urgent removal (Turkun, 2015).

In addition, local governments' rhetoric and renewal initiatives have also contributed to territorial stigmatization. In their initial statements published on their websites, Fatih Municipality cited the deterioration of houses and Romani lifestyle as reasons for the segregation of this community from the city and society (Kaban, 2011, p. 46). Islam and Enlil (2010) analyzed the Municipal Report on Urban Renewal and contended that the report depicted the neighborhood in a stigmatizing manner. They specifically identified certain phrases used in the report, such as 'primitive living space,' 'middle-age city,' 'rubric,' 'wreckage,' and 'hut' (Islam & Enlil, 2010).

The municipality created territorial stigma by defining the site's problems and solutions as a "problematic neighborhood" in various institutional documents and descriptions. This top-down description of the 'problem' must be understood in light of the other objectives included in the annual activity reports and the five-year strategic plan, such as "attraction zone", "attracting new financial sources" and "making Fatih touristic."

Furthermore, Romani people have also experienced ethnic discrimination. The conjugation of ethnic and territorial stigmatization is also evident in scholarship on Roma communities, whose practices of occupation, inhabitation and dwelling are fundamental to their stigmatization (e.g., Tyler, 2013). According to one respondent, "the renewal resembled societal purification. First, the state officers blemished our neighborhood; later, they forcefully relocated to Taşoluk. Society believes it has the right to exclude us and treat us with prejudice. The mayor started a stigmatizing campaign. 'Rotten teeth is how he described our neighborhood." (Interview 2, January 2018,). Blaming Romani for the neighborhood's poor reputation and impurity demonstrates the extent to which local officials internalized outsider prejudice.

5.2. Planned Displacement, Ongoing Property Transfer, and Social Differentiation

The property owners consist of a few individuals from the Sulukule community who were previously granted rights in the project, as well as recent buyers who acquired houses either from the rights holders themselves or directly from TOKI or the municipality. The new buyers have attracted media attention several times and have been framed scandalously for their presumed political identity or close political connections (Daglar, 2009). The mayor confirmed some buyers' affiliation with the Municipal and National Assembly and stated that "27.19% of the deeds in the project area changed hands between 2004 and 2005." The number of deeds in the project area did not fluctuate as significantly as some have claimed." ("Mustafa Demir", 2009).

Sulukule had an informal property regime (Uysal, 2012), with only a few Romani people serving as rightful owners. This left significant opportunities for the local government to change property relations through interventions before and during the urban renewal project. The neighborhood's stigmatization pushed real estate prices extremely low, promising Sulukule residents an opportunity to extract some profit when selling their land for relatively higher prices following the renewal project.

Despite being an exceptional tool and lacking a provision for urgent expropriation in Law 5366, the Ministrial

Council's decision on "urgent expropriation" on December 13, 2006 (Yilmaz, 2009, p. 121) set the stage for speculation and devaluation. When conducting urgent expropriation, the authorities may forego regular procedures, and property owners cannot object to the report of the 'Appreciation Price Committee.' Furthermore, the authority can take any form of intervention, including demolition, once the compensation amount to the bank has been wired. The residents of Sulukule regarded the expropriation as an imminent threat, leading to panic sales to external parties. Several third parties bought multiple houses, with some acquiring up to 10 properties. (Interview 14, September 2018). Low and irregular earnings (Tuna, et al., 2006), as well as limited access to legal advice, have left Sulukule people powerless at first. Furthermore, the municipality strengthened divisions among the people based on multiple ownership and tenure types, drawing gatekeepers to its side (Interview 2, January 2018). However, most Sulukule residents immediately organized an association to protect Romani culture and Sulukule's historical function. Their resistance gained international support and visibility, and their struggle expanded to the legal sphere. The Association filed a lawsuit challenging the decision for urgent expropriation (Yilmaz, 2009, p. 64–65), while the Istanbul Chambers of City Planners and Architects initiated separate legal proceedings in 2008 to obtain a court order to halt the implementation of the project and invalidate it. However, in August 2008, the demolition process commenced, and the local government did not consider any form of community involvement or legal procedures. The court's 2012 ruling on the project's termination came after the demolition and replacement of old houses in the region with new houses. ("Sulukule projesi iptal", 2012)

According to an official announcement, property owners who decided to become rights holders in the project would pay the price difference between the demolished and new houses over 15 years without a down payment (Interview 8, September 2018). However, the payment schemes for new houses were not compatible with residents' budgets. For the few original residents remaining in the renewed Sulukule, the heavy burden of payments and inflation adjustments every 6 months makes property ownership almost impossible. (Interview 3, July 2018; Interview 8, September 2018). The authorities altered the contract terms in mid-process (Interview 14, September 2018). Regrettably, during our visit in June 2018, we witnessed the unvoluntary eviction of two elderly people due to high credit payments.

Meanwhile, TOKI planned to build social housing in Taşoluk, approximately forty kilometers away from the current area (i.e., planned displacement), for tenants and non-property owners who could prove evidence of residency in the area prior to July 31, 2005 (Yilmaz, 2009, p. 118). It is clear that the municipality aims to transform the area by excluding or minimizing the presence of its original inhabitants.

5.3. Reimagining a Neighborhood through Renewal Design and Renaming

Through its renewal efforts, the municipality aimed to reinvent the neighborhood's image and envision a future for Sulukule by attracting new conservative residents. This involved replacing existing informal housing with two-story houses featuring a common backyard, designed in the Ottoman style, which reflected a cohesive Islamic and conservative community.

Some noteworthy planners voluntarily formed the Borderless Autonomic Planners (STOP) and developed alternative plans for the site and housing designs, the goals of which represent a novel and unique approach to local government and planning. The alternative plan is comprehensive because it integrates spatial solutions with economic and social policies. The municipality could not ignore global and national resistance, so it met with STOP to discuss alternative plans. However, a plan developed by an architectural firm was promulgated and implemented ("STOP girişimi", 2009).

According to the senior municipal official who oversaw the implementation of the project, its purpose was not the removal of the original settlers, but rather, "We thought two-story houses with a common backyard would better suit the lifestyle of Romani...new houses are too small to accommodate a middle-class family. I express my deep regret at not being able to prevent the Romani community from selling their houses, which would result in a tangible economic detriment for them." (Interview 4, September 2018). However, as accepted by the mayor, almost one-third of the houses changed hands from rights owners to third-party owners even before the project began (Sulukule Gunlugu, 2013). Furthermore, the construction of more dwelling units than the number of rights holders, as well as the introduction of educational and commercial buildings on public land, suggested the municipality's goal of attracting new, wealthy residents to the site. In fact, the municipality completely ignored a sociological report on Sulukule. In contrast to the official perspective, one of the respondents concluded that the renewal project failed to offer higher life standards, or what he referred to as a "villa type of living," in the neighborhood. (Interview 3, July 2018)

The reimagining of Sulukule included the construction of a police station for local security concerns, a cultural center, and several shops. Other initiatives taken by the municipality to entice nonresidents to visit and live in the neighborhood include the distribution of public lands to a private college and various Islamic foundations affiliated with the ruling party (Interview 3, July 2018).

In this regard, it is worth noting that the ongoing discontent regarding the neighborhood's name emerged as a recurring theme during the field survey. The dispute over the neighborhood's name played a significant role in the contentious politics between the municipality and the Sulukule Platform. The central government realigned the neighborhood borders and united the Neslişah and Hatice Sultan neighborhoods under the name of Karagümrük in 2008 to erase traces of the past; however, in solidarity with the international community, the Sulukule Platform chose the name Sulukule as the easiest way to popularize their struggle due to its connections to the Romani community and the "good old days" (Islam, 2009). Territorial stigmatization is an antagonistic process; although it is generated from above, local people resist it from below through various activities (Sisson, 2021), including neighborhood naming in this instance. However, after new life emerged, Turkish residents of the renewed site preferred to refer to the neighborhood as Karagumruk or Sultan rather than Sulukule, an issue that seemed to be firmly tied to territorial stigma. Residents expressed discomfort when we called the neighborhood 'Sulukule.'

6. New-Middle-Class Buyers' Discontent and Return of the Romani

The municipality's destigmatization strategy assumed, based on official statements and practices, that the resettlement of new owners in the neighborhood, following the displacement of the Roman community and the construction of new houses, would restore a "reputational gap." (Kallin, 2017). The municipality sold 'future investment' to the new owners in exchange for an increase in general 'improvement' in the neighborhood. Between 2006 and 2013, rents and sale prices in Sulukule and Karagümrük increased by more than 300% (Sahinkaya, Duran-Diaz & Bendzko, 2018). The reputational gap occurred because the new owners were unwilling to move to Sulukule due to dissatisfaction with its social fabric. Refugee arrival provided an opportunity for new homeowners; therefore, with the exception of a small number of landlords, most owners showed a preference for renting two-story residences to refugees (Interview 11, September 2018). The Islamic-conservative residences and new owners believed that urban renewal would drive Romani people from Sulukule, rescuing them from crime and immoral activities (Ozet, 2020, p. 156). As a result, their expectations depended on the success of the planned displacement. However, the municipality did not achieve a planned displacement, and 273 out of 300 Romani families either sold their rights or could not stay in social housing in Taşoluk. These families returned to Sulukule and settled in nearby areas, primarily in basements, where they were surrounded by relatives and Romani neighbors. In this context, contrary to the municipality's intention, the neighborhood remains delineated by Romani people since prior to the renewal. The Romani people resided in a fairly constricted area (Sulukule), but after their return, they spread out throughout the district, causing the entire area to resemble Sulukule (Interview 3, July 2018; Ozet, 2020, p. 164). Unsurprisingly, the new Islamic-conservative owners and other native residents of the neighborhood are strongly urging the municipality to take immediate and drastic measures to remove Romani from the region, citing widespread discontent with their return (Ozet, 2020, p. 157, 161). Ironically, a common sentiment among Romani people is a sense of displacement.

Evidently, stigma does not adhere to all communities in identical ways, and stigma is more prevalent in some places than in others (Pattison, 2023). The renewal area, historically perceived as an ethnoculturally distinct area, was a home for Romani people, with a vibrant culture and sense of community. Furthermore, a neighborhood for Romani people serves as a solidarity network for their livelihood (Interview 1, January 2018). It is obvious that territorial stigma was associated with Romani identity, and discrimination and cultural stereotypes of Romani people (theft, illiterate, fun-addicted, state aid-dependent, etc.) persisted in the community (Balci, 2009). Both state actors and the public perpetuated long-term discrimination based on their identity and lifestyle and forced them into an exclusionary enclosure in certain geographies, such as Sulukule, where they faced policing and inadequate public service delivery. However, according to the municipality's definition, this is categorized as an integration problem, putting the responsibility on Romani community. De-contextualizing Sulukule from its socio-cultural roots and the structural inequalities that have shaped its life in practice has led to failed displacement. The flaws arising from de-contextualization are evident at each phase, from problem definition to the scale of territorial destigmatization.

According to the annual activity plan (2006), Fatih Municipality initially designed a renewal plan in five groups, each encompassing different parts of the Hatice Sultan and Neslişah neighborhoods. Only the first group was designated as a renewal area, which accounts for 4% of the overall planned area (Balci, 2009). The division of power over plan approval between metropolitan and district levels imposes barriers on the boundaries of renewal areas. Although both are in the hands of the ruling party, the metropolitan municipality has consistently denied Fatih municipality's requests for a site extension. During its fourth year in power and amid EU membership negotiations, the ruling party appeared reluctant to deal with rising community mobilization and international opposition, which included UNESCO. Instead, the governing elite chose to alleviate tensions at the metropolitan level. Consequently, the renewal area did not include

the entire Neslişah and Sultan neighborhoods; the remainder of the neighborhood, where Romani people continue to live in old, physically damaged structures, remained untouched ("nearby area" hereafter). As one of the respondents noted, the intervention area should have extended at least to Sarmasik, the Neyzen region, and Imam Cemil Street, but it was very narrow and did not include other problematic areas of the Sultan and Neslişah neighborhoods (Interview 3, July 2018; Ozet, 2020, p. 169).

The return of resentful Romani people in the neighborhood has created similar reputational and security problems for both outsiders and non-Romani individuals in the area. The municipality relied solely on the installation of a police station to address security issues, ignoring structural factors. However, "safety" or "crime prevention" requires a concerted effort across multiple levels and dimensions, including employment, education, training, and comprehensive initiatives like social assistance and rehabilitation. Prior to 2020, the municipality's strategic plans, which outline its operations and long-term goals for the following five years, were produced as internal documents, not as outcomes of stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, there is almost no reference to national-level actors or development plans. Eventually, Sulukule's initial problems persisted in the nearby area and spread to the new site, causing fears and security concerns and perpetuating the image of an 'unsafe' place. For instance, a 60-year-old man commented on the current state of the neighborhood, setting himself apart from those who had tarnished its reputation.

> Not taking drugs is considered a miracle here. We strongly supported the urban renewal project... At least we no longer have these types of moral problems in Sulukule since its renewal. However, we have other problems because falling into illegal activities is easy here. We are obliged to stay here; we feel a sense of [being] trapped. Who does not want to raise children in a better place? (Interview 20, October 2018)

Without exception, all respondents addressed the neighborhood's ongoing social problems: drug use, illegal activities, low education, school dropouts, and lack of employment. Romani people are severely disadvantaged at every level—housing, education, and employment. From their perspective, these issues have rendered criminal activity the only viable option for survival. The municipality and Romani people have different logics about what constitutes a local problem and how to solve it. Although the municipality refers to it as a "safety issue," the local community defines the problem as marginalization and exclusion. Several studies have demonstrated that the effectiveness of urban renewal projects in curbing urban crime remains limited. Successful destigmatization depends on coordinated action at the local and national scales, as well as the dissemination of data on the declining crime rate, forced evictions, tenant displacement due to economic hardship, and so on (Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021). By recalling Sulukule's commitment to criminal activity, the Istanbul Police Department's mapping of Fatih and Beyoğlu as two of the six districts with the highest number of crimes perpetuates stigmatization ("Megakentte", 2020).

Discrimination against the Roman community has historical roots. Since the Resettlement Law of 1934, lifted into motion in 2004, the state has banned the migration of Romani to Turkey, where historically they were either displaced outside the city center or forcefully resettled (Balci, 2009). Regrettably, The Fatih Municipality's territorial destigmatization plan followed a similar historical path. The central government, which changed its stance in response to international policy, influenced the municipality's shift in attitude toward the Roma community. In 2015, several central bodies launched a project with EU financial assistance to streamline the integration of the Romani community in districts where the majority of the Romani population reside. The project selected 12 pilot provinces, including Istanbul. Its goal is to enhance the Romani community's accessibility to social security, employment, education, and other entitlements, as well as gather demographic data on the Romani population. The adoption of event-based destigmatization in Sulukule began in response to a shift in national rhetoric and policy, specifically the celebration of Roman Day in Sulukule, which is neither sustainable nor based on the recognition of the Romani community's cultural heritage and its link with Sulukule. This change involved branding Sulukule and attracting new visitors through the opening of the Art Academy. The mayor has promoted the Sulukule Art Academy on various television channels. In 2015, the local strategic plan incorporated the terms "Sulukule" and "Romani." The founder of the Children's Art Center, Funda Oral, claims that a schizophrenic policy was in place here (Aydın, 2015).

7. Refugee Arrivals and Flights of Long-Term Middle-Class Locals

The start of the refugee flow to Fatih, especially to Sulukule, coincided with the completion of new houses in 2012. There are 182,440 refugees and migrants in Fatih (IOM, 2019), with the majority being Syrians (80,920), who make up about one-third of the district's population. The refugees preferred Fatih because of its proximity to the city center and tourist infrastructure, which offered temporary and permanent job opportunities in numerous hotels and companies. They are highly visible in both business and labor markets. In the neighborhoods of Molla Gurani, Aksemsettin, Mimar Kemalettin, Aksaray, and Karagümrük, as well as on many streets such as Malta and Naci Şensoy streets, some wealthy

Syrians started new businesses in the food and textile industries. Syrian businesses in the district, as well as Syrian residents, have altered the district's overall identity and image.

Since most owners in Sulukule did not want to live in the renewed Sulukule and sought tenants who would pay higher prices, the arrival of refugees and their housing-sharing behavior offered an opportunity for new owners, and a new phase in Sulukule's history emerged. An official stated "Nowadays, Turkish middle-class people do not [like] live here." I heard Syrians rent most of the houses. Some Syrians pay higher amounts, so the landlords prefer not to reside there. Syrians have already occupied Fatih District." (Interview 4, September 2018).

Some upper- and middle-class Syrians purchased or rented newly renovated houses on an annual basis. Poor Syrians could afford rents through house sharing with other migrants. 6 months before we began our field survey (March 2018), police forces had evicted unlicensed refugees from the neighborhood. Before forced evictions, a single house filled with at least 16 to 20 beds had been the typical landscape of Sulukule (Interview 2, January 2018), and some of the two-story houses hosted two or three Syrian families, as reported in the newspapers (Vural, 2016).

Apart from Syrian refugees, other tenants in the renewal area included Lebanese, Iranian, Palestinian, Tunisian, and Turkish residents (Interview 8, September 2018). In the area, Syrians operated grocery stores, shops, markets, and barbers. Arabic gained immense popularity, leading some to regrettably refer to the neighborhood as "Little Syria," despite its previous association with the Romani community. In other words, the renewed Sulukule was inhabited by a mostly immigrant or refugee population, which changed the neighborhood landscape from a spoken language to catering options. One participant described the demographic shift in the renewal area:

> [The] Syrian population has decreased gradually since 2014. Before, it was like Syria's neighborhood. Syrians constitute approximately 45% of the neighborhood as of today. This neighborhood has been transforming from "Little Syria" after some Syrians moved to other districts, such as Esenyurt, due to increased rents. (Interview 9, September 2018)

The majority were university graduates; nevertheless, without accreditation, they, expressly Syrians, were forced to work in low-paid, informal jobs (Interview 12, September 2018):

> Syrians who [live] in this area earn low wages. For instance, one of my sons, who has a university diploma, works as a driver and earns 1,500 TL monthly. Syrians [cannot] earn their livelihood by performing their profession; thus, they are compelled to work in cheap and unstable jobs. Their driver's license and university diploma are not valid in Turkey. My other son works as a translator on the days he finds an opportunity; other days, he must look for an unqualified job. He is cheap labor in either case. Therefore, Syrians do not have an alternative other than living together in a single flat, notwithstanding inspections are very tight nowadays. (Interview 9, September 2018)

In Sulukule, all interviewees were aware of the divisive, sometimes hostile, attitudes toward refugee newcomers manifested among displaced Sulukule people living in the nearby area (Interview 3, July 2018; Interview 12, September 2018). This feeling entailed a shifting sense of place and belonging and was therefore a critical component of displacement. Romani accused the refugees of their displacement. On the other hand, long-term Karagümrük residents keep their distance from refugees, prefer non-interaction, avoid shopping at their markets, and emphasize cultural and lifestyle distinctions, despite their Muslim identity (Interview 1, January 2018). The mass flow of Syrian refugees and unfair competition over local resources intimidate long-term residents, leading to tension and a "sense of loss" among the local community (Saracoglu & Belanger, 2019).

> In the old days, we had a wealthy life, many jobs, and many money-making opportunities. We never suffered in those days. Today, strangers are everywhere; we have been uncomfortable since the day they arrived, and the government provides resources that meet their needs while ignoring ours. Syrians make a better living than I do. They have free shopping vouchers, so they can go to hospitals and schools. They get easy entry into businesses because they have a tax exemption. We are second-class citizens today (Interview 22, 'October 2018).

As a result, the refugees' arrival in Sulukule generated contradictory outcomes. On the positive side, the presence of refugees offered new owners a higher rental income; on the negative side, they increased social tensions and contributed to the neighborhood's 'negative and unsafe place' perception. Here, we encounter the stickiness of territorial stigma as a barrier to attracting the middle classes; however, "when the image and real estate potential of a neighborhood improve, larger factions of middle- and upper-income-class people arrive" (Simon, 2008). More than that, refugees' entry changed the demographic makeup of the Fatih district, forcing long-term residents who were conservative and middle class to flee to nearby districts like Beylikdüzü or Başakşehir. One official expressed the spoiling historical identity of the Fatih district, citing this change in the district's population as the cause for his move (Interview 8, September 2018). According to the TUIK data set, the population of Fatih district changed from 422.941 in 2012 to 356.025 in 2023, indicating a migration of about 67,000 people to neighboring districts.

The local setting deteriorated due to municipal inaction, a lack of responsiveness to community-level tensions, and a loss of capability to implement tailored solutions to maintain social and cultural fabric, while the central government shaped the scope and direction of refugee policy. The neighborhood's reputation suffers due to an increase in crime

("Megakentte", 2020), leading to its rebranding as a 'Syrian ghetto.' Recent research has asserted that the presence of Syrian ghettos in Istanbul is due to the clustering of Syrians in specific neighborhoods and districts, as well as their cohabitation in a single home with self-exclusion and exclusion from the wider community (Kavas, Avşar, Kadkoy, & Bilgiç, 2019). The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's most recent Strategic Plan (IBB, 2020) ranks the "immigrant/refugee issue" as the third most common cause of concern among locals.

The rising public discontent with the Syrian refugees and right-wing opposition parties' campaigns, as well as deteriorating relations with the EU, forced the AKP government's discourse and policies to change. At the local level, the growing social tensions and violent fights between the refugees and the host community unavoidably led the newly elected mayor to take action. The mayor, who retained his constituency and secured re-election in the 2019 local elections, transformed the strategic plan into a tangible document through collaboration with the local governance network and stakeholders. Before that point, neither the Municipal Strategic Plan nor the Annual Action Plan contained any provisions or measures to accommodate or integrate refugees. Some excerpts from the plan indicate that settings and leadership change at the local level: "Loss of neighborhood culture, flight of long-time residents to other districts—ghettos belong to foreigners, along with discrimination against them; require integrative and multi-scaled solutions.". According to the mayor, the excessive refugee flow has spoiled the country's identity and social fabric. Despite his persistent and vigorous advocacy, the central government did not halt the admission of new refugees to Fatih until 2021. Then, the International Affairs Directive ceased new foreign residency and commercial permits for Fatih ("Fatih belediye", 2021). The evolution of territorial destigmatization requires further field research because stigmatization and destigmatization are ongoing processes.

8. Conclusion

Based on the Sulukule case, we unpacked the "radical" and "soft" components of the municipal destigmatization strategy, from displacement to renaming the neighborhood, and discussed the failure in terms of its design and implementational shortcomings with reference to socio-spatial developments. Although the municipality recorded a success in transferring the properties of Romani to its middle-class political network through centralized and authoritarian governance, the "reputational gap" (Kallin, 2017) remains in Sulukule. Consequently, the neighborhood developed its own spatial and social dynamics over time rather than producing the municipality's planned outcomes. The return of the Romani people, the flight of local middle class, the image of the Syrian ghetto, and 'unsafe' neighborhood reproduced the historical negative reputation of Sulukule.

One of the outcomes of our study is associated with the connection between territorial stigma and gentrification. The activation of territorial stigma, in our case by the central and local authorities, discredits and devalues urban residents not only because of their poverty, ethnicity, class position, or religious affiliation but also because of the places they associate with (Slater, 2015). Where citizens are blamed for stigma, demolition and displacement arise as projected remedies, particularly where fear of crime is seen as restricting investment potential. In this context, the de-stigmatization strategy involves "gentrification", a physical upgrade, and social change toward a higher social class composition (Clark, 2005, p. 263). However, in the past 12 years, the municipality has not accomplished the promised general improvement in Sulukule that the middle class invested and lived in. Currently, the neighborhood's negative reputation has been reinvented through the "invasion of Syrian refugees", delaying the succession of middle and upper classes. Furthermore, these hostile relations deepen the unsafe perception of the renewed area.

As Wacquant (2008) noted, territorial stigma overlaps with the stigma of ethnicity, age, race, and class belonging to social categories. This intersectionality also reveals that territorial destigmatization in practice is a complicated, multidimensional, and multi-scale task. Ignoring the overlapping nature of territorial stigma and formulating an intervention limited to one or a few dimensions for stigmatized sites inevitably exacerbates the situation, similar to the ahistoric and non-integrative strategy of Fatih municipality. The issue at hand concerns the diverse manifestations of conflicts in territorial planning and governance. Different levels of planning authorities and centralized governance are at odds with each other, which shows that spatial planning is not integrated, local issues are not taken into account and local stakeholders are not involved. This has led to the formation of conflicts among numerous parties, including different levels of government. Achieving territorial destigmatisation requires collaboration across all levels of planning authority and cohesive spatial plans. From the policy perspective, directly addressing territorial destigmatization as a goal in all official documents—from national development plans to local strategies—and making those documents tangible through negotiations among stakeholders are integral parts of the destigmatization process. As such, destigmatization is also a collective effort involving not only local and central authorities but also residents, grassroots organizations, private companies, and developers. Policy conflicts between not only the central and local authorities but also the

international and national authorities, as well as over-centralism, contribute to stigma's persistence. In this context, we agree with Schultz Larsen and Delica (2021) on the contradictory role of state actors at the central and local scales in the destigmatization process, describing this role as 'policy schizophrenia'. If the municipality had worked with Romani people and other interested parties to create a destigmatisation strategy and set up a governance network in Sulukule, it could have led to an integrated regeneration with a range of goals, such as reducing crime and creating jobs, as well as "stay put" options.

Our study sheds some light on destigmatization strategy at the municipal level and discusses its success by analyzing how stigma attached to a place has changed over time through interventions. Further field research is necessary to understand the evolution of territorial destigmatization, given that stigmatization and destigmatization are continuous processes.

ORCID :

Betül DUMAN BAY   0000-0003-4616-0432
Zuhal GÜLER   0000-0002-7995-5699

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How cite this article

Supplemantal Material 1: Interviews

Supplemantal 1. Interviews with the residents.

Interview	Site	Sex	Age	Profession	Origin	Date
7		M	58	Private Security	Turkish	Sep. 24, 2018
8		W	55	Café manager	Turkish	Sep. 24, 2018
9		M	50	Grocer	Syrian	Sep. 24, 2018
10		M	20	Driver	Palestinian	Sep. 24, 2018
11		W	42	Tourism Agent	Romani	Sep. 24, 2018
12	Renewal Area	M	30	Graphic Animator	Syrian	Sep. 24, 2018
13		W	40	Tourism Agent	Turkish	Sep. 24, 2018
14		M	45	Teacher	Turkish	Sep. 24, 2018
15		M	20	Grocer	Syrian	Sep. 24, 2018
16		W	59	Housewife	Iraqian	Sep. 24, 2018
17		M	77	Driver	Turkish	Sep. 24, 2018
18		M	73	Old age pensioner	Turkish	Sep. 24, 2018
19		M	60	Worker-Ex prisoner	Romani	Sep. 24, 2018
20		M	55	Buffet Owner	Turkish	Oct. 21, 2018
21		M	49	Retiree/Cleaner	Romani	Oct. 21, 2018
22	Nearby Area	W	65	Çengi (Romani Dancer)	Romani	Oct. 21, 2018
23		W	40	Cleaner/unemployed	Romani	Oct. 21, 2018
1		M	23	Actor	Romani	Jan. 17, 2018
2		M	24	Singer	Romani	Jan. 28, 2018

Supplemantal 2. Interviews with the officials.

Interview	Position	Unit	Date
3	Mukhtar	Karagümrük Neighbourhood	July 5, 2018
4	Counsellor of Mayor	Fatih Municipality	Sep..24. 2018
5	Director/ Development and Urbanization	Fatih Municipality	Sep.24, 2018
6	Director/ Department of Analysis and Project	Fatih Municipality	Sep.24, 2018

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Review Article

Aging Well and the Intersection of Flourishing, Connectedness, and Sense of Meaningfulness in a Changing World: Implications for Personal and Societal Responsibility

Terence SEEDSMAN[1] ⓘ, Nilüfer KORKMAZ YAYLAGÜL[2] ⓘ, Aslı Gözde AKIŞ[3] ⓘ

[1]Emeritus Professor, Institute of Health & Sport, Victoria University-Melbourne, Australia
[2]Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Gerontology, Akdeniz University Antalya, Türkiye
[3]Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Gerontology, Balikesir University, Balikesir, Türkiye

Corresponding author : Aslı Gözde Akış

E-mail : asligozde.akis@balikesir.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

Countries worldwide are now facing a multitude of challenges emanating from population aging, along with increases in human longevity. This demographic transition to older populations globally has created interest in the concept of aging well, with implications for a reconceptualization of the life course. In this study, insights, perspectives, and research findings surrounding human flourishing, social connectedness, and sense of meaningfulness are introduced for the purpose of drawing attention to their respective associations either independently or collectively with aging well. This study by way of a random search of the literature, provides contemporary insights for building a knowledge platform centered on aging well. Societal aspirations for promoting aging well will require a priority focus that promotes the adoption of healthy lifestyles across all ages. To apprehend and confront the challenges surrounding aging well will require new forms of communication and partnership undertakings involving the government, policymakers, health professionals, the general public and especially people destined to live into older age. Consequently, a deeper understanding of aging well and its promotion throughout the life course is urgently needed, including the existential aspects of aging well and the social, political, economic, and environmental forces that influence the level of health and well-being of people.

Keywords: Existential Health, Narrative on Aging, Resilient Aging, Self-Care, Social Embeddedness

1. Introduction

There has been a revolution in terms of thinking more positively and realistically about the prospect of aging well, however, there still remains the challenge for individuals and societies to adjust their attitudes and mindsets when it comes to aging per se (Diehl, Smeyer & Mehrotra, 2020; Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). Unfortunately, aging is still portrayed in pessimistic and apocalyptic terms while ignoring the potential and possibilities for active and productive aging (Burr, Caro & Moorhead, 2002; Foster & Walker, 2015; Lin, Sindall, Williams, & Capon, 2022; Moulaert & Biggs, 2012). It is relatively easy to understand how younger generations and policymakers can all too easily fail to fully comprehend the lived experiences of older people while they persist in denying their own aging selves. Most people today, and certainly in the future will live long enough to reach the status of older person. With this factual knowledge in hand, would seem inherently sensible for individuals and society to undertake responsible planning efforts to promote and support healthy and meaningful adaptation during later life. While there is not a consensus in the literature on the concept of aging well, theories and models on aging well suggest that the content of the concept varies according to social and political conditions, cultural context, and mainstream approaches.

The notion of aging well may be perceived as more of an individual responsibility in contemporary culture; however, individual actions are not independent of social structures. The World Health Organization (2002) has claimed that the increasing trend towards population aging worldwide will bring to the forefront new social, political, and economic challenges requiring the introduction of policy initiatives that support aging well within a life course framework.

There is now a call for a new narrative on aging that challenges the conventional view that the aging process is fixed and immutable (Diehl, Smeyer & Mehrotra, 2020). Johnson (1995) in a statement on aging well suggested "Aging well is fundamentally a dynamic between the individual and the environment" (p. 26). It is now recognized that aging well across the life course will require responsible actions taken by individuals including support from progressive and insightful social policies that create equitable access to essential health-related services when needed (Commissioner for Senior Victorians, 2020; Halaweh et al; 2018). This paper by way of a review of selected research literature seeks to a) highlight some examples, insights, understandings, and findings surrounding human flourishing, social connectedness, and meaningfulness in life, including their respective and collective associations with aging well and b) encourage further research addressing the impact of sociocultural contexts and their structural configurations that may nurture or impede the existential sense of flourishing, social connectedness, and meaningfulness in later life. Roberts (2012) offered an important and challenging perspective on aging and living well that warrants attention by all and sundry:

The goal of a 'good' and productive long life is possible if there are appropriate interventions at the right time, if health inequalities are robustly addressed, and if the individual is treated as a person with capabilities who is rooted in a community, not a bundle of problems and symptoms living an isolated existence. (pp. 14-15)

2. Aging Well: Conceptual Perspectives and Views on Sharing of Responsibilities

Aging well is a concept that delineates the essence of aging in contemporary societies and offers goals regarding how it should ideally unfold, serving as an overarching framework for various concepts. Defining the boundaries of aging well as a concept is quite difficult. Throughout the history of gerontology, terms such as successful aging, healthy aging, positive aging, and active aging have been used in conjunction (Fernández-Ballesteros et al., 2010; Valiant, 2007; Woods et al., 2016). These concepts incorporate perspectives that transform the meaning of aging in society, which traditionally carries negative connotations, such as physical loss, cognitive decline, and dependency, into a positive light. While nuances exist among these concepts, their similarities in terms of goals and content are noteworthy. The most significant commonality among these concepts is their emphasis on physical, cognitive, and social functioning. The fundamental goals for sustaining and enhancing these functions are commonly perceived as achieving independence and quality of aging (Bartlett & Carrol, 2015). In alignment with all these concepts, the literature suggests that the understanding of aging is multifaceted and typically encompasses satisfying social relationships, a sense of meaning in life, self-realization, and autonomy (Halaweh et al., 2018). On the basis of contemporary research findings, aging is now being portrayed in a more favorable light as a consequence of a more balanced presentation of aging-related processes (Bhattacharyya, 2021; Chapman, 2005). It is now known that aging well is influenced by modifiable interventions aimed at improving physical functioning and independent living (Beswick et al; 2008). Over three decades ago, Maddox (1992) emphasized the modifiability of the aging process, and more recently studies by Tosato et al. (2007), Michel et al. (2016), and Bland (2018) have reported on the influences of such matters as diet, exercise, lifestyle, and the environment as providing physiological, psychological, and functional benefits. Interventions aimed at the modifiability of aging processes might well take note of Seligman (2021), who contends that the disease

model of human functioning requires a balancing perspective, an approach that promotes "the scientific study of what makes individuals and communities thrive" (p. xiii).

Aging well is, in essence, a dynamic construct in that it must be considered amid life changing events and transitions across the life course. As such, older people need to build resilience in order to cope with expected and unexpected circumstances and situations (Fineman, 2012). At the same time, aging well is negotiable to the extent that individuals commit to exercising choices that optimize health-related behaviors that allow for active, healthy, and meaningful personal relationships throughout their lives (Adams & Blieszner, 1995; Hawkins, 2005; Seedsman, 1994). Hemberg, Forsman, and Nordmyr (2017) introduced the notion of existential health with implications for a measure of personal responsibility for aging well. For Hawkins (2005), the notion of aging well is based on an approach that "promotes personal behaviors and life course environments that limit functional declines, especially those caused by chronic conditions, to help older adults maintain their independence and health" (p. 1).

As the population of the world ages the issue of who should be responsible for undertaking actions for promoting aging well will become the subject matter of intense debate and concern across all levels of society. While aging well is primarily a personal affair it carries at the same time policy implications for societal interventions to promote active, healthy, and productive aspects of aging within the context of a life course framework.

Figure 1 provides a listing of eight (8) key attributes of aging well obtained by way of responses received from older people as part of a feedback survey in the Australian state of Victoria (Commissioner for Senior Victorians, 2020). The key attributes provide important clues for implementing future research, policy, funding, and program initiatives aimed at promoting the health and well-being of older people.

Figure 1. Attributes of Aging Well (*Source*: Commissioner for Senior Victorians, 2020, p.3). [Published with permission from the Commissioner for Senior Victorians].

The aging well concept must also include due recognition of the reality that disability, marginality, isolation, poverty, and pathology will, in some way or other be part of the lived experience of many older people. Johnson (1995) provided a realistic and balanced perspective on aging well by emphasizing that there are many instances that show older adults aging well despite the presence of functional decline, poor health, and adverse life-related circumstances. The preceding researcher added a salient and telling commentary "the most important marker for aging well is one's social-psychological interpretation of whatever one encounters through the aging process" (p. 126). The development of positive behavior by individuals against changes caused by new social risks and uncertainties can also be considered as a fundamental aspect of subjectivity (Giddens, 1991). McLaughlin et al. (2010) in a study of '*successful aging*' in the United States reported that many older people, despite declining health still maintained that they were aging

well. Sadly, Angus and Reeve (2006) identified ageist attitudes and related stereotypes as detrimental to the process of aging well and offered the view that any "aging well initiatives based on individualism and 'self-responsibility' risk reproducing existing power relations that continue to inform ageist stereotypes" (p. 137). Burnes et al. (2019) identified the need for vigorous international research to examine the effectiveness of interventions to reduce ageism. Bugental and Hehman (2007) argued for a more focused approach to combating ageism by integrating theory with policy by drawing upon emerging findings and understandings from the biological and social sciences. Studies by Chang et al. (2020) and Levy et al. (2020) revealed the adverse impact of ageism on the health conditions of older people, including the consequential economic costs on healthcare systems, with a call for strategic interventions to combat societal sources of ageism. Crăciun (2019) provided an interesting range of perspectives on how to think positively about aging, while Bar-Tu (2021) highlighted the value of utilizing positive aging concepts as part of strategic approaches to enhance the well-being of older people. Aging well is most likely to occur through a sharing of responsibilities between individuals and society, involving a sustained focus upon maintaining health, well-being, independence, and quality of life across all ages (Lin et al; 2022). Johnson (1995) argued "The professional and older adult are both intimately involved in the process of aging well and in the outcome" (p.127). With more people worldwide living longer lives, human services professionals need to be more proactive in relation to the area of preventive healthcare within the context of a life course framework (Foster & Walker, 2021; Johnson, 1995; Kuh et al; 2014; Sander et al; 2015). Unfortunately, the preparation of medical and nursing professionals is still aligned to the traditional practice of treating disease and disability, while there is clearly an urgent need to assist individuals to stay healthy for as long as possible, made ever more important with increases in human longevity. Bland (2018) called for the adoption of '*personalized lifestyle medicine*' as an effective means of combating disease incidence.

Foster and Walker (2021) offered the view that "individuals to some extent are agents of their own aging process" (p. 2), which raises the issue of 'self-care' as offering a significant resource for aging well (Høy, Wagner & Hall, 2007; Mielenz, Kannoth & Xue, 2021). Self-care can be seen as involving a diverse range of choices, activities, and behaviors undertaken by an individual to promote personal health, well-being, and independence. Healthful behaviors including physical exercise represent an investment in self-care. According to Manchana (2021), evidence suggests that health conscious decisions by older people along with support from family and friends can assist in maintaining independence as well as combating loneliness. Mielenz, Kannoth, and Xue (2021) contend that the application of self-care patterns in early life can help lower the chance of disability-related problems occurring in older age. As a result, the development of any future aging well framework will need to consider how best to emphasize and promote health literacy initiatives with due consideration given to successful interventions across international and cultural contexts (Levin-Zamir et al; 2017).

The trajectories of population aging vary among countries, and the meaning of aging well may differ between developed and developing nations when combined with the influences of globalization, financial, and political insecurity (Bartlett & Carrol, 2015). Geographic location can be a significant factor in aging well as exemplified by Blackberry (2022), who reported on the extreme difficulties associated with accessing aged care services by older people living in rural (outback) areas throughout Australia. The preceding situation from Australia highlights the need to better understand how aging well various across different geographical areas including the type of policies that may help to amend health inequities across disenfranchised areas. Curtis and Jones (2008) provided a balanced perspective on health inequities that require attention by health care professionals and policymakers "health variation is caused both by the characteristics of individuals, and also by the setting in which they are situated" (p. 666). Fineman (2012) provided a timely reminder that human agency, which concerns the ability to take action, control, and make choices, requires a societal responsibility to embrace clearer understandings of human needs and the implications arising from the fact that "Safety and security are necessary to have the ability to fully and freely exercise options and choices" (p. 122). Obviously, in conflict situations involving wars and aggression the ability for individuals to act as free agents is seriously compromised due to existential anxieties surrounding safety and survival. Any attempt to understand aging well will be limited if there is little or no consideration given to the effects of the environment on a person's sense of belonging and agency (Andrews et al; 2009; Gilroy, 2008; Wahl, Iwarsson & Oswald, 2012). At the same time, the socio-cultural context cannot be ignored, as cultural values and related behaviors are inextricably linked with health and well-being (Howell & Peterson, 2020; Korkmaz Yaylagul & Seedsman, 2012; Torres, 1999).

While research shows that it is never too late to adopt a lifestyle in older age that is conducive to health improvements, it is far better to arrive at an older age with a healthy profile (Goetzel et al, 2007). A focus on personal responsibility for aging well can all too easily deflect engagement from thoughtful and balanced discourse relating to societal support for those citizens made vulnerable as part of the human condition (Fineman, 2012). It is easy to see how key decision-makers may adopt a form of *purposeful inaction* or limited responsibility in relation to promoting aging

well based on a twofold mindset involving 1) ageist-type attitudes that draw upon essentialist beliefs that "define the process of aging as fixed and inevitable rather than malleable and modifiable" (Weiss, 2018, p. 925) and 2) adherence to an ideological stance that maintains "individual liberty should remain exempt from public regulation" (McConnell & Hart, 2019, p. 651). Questions, arguments, and issues relating to personal versus societal responsibility for health and well-being have been longstanding, as shown by Minkler (1999), who advocated for "a more balanced approach one that ensures the creation of healthy public policies and health-promoting environments, within which individuals are better able to make choices conducive to health" (p. 135). It must be accepted, however, that at the individual level the meanings and attitudes surrounding one's own aging-self will undoubtedly impact the ability to age well (Chen et al; 2018). An immediate social imperative facing public and private policymakers along with medical, nursing, and allied healthcare professionals resides in the challenge to provide and promote a balanced reality of aging and old age as a counter to the prevailing and damaging assumptions of decline, redundancy, dependency, non-productive, and economic burden. Unfortunately, it has to be recognized that globally the opportunities and support systems for aging well are not evenly distributed within and between population cohorts (Higo & Khan, 2015). While no single approach exists for promoting aging well there are personal and socio-political challenges and responsibilities that might well be considered within the context of the following commentary offered by Roberts (2012):

> Policymakers, planners, politicians, designers, technocrats and commissioners all have a role to play in creating a society in which the wellbeing of older people is actively promoted. However, individual responsibility also needs to be exercised to prepare better for the transitions that come with older age and which can dent wellbeing. (p.33)

2.1. Flourishing as a Salient Factor of Well-Being

Up until recent times, the notion of human flourishing has been essentially a focus of attention through religious and philosophical related discourses. However, the emergence of theoretical and research-based undertakings in the fields of positive psychology and developmental psychology have now moved human flourishing beyond an aspirational endeavor to a position of increasing potential and possibility for enhancing human health and well-being across the life course. The concept of *human flourishing* can be aligned in a general sense of the phrase with the Latin word *florere, meaning* to blossom, bloom, or to be in a healthy state of general mental and physical functioning. Drawing upon Aristotelian ethics, the term eudaimonia is often used to describe human flourishing or living-well (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Seligman (2012), in his landmark publication *Flourish, identified* five (5) pillars of well-being namely: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. While the ideal would be to maximize all of the preceding five elements of well-being, the reality is that individually and collectively, Seligman's five pillars of well-being provide a lifestyle guide for engaging the task of human flourishing. Seligman also recognized the value-added aspects of self-esteem, optimism, resilience, and self-determination as complementary additions to the notion of human flourishing. According to VanderWeele (2017), human flourishing comprises a range of important aspects of human life and not just psychological well-being alone, and as such, he proposed four pathways comprising family, work, education, and religious affiliation as offering opportunities to nurture life satisfaction and happiness, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose in life, character and virtue, and close interpersonal relationships.

The worldwide existence of human inequality and associated issues concerning health equity might well suggest that the realization of human flourishing for much of the world's population presents a fairy tale or far-fetched utopian dream. In light of the preceding perspective, the following question requires attention by scientists, health practitioners, bureaucrats, public health officials, and human rights activists who aspire to advance policy and related actions and practices to promote flourishing across the life course. *Where on the spectrum of possibility does human flourishing reside?* A thumbnail explanation of human flourishing illustrates the importance of establishing sustainable and meaningful interpersonal relationships that allow for genuine connections with others, resulting in a positive sense of belonging (Ekman & Simon-Thomas, 2021).

Any discussion on the construction of an ideal or practical blueprint for a flourishing life in older age must necessarily realize the limitations that impact both the individual and the contextual socioeconomic situation prevailing at the time. Cebral-Loureda et al. (2022) and Younkins (2008) emphasized the need to understand that the concept of human flourishing and happiness is linked to matters concerning human rights, dignity, social justice, ethics, equity, and the law, including due consideration of sociocultural influences on health and well-being. The preceding researchers also cautioned against over-emphasizing the individualistic or existential responsibility for human flourishing and well-being as this approach represents a failure to acknowledge the import of sociocultural, economic, and environmental factors. Some three decades ago, Maddox (1992) reminded us that "Well-being has social as well as personal determinants. A word of caution is required, however. Though material resources surely help, such resources alone do not ensure

well-being" (p. 62). The concept of human flourishing opens a myriad of opportunities to engage questions and issues that arise within a host of domains, including ethical, philosophical, political, psychological, medical, educational, environmental, cultural, and socio-structural. For example, Wolbert, de Ruyter, and Schinkel (2019) argued a case for more debate and discussion by educational philosophers and practitioners surrounding the kinds of theoretical approaches that may be considered in promoting human flourishing.

According to Sorrell (2017), human flourishing in later life is exhibited by those older individuals who view themselves as evolving, growing, and open to change. The preceding aspects of human flourishing align well with Hillman (1999), who argued that life in older age provides opportunities for a new way of being that involves "Unfolding, evolving, developing, improving" (p. 60). While there is no such thing as the correct way to thrive and flourish in later life, there is, however, a high degree of consensus that a sense of general health and well-being is best achieved in a community with others. In other words, personal growth requires sustained and meaningful interaction between the self and others. Any genuine attempt to advance human flourishing across all ages must recognize and act upon the challenges facing humanity relating to inequality and marginalization, with particular attention to income, housing affordability, education, and access to healthcare and health coverage (Gebremariam & Sadana, 2019; Prince, 2020). It may well be that flourishing is nurtured by the adoption of an optimistic orientation to life, which is reflected in a genuine willingness to allow for the unfolding processes of life while holding onto a sense of hopefulness along with an openness of mind and an acceptance of one's journey. Taylor (1981), in his essay *The Meaning of Life, offered* the view that for some individuals, "What counts is that one should be able to begin a new task, a new castle, a new bubble. It counts only because it is there to be done and he [*she*] has the will to do it" (p. 150). Kenyon (1991) provided a characteristic of the life journey that might well be amenable to inclusion in any realistic interpretation of human flourishing, in so far, that the quality of an individual's life journey is "informed by the positive qualities of an adventure, namely wonder, anticipation and openness, and perhaps enthusiasm even in the face of loss, suffering, and disillusionment" (p. 27).

Baars and Phillipson (2014), drawing upon the detrimental consequences of social exclusion and marginality impacting many older people, argued that more sensitivity should be forthcoming from the adoption of humanistic policies that address the existential limitations and vulnerabilities that circumscribe their life world. Likewise, Ferraro and Shippee (2009) offered a related perspective that has implications for outcomes relating to human flourishing "social systems generate inequality, which is manifested over the life course via demographic and developmental processes, and that personal trajectories are shaped by the accumulation of risks, available resources, perceived trajectories and human agency" (p. 333). The focus on human flourishing should not be confined solely to community-dwelling members of society but should also include individuals who are living in care-type environments, such as nursing homes and residential aged care facilities. There is the moral imperative whereby people living in aged care settings are provided the opportunity to thrive rather than merely survive until the end of life. More serious undertakings are required to explore ways of restructuring the life world of aged care residents with the primary goal of fostering opportunities for aging well. The potential for human flourishing in residential aged care facilities is heightened when care is provided in an operational climate that fosters kindness, respect, understanding, and compassion (Minney & Ranzijn, 2016; Rhodenizer, 2014; Seedsman & Seedsman, 2019; Seedsman, 2021). Unfortunately, all too often, adherence to rigid rules, regulations, and inflexible timetables as part of nursing home organizational structures denies aged care residents the opportunity to experience the therapeutic benefits arising from access to garden and parkland environments. Magnussen, Alteren, and Bondas (2021) reported that aged care facilities that provided opportunities for '*nature-human interactions*' through access to garden environments assisted in the creation of flourishing outcomes evidenced by older people repotting that gardens enabled them to connect with self, others, and the world of nature. Work on the value-added outcomes for older people engaging with garden environments during COVID-19 provides ample evidence for aged care settings to include the garden as a salient health resource within the overall aged care support agenda (Corley et al; 2021; Levinger et al; 2022). Policymakers and health professionals might well take notice of Weziak-Bialowolska, McNeely, and VanderWeele (2019), who asserted:

The measurement of human flourishing—the ability of humans to thrive – has potential to inform policy and personal reflection, to guide design of interventions and to monitor societal wellbeing. (p.11)

2.2. Health Promoting Potential of Social Connectedness

The trajectory of individuals throughout their life course is simultaneously individual and societal, or more precisely, it is interpersonal (Kenyon, 1991). The development and aging of each person take place in a changing world with other persons. The choices that each individual makes in relation to engaging with the outside world (including

the ever-expanding digital world) determines to a large extent the overall structure of their lives, with consequential implications for health and well-being across the life course (Aung et al, 2022; Hooyman & Kiyak, 1992; International Telecommunications Union, 2021).

Seligman (2012) in his pioneering work on human flourishing offered the view that meaningful connection with other people, friends, family, and the general community provided an effective antidote to the low points of life as well as presenting opportunities to share personal achievements that occur over the life journey. Schotanus-Dijkstra et al. (2016) in a Netherlands study reported that while personality traits were a strong factor associated with understanding human flourishing, there was a need to recognize the importance of situational factors such as social support and positive life events. Douglas, Georgiou, and Westbrook (2017) in their work on social participation as an indicator of successful aging made a case for health professionals to be more assertive in targeting social participation as an effective approach for improving health and general well-being. Katz (2009), based on a cross-national study, highlighted the significance of intergenerational family relationships in supporting both cognitive and emotional aspects of subjective well-being among older adults 75 years and older. Andrews et al. (2003) reported on a 'befriending' scheme that offered the potential to combat loneliness among older people and while acknowledging the value of strong family connections to counter loneliness they also asserted that "non-family social interactions are also important for an older person's subjective sense of wellbeing and happiness" (pp. 349-350). However, Adams and Blieszner (1995) argued that having a family relationship is not necessarily an indication that an older person is aging well. Notwithstanding the preceding viewpoints, Adams and Blieszner reported that research indicates a strong connection between the quality of family interactions and the psychological well-being of older people. The point must be made, however, that while grandparenting provides many opportunities to positively connect older people with their respective family members, there can be evolving circumstances whereby the grandparenting role becomes too demanding due to downturns in general health and well-being (Danielsbacka, Křenková & Tanskanen, 2022).

Bradfield (2020), reporting on the conduct of community-based non-clinical arts programs for older people, revealed favorable outcomes in relation to engagement and social interaction. The results of an international literature review on older volunteering by Gil-Lacruz et al. (2019) revealed positive psychological benefits arising from opportunities to expand social connectedness, leading to increased social networks and an improved sense of meaning and purpose in life. Notwithstanding the research evidence surrounding the health and well-being benefits arising from opportunities for older people to engage in volunteer-type activities there nevertheless remains the need to ensure the application of quality assurance approaches to volunteer opportunities (Matthews & Nazoo, 2021). Indeed, connection is why we are here, it's what gives purpose, substance, and meaning to our existential lives. Schlossberg (1989) provided what might well be seen as the quintessential purpose relating to human connection ". . . the most important lesson is that even with our differences, we are connected by the need to matter and the need to belong." (p. 15). Matos et al. (2021), in an international study of the COVID-19 pandemic across 21 countries worldwide, reported major stress-related outcomes from respondents arising from a pervading sense of social disconnection and loneliness. Another area demanding more detailed examination in relation to aging well concerns the extent to which expatriates are able to adjust their thinking, attitudes, and behaviors as employees and ultimately following retirement in their respective host countries (Chen, 2019). The extent or otherwise of social integration and meaningful adjustment into local community life by expatriates and their families will be an important determinant for mental health and general well-being. For example, Palmberger (2017), in a study of older Turkish labor migrants and their spouses, found that positive social ties and enhanced sense of social embeddedness resulted from "active participation in one of Vienna's Turkish cultural/religious/political associations" (p. 235). An obvious policy and strategic challenge for host countries relying on migrant labor concerns the establishment and ongoing evaluation of voluntary programs and support systems to assist with the social integration and well-being of expatriates.

Lifelong learning emerges as a crucial dimension for the meaningful adjustment of older individuals to the community. Narushima, Liu, and Diestelkamp (2018) provided research evidence supporting engagement in non-formal lifelong learning by older adults as an effective means for helping to sustain their psychological well-being, along with positive improvements in their overall reserve capacities. The preceding study provides clear evidence of the value-added outcomes resulting from the provision of informal community-based learning programs that promote active aging. Hayslip (2014) in an examination of lifelong learning found that such learning produces opportunities for older learners to a) build meaningful social connections b) establish positive intergenerational relationships c) create improved attitudes within the community on the health benefits of later life learning and d) gain new skills, competencies, motivations and self-confidence. The preceding researcher also spoke of ensuring a '*person-environment fit*' with respect to an older person engaging in community-based learning programs. Schoultz, Öhman and Quennersedt (2020) called for deeper research initiatives on the connection between older adult learning and the link with positive health

outcomes in the interest of strengthening "the cumulative knowledge production about the relationship between adult learning and health" (p. 528). Machielse and Hortulanus (2014), in their research on social ability and social frailty, offered the following realistic and yet supportive commentary on balanced living in later life:

> For future generations of older adults, a good balance between independence and connectedness is crucial: only then can they fully enjoy the freedom, and at the same time feel safe and protected in the face of limitations and adversity. (p. 135)

2.3. Meaning and Purpose: A Primary Ingredient for Living Well

The link between having a meaningful life purpose in older age and aging well has been reported by a number of research findings (Musich et al, 2018; Pachana & Baumeister, 2021; Pinquart, 2002; Windsor, Curtis & Luszcz, 2015). The choice in later life might be for some to disengage, step back, and become at best an observer of life. On the other hand, there will be those who prefer to retain their '*self-hood*' through the role of risk taker which entails an openness and acceptance to create new meaning and purpose as part of a continuing and active engagement with life. For de Beauvoir (1977) "There is only one solution if old age is not to be an absurd parody of our former life, and that is to go on pursuing ends that give our existence a meaning" (p. 601). Wong (1989) made the point that personal meaning should be seen to be a significant component in the promotion of well-being in later life and emphasized "prolonging life without providing any meaning for existence is not the best answer to the challenge of aging" (p. 522). The maintenance or progress toward meaningful living in older age may be stymied by a pervading sense of "fatalism implicit in metaphors of deterioration, decline and disease as-aging precludes many individuals from re-establishing or maintaining adequate levels of physical, psychological and social health" (Davidson, 1991, p. 177). Even today, in modern medicine and nursing, along with a myriad of allied health professional services there still persists institutionalized elements of negative metaphorical thinking, attitudes, and practices towards aging and old age (Ben-Harush et al; 2016). While Van Winjngaaden, Leget, and Goossensen (2015) identified older people who were tired of living and who expressed a willingness to give up on life, the work of Dannefer, Lin, and Gonos (2021) revealed that "One of the now-well established principles of positive mental health is the importance of a sense of control over one's life" (p. 75). Hence, the need for the development of vigorous and sustained public health promotion programs that highlight the realities and value outcomes emanating from the adoption of healthy lifestyles and active living. Older people, like everybody else, live in a world of rapid change, and as a consequence, they require periodic bouts of re-orientation to meaning and purpose in life. While Laceulle (2014) posited the view that charting one's life course is a difficult task, she also argued "that almost all aspects of people's lives are susceptible to revision in light of new information and knowledge" (p. 97). The meaning and purpose of the life of an older individual are shaped by personal, social, and environmental factors. Hence, the need for the development of vigorous and sustained public health promotion programs that highlight the realities and value outcomes emanating from the adoption of healthy lifestyles and active living. While acknowledging the relevance of structural issues and socio-political-economic dynamics impacting the lived experiences of people across the life course, the matter of meaning of life is first and foremost uniquely existential as it arises "within us, it is not bestowed from without" (Taylor, 1981, p. 150).

In addition to socio-cultural and existential conditions, the influence of older individuals' interactions with societal institutions and other organizations should be considered in shaping the meaning and purpose of their life. For instance, the impact of working in advanced age on the meaning of an older person's life and well-being needs to be explored more deeply (Martela & Pessi, 2018). Barlin et al. (2023), in their study focusing on older individuals in the workforce, demonstrated that engaging in work in advanced age contributes to a sense of purpose in life and supports subjective well-being. Kim et al. (2021) reported research findings showing that resilient aging among people was associated with an encouraging of optimism and purpose in life. Charles and Carstensen (2010) noted that people with strong social networks, particularly those with supportive friends and family members, were inclined to report a positive sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Flett and Heisel (2021) responded to the COVID-19 pandemic provided a valuable commentary on the relevance of '*mattering*' among older people. In other words, the preceding researchers highlighted the detrimental effects impacting older people who experience a pervading sense of not being valued or feeling that they are no longer of any significance whatsoever to other people. In particular, Flett and Heisel offered the following viewpoint "mattering deserves much more focus among psychologists than it has received thus far; knowledge of whether an older person feels like she or he matters to others is fundamental to understanding this person and how life is going and how it is likely to go in the future" (p. 2449). In a related way, the work of Rinnan et al. (2018) on the meaning of life and joy among residents in nursing homes was very much dependent upon the extent to which staff were perceived as being competent, attentive, respectful and prepared to carefully listen to their needs and concerns. Schlossberg (2009) in recognition of people now living longer reminded us that life in older age still involves the

existential challenge of finding meaning and purpose. For Schlossberg, the issue of mattering and that we count for something worthwhile is crucial for our health and well-being. Baumeister and Vohs (2002) proclaimed that the field of positive psychology offered supportive approaches for building human well-being by focusing on positive qualities of living that nurtured a solid sense of meaningfulness in life.

Gewirth (1998) articulated the notion of self-realization in a manner that assists in helping to understand how an individual comes to understand the evolving self within the context of "an unfolding of what is strongest or best in oneself, so that it represents the successful accumulation of one's aspirations or potentialities" (p. 3). Likewise, Laceulle (2018) reminds us that "each socio-cultural context also harbors a variety of forces that may impede the optimal realization of a good, meaningful life" (p. 10). Steger (2012) reported that making meaning in life is now held to be an essential ingredient in fostering human well-being by influencing key psychological domains, including the sense of self-worth, efficacy, and self-justification. It has to be accepted that some people, particularly those in later life, may choose for whatever reason(s) to disengage from authentic living due to the feeling that life has become meaningless. For Kenyon (1991), the outcome of such a choice is to "disarm before the inevitable" (p. 29). It must be said that when individuals display a lack of interest or outright indifference about issues and concerns related to meaning and purpose in life, there is every chance that they will experience some form of depression and ill-health (Dewitte & Dezutter, 2021; Frankl, 1961). Max Lerner (1990), a distinguished American author, educator, and columnist, offered an important and highly relevant viewpoint that aligns with the need to retain the capacity for meaning-making and purpose in later life:

> Back in the late 1950s and 1960s, experts were saying that old age was a time for a man or woman to "disengage"- to mute their intensities, diminish the life-roles they had played, in short, to prepare for death... Who were these savants of aging to tell me when to disengage at the very moment when I felt the fire of battle, like Nelson at Trafalgar? Who were they to tell me to prepare for death, when death was exactly the adversary I had to confront and somehow outwit. (cited in Carlsen, 1991, p. 167).

3. Conclusion

Preparation for developmental and adaptive responses to later life requires deliberate and carefully focused interventions that include education and training at selected points throughout the life course. Any societal attempt to seriously implement a strategic policy approach to foster aging well will necessarily require a sustained political will and unwavering commitment to support "developments that can enhance the possibilities for a socially supported yet flexible "age-integrated" life course" (Dannefer, Lin & Gonos, 2021). The preceding approach offers a strong alternative to the mix of historical age-differentiated institutionalized structures such as education, work, and retirement that have limited the possibilities and potential of many people living a vital life in older age. The 21st century has heralded the need for people to establish a *modus operandi* for living in a world of increasing uncertainty and unprecedented change. Harari (2018) in his text *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, suggested that "To survive in such a world, you will need a lot of mental flexibility and great reserves of emotional balance" (p. 265). With human longevity on the increase there exists the need to address the unacceptable situation whereby far too many older people experience a pervading sense of personal irrelevancy and invisibility in their later years (Neel & Lassetter, 2019).

While individual aging represents a climax to a life lived there still remains the challenge to continue the journey with purpose and resolve to remain relevant by engaging in a continuing medley of positive thoughts, intentions, and subsequent occupations that support health and well-being (Barbaccia et al; 2022; Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019; von Humboldt et al; 2014). Britts (2016) offered a Danish perspective on living well that sits comfortably with the pursuit of aging well offered by the field *of positive psychology*: "If we make an effort to stay in love with life itself by cultivating contentment, we engender wellbeing. Our methods are unique to each of us" (p. 133).

The need to establish and maintain a sense of self-purpose and self-worthiness is fundamental to human flourishing and general well-being. It is ever so important throughout the life course, and equally so in later life (Roe et al, 2022). For Huppert and So (2013), the enhancement of flourishing in the general population will require the implementation of progressive strategic approaches based upon deeper understandings surrounding the determinants of human well-being across varying socio-cultural contexts (Höltge et al, 2022). No statement or recommended approach to aging well can be held to hold true for all of us as the aging process is a uniquely personal experience that involves periodic episodes of negotiations with self and others arising from "interruptions of plans, the unpredictabilities of health, the uncertainties brought by shifting contexts and relationships" (Carlsen, 1991, p. 190). It is the contention of the current authors that continuing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research on flourishing, social connectedness, and a sense of meaningfulness in life offers the potential for enhancing further evidence-based findings and understandings on aging well. At the same time, aspirations for healthy aging as an individual or social goal might well be realized by the adoption of the following recommendation offered by Kuh et al. (2014) "Given the growing evidence that the

majority of older people are aging with chronic conditions, research on maximizing physiological resilience, capacity to cope and maintaining social participation should become priorities" (p. 244).

The research findings surrounding the domains of flourishing, social connectedness, and a sense of meaningfulness in life, as presented in this paper, have important implications for governments, policymakers, health practitioners, educators, key community leaders, and individuals, that aging well should be a matter of serious interest for everybody. Gilleard and Higgs (2014) rightly reminded us that aging today is entirely different to the historical portrayal of aging as a process that was fixed, homogenous, and involving physical and cognitive decline. It is now time for nations worldwide to undertake a radical rethink of the potential for aging well in the 21st century, and in so doing, develop and implement innovative policies and relevant interventions that optimize the quality of life and overall well-being of older people's lives. In closing, it must be emphasized that aging well manifests itself in ways that are uniquely personal and reflected in ways that encompass and embrace a range of dynamic lifestyle practices and activities that allow for the emergence of varying aspects of flourishing, social connectedness, and a sense of meaningfulness in life. Deeper understandings of how the preceding three domains operate interactively to promote a person's aging well journey would bring forth valuable knowledge for application across a wide range of health promotion services and activities. Aging well as a priority focus involving a life course approach, has the potential to create a range of opportunities for increasing numbers of older people to be healthier, happier, and meaningfully engaged in community life. At the same time, society stands to witness a reduction in overall economic and health care costs. If aging well is to become a prevalent goal for aging societies, then societal institutions (public and private) will need to develop and implement new policies that emphasize and promote productive community participation and sustained engagement in healthy lifestyle patterns across the life course (Mielenz, Kannoth & Xue, 2021; Visser et al, 2019; Woods et al, 2016; Giddens, 1991). Fineman (2012) emphasized that while societal institutions pervade our lives across the life course there exist urgent questions relating to their relevancy, purpose, structure, design, and commitment to fairness and justice. Riley (1992), in her vision of changes required to correct the mismatch between individual aging and access to appropriate social support systems contended "After all, the future does not just happen, it is created by human beings" (p. 24). In particular, the way forward for aging well may rest in policy initiatives and subsequent actions aimed at a reconceptualization of the life course incorporating a new moral economy in aging, as advocated by Minkler and Cole (1991):

A new moral economy of later life will require attention to quality of life issues in education, work productivity, and health care at each stage of the life course. . . and new arenas that bring old and young together. It will require too a vision of the whole life course, which affirms the intimate interdependence of generations. (cited in Johnston, 1995, p. 128)

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ORCID :

Terence SEEDSMAN	0000-0002-6594-3742
Nilüfer KORKMAZ YAYLAGÜL	0000-0001-9918-7968
Aslı Gözde AKIŞ	0000-0003-2141-2787

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