






Being a Female Academic During the Pandemic: Lecturer, Teacher, Mother, Scholar and More

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ABSTRACT

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The main objective of this research was to explore the experiences of women in academia who have children, specifically focusing on their encounters with distance learning and working from home during the pandemic. The study aimed to investigate the challenges they faced, the benefits they gained, and their perspectives on how the gender influenced their overall experiences in this context. To this end, the study adopted the qualitative research method of phenomenological design. Interviews were conducted with 11 participants, including children working at the same university offering courses by means of distance learning during the pandemic. The data were examined through content analysis. The participants expressed that they encountered a variety of problems, particularly due to being women. They stated that they assumed many different roles at the same time and place and struggled to carry out the responsibilities. Almost all participants indicated a significant decline in the volume of academic studies, considering the excessive number of responsibilities assumed by women and the lack of a shared workload at home. The present study is expected to help female academics realize that these problems are not unique to them, providing them with a source of motivation.

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INTRODUCTION

Entering public discourse in late 2019 and turning into an intercontinental issue in 2020, COVID-19 has become a factor altering life in a variety of ways. This virus regarding the nature, effects, and treatment of which we do not have adequate knowledge has reshaped our lives and evoked anxiety and disturbances due to its uncertainties (Erdoğan et al., 2020; Yıldırım, 2020). Countries have been forced to adopt a plethora of measures in many aspects of life, such as education, business, and travel, in order to defend themselves against the contagion. Many countries have imposed nationwide quarantines and curfews. In 2020, distance learning and remote working became the new way of life for many people.

This way of living has transformed homes from solely being spaces of cohabitation into schools and offices at the same time. Components of educational and professional life such as class sessions, meetings, job interviews, and exams have been moved to living spaces. This has affected everyone living together in a house, resulting in a significant adjustment period. Naturally, the adjustment period has brought about many problems. This process has affected women the most (de Paz et al., 2020; Ham, 2021; Yıldırım & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). Professional obligations have been added on top of their existing domestic responsibilities. The domestic workload of women has been significantly increased with many additional tasks such as paying more attention to hygiene inside and outside the home, taking care of the elderly, disabled family members, patients, and/or children for a longer time, and dealing with the learning of children who are continuing with distance education in this period (Yıldırım-Şahin, 2021). Due to complicated and extended working hours, female academics have been considerably affected by the entire process. The sudden emergence of distance learning resulted in issues such as the reorganization of the whole educational process, grading, and being away from research sources (Malisch et al., 2020). Having both teaching and research responsibilities, academics have been forced to adapt their studies to work from home (Cui et al., 2020). Even though both male and female academics have reported significant increases in their childcare and domestic chores during the pandemic, the experience of female academics was found to be more apparent in this respect (Deryugina et al., 2021). This has aggravated the challenges already experienced by female academics in the male-dominated working environment. Studies examining the gender distribution within the publications made during the pandemic support this claim. Many journal editors indicated that there has been an increase of around 20 to 30 percent in article submissions, with most of the submitters being male academics (Beck, 2020 cited in Cui et al., 2020; Kitchener, 2020; Minello et al., 2020; Oleschuk, 2020; Pinho-Gomes et al., 2020) and this situation was found to be prevalent in all fields of study (Andersen et al., 2020; Kitchener, 2020; Minello et al., 2020; Oleschuk, 2020; Pinho-Gomes et al., 2020; Quak et al., 2021). The productivity and scientific output of female academics were disproportionately affected by the global combat against COVID-19 (Gabster et al., 2020).

The primary reason behind this decrease in productivity has been considered to be the role conflict experienced by women due to the pandemic (Couch et al. 2020; Cui et al. 2020). In addition to their research, women have seen an increase in their childcare-related responsibilities, with schools being shut down and curfews being implemented. They also assumed the responsibility of monitoring the performance of their children at school in addition to taking care of them (Petts et al., 2021). Furthermore, the responsibility for fulfilling the

emotional and social needs of children has also been borne by mothers. The domestic responsibilities of female academics have surged, while the decrease in support due to the quarantine period has resulted in shifts between the roles of being mothers, spouses, and teachers within the same day. The combination of social roles, familial duties, and professional obligations has made the conditions significantly challenging (Couch et al., 2020). The sense of inadequacy among female academics, compromises over their professional roles, and fulfilling their maternal roles by different and challenging means occurred during this process. Work continuity and anticipatory anxiety regarding their professional careers have accompanied these problems. In particular, mothers with younger children were found to be affected more by this situation (Minello et al., 2020).

Having started to work from home along with the domestic responsibilities traditionally borne by women, female academics have begun teaching remotely through distance learning. Being a new means of education for many academics, distance education has brought about novel habits, skills, and problems. Academics have faced a wider range of novel responsibilities, such as adjusting to this method of lecturing either synchronously or asynchronously, arranging the house accordingly, and learning the methods, techniques, and means suitable for online or distance education.

During the pandemic, certain studies handled the challenges faced by female academics in many countries such as the United States, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Turkey in distant education (Guy & Arthur, 2020; Minello et al., 2020; Nash & Churchill, 2020; Yıldırım, 2020; Yıldırım & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). The studies included participants from different countries and branches under varying working and living conditions. The present study aimed to conduct research on the experiences of female academics in Turkey specializing in education during lectures and remote working, as well as their opinions on the role of being a woman in these experiences. Turkey adopted distance education in March 2020, with the transition affecting all grades and levels. During the transition, universities implemented varying practices, with some holding courses synchronously and others asynchronously. The university at which the present study is conducted started with online courses following a one-week break. Therefore, the study included female academics encountering two novel situations: transitioning to remote working and online education at the same time. In this respect, the research objective was to identify the experiences of participants going through similar processes. It attempted to define the way they experienced the process as women, academics, and teachers, as well as the impact of being a woman on these life experiences.

For this purpose, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the experiences of female academics during distance education?
- (2) What are the problems of female academics during distance education?
- (3) What do female academics think about the impact of being a woman on their own troubles?

METHOD

Research Design

The present study was designed as a phenomenological model one of the qualitative research methods. The purpose of phenomenological design is to understand human experience. In other words, phenomenology aims to present in-depth and detailed knowledge about a subject and to reveal experiences and meanings (Yıldırım & Şimsek, 2005; van Manen, 2007). Interviews provide the fundamental data collection tool in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2003). The phenomenon of this research is being a female academician during pandemic.

Sample and Data Collection

The study group was determined by means of criterion sampling. The study included female academics working at the faculty of education at a public university located in the Marmara Region in Turkey. The reason for choosing this university in the Marmara region is that it is easily accessible by researchers, as well as being one of the first universities to start distance education during the pandemic period. In addition, the study was conducted with female academics working in the faculty of education, who have similar working conditions in the same faculty. The faculty employs 115 academics, of whom 47 are female. A decision was taken to interview those with children among the female academics for the purposes of this study. The purpose behind this decision was to interview academics with similar working and living conditions. In this respect, 11 volunteer academics among the 25 with children of primary or secondary school age participated in the interviews [Alphanumeric symbols were used to identify participants. To that end, a denomination system including the participant number, the initial letter for "participant" (p), and the number of children was used. For instance, if the third participant had two children, the name assigned to the participant was 3P2] as seen on Table 1.

All participants in the study have completed their doctoral studies and are giving lectures. The following section provides an account of the situation in Turkey regarding academic progression and distance education during the pandemic.

Academic progression in Turkey: Academic progression in Turkey (Assistant Professorship, Associate Professorship, Full Professorship) takes place based on the scoring system indicated by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE). The applications prepared in line with the scoring system are assessed by a council, and the academic title is granted if an application is deemed satisfactory. Each university has its own set of criteria for employing academics under the professorship title concerned. These criteria must also be met. To maintain the continuity of assistant professor positions, academic staff are also required to make publications within certain periods in line with the criteria set by the university.

Distance education in Turkey: The first official COVID-19 case in Turkey was announced on March 11, 2020. Following the announcement of the first case, all educational activities were suspended for all levels on March 13. Primary, secondary, and high schools had a 3-week break before starting again with distance learning. As for universities, distance learning was adopted as the means of education starting on March 23, 2020. As of this date, university education is provided exclusively online. The process differed depending on the infrastructure and preparedness of the universities. The university at which the present study was conducted only had a one-week break before swiftly resuming educational activities with live course sessions. The semester course schedule was published on the education platform to be used by students and instructors. All educational

practices, such as examinations and assignments, were conducted on this platform. Online courses are also recorded, allowing students to access the recording and listen to the lecture again whenever they want.

Table 1. *Female academics included in the study*

Code	Academic Position	Age	Year of Seniority	Number of Children	Ages of Children
1P2	Lecturer (PhD)	33	11	2	2, 7
2P1	Associate Professor	44	22	1	12
3P2	Assistant Professor	40	14	2	4, 9
4P1	Assistant Professor	37	14	1	5
5P2	Associate Professor	41	17	2	5, 7
6P2	Lecturer (PhD)	35	10	1	5
7P3	Assistant Professor	47	13	3	13, 13, 17
8P2	Lecturer (PhD)	39	3	2	4, 7
9P1	Assistant Professor	35	11	1	4
10P2	Associate Professor	40	16	2	6,12
11P1	Associate Professor	35	12	1	8

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the research data used in the study. Similar studies were first examined to identify the questions to be used during the interviews (for example, Boncori, 2020; Couch et al., 2020; Manzo & Minello, 2020; Minello et al., 2020; Oleschuk, 2020; Yıldırım & Eslen Ziya, 2020). A pool of questions was created in line with the research purpose and the literature review. Among the questions that served the research purpose, the best ones were selected from the pool of questions and presented to two experts conducting studies on qualitative research methods and a member of the academic staff specializing in women's studies working at the department of sociology. The questions were reviewed and finalized for the pilot study in line with expert recommendations. Then, a pilot study was conducted to identify the comprehensibility and fitness of the questions for research purposes. Furthermore, the opinions of individuals participating in the pilot study were also sought to make the necessary adjustments to improve the clarity and understandability of the questions. The semi-structured interviews involved asking questions of the participants regarding their experiences of distance education, their gains, their problems, and the role of their womanhood in these problems.

Since the lockdown process continued at the time, the interviews were conducted via telephone according to the preferences of the participants, and voice recordings were taken with their permission. The shortest

interview duration was 13 minutes, while the longest was 32 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process consisted of two stages: preparing the data for analysis and conducting the actual analysis. The voice records of the semi-structured interviews were transcribed to prepare the data for the analysis. The consistency of the interview transcriptions and voice recordings was checked.

In this study, the content analysis method was used in data analysis. For data analysis, two researchers first shared the data between themselves to conduct the analysis and kept separate coding notebooks. Then, three researchers held a meeting to compare the codes obtained and exchange views regarding the codes to be included in the re-analysis process as well as the themes to be formulated with these codes. Two researchers then re-examined all the data in line with the decisions taken during this meeting. The researchers convened again after the completion of the analysis to make another comparison. They discussed differing codes and reached a consensus.

Validity and Reliability

Certain practices were adopted before and after the interviews to ensure the reliability of the study. The researchers both made use of the existing literature and sought expert opinion while formulating the questions. The features and working conditions of the participants, as well as the selection criteria for the study, were explained clearly. The participants were given detailed information regarding the purpose of the research, which was to foster an environment of trust. During and following the interviews, participant approval was sought regarding the accurate comprehension of the terms mentioned in conversations. All researchers attended the discussions while analyzing the data in order to avoid researcher bias. Following the analyses, the data were re-examined collectively, with the findings in line with the themes and codes; sample statements were presented verbatim without any modification. Alphanumerical symbols were assigned to participants while they presented the statements.

FINDINGS / RESULTS

The data collected regarding the participant experiences of education during the pandemic and the impact of being a woman on these experiences are presented in line with sub problems.

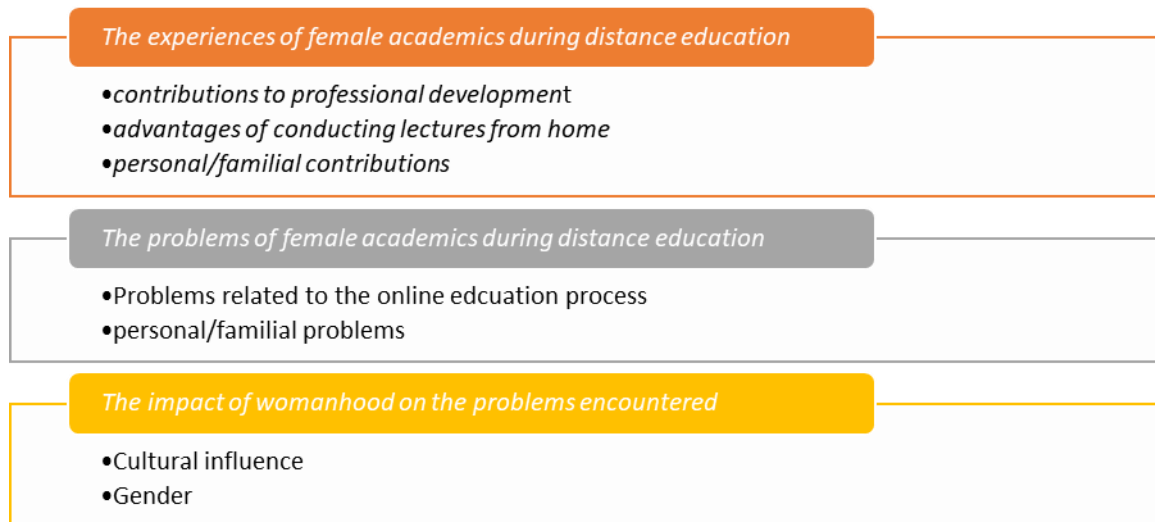


Figure 1. Themes about subproblems

The experiences of female academics during distance education

The pandemic has resulted in a sudden transition to distance education. As the university had a suitable infrastructure for distance education, the lectures were resumed following a one-week break. Even though the university offered virtual classrooms before the pandemic, the academics rarely used them. This transition has had the academics using these virtual classrooms to conduct their lectures. Additionally, the academics have also used many different online applications. When the question was asked about the experiences gained during the distance education process, the answers were gathered under there themes. “*contributions to professional development*”, “*advantages of conducting lectures from home*” and “*personal/familial contributions*”.

Under the theme of *contribution to professional development*, there are codes for “being aware of/using technological applications”, “gaining distance education experience”, and “contribution to the field of expertise”. The experience of distance education during the pandemic was considered as a benefit in its own right. Besides this, the most frequently mentioned benefit concerned “being aware of/using technological applications” or using these applications more often. 1P2 express the following about this code: “*I found about online programs and, for instance, many platforms that may be used in our profession, in social sciences. I really want to use all of them at once, sometimes I prepare specific schedules. This is a great benefit for me. I think I have more self-confidence...*”. Similarly, 4P1 also express the following statements: “*I had deemed myself inadequate regarding the use of technology. Now, I think [the present circumstances] have allowed me to improve myself. This because I had to learn inevitably how to use different technological tools to, for example, make better presentations or conduct more effective.*”.

Participant named 8P2 said the following about "gaining distance education experience" and "contribution to the field of expertise:

One of my courses concerns effective distance education, so I started studying this issue in more detail, applying it to my practices. I believe I have gained considerable experience in distance education, vis-à-vis technological means that may be used for fostering an interactive distance learning environment.

In addition, the participants stated that they will continue to use their knowledge and experience about

digital applications that they gain after the pandemic, and that this is a long-term contribution for them. About the potential reflections of their new knowledge, skills, and habits from online teaching in the post-pandemic period, the participants stated that they will continue to use web 2.0 tools and make online meetings. Regarding this, 3P2 expressed:

I will continue giving online assignments. I will not use traditional ways of giving assignments, let students upload them online. It is incredible, quite advantageous. As you said, it saves a great deal of paper and helps you avoid a substantial amount of work.

5P2 stated:

I realized virtual classes as an option to hold lectures even after things go back to normal. In fact, I think it might make things easier for me... Secondly, when it comes to exams, distance education may be a great solution for shorter examinations...

Also, 2P1 mentioned:

I can make active use of Google Classroom after this for all my courses. I think I may collect assignments from there (Google Classroom). This makes it easier to archive them, prevents them from piling up while also saving paper... For example, for graduate thesis dissertations, even if their topic is closely related, the academic did not want to come if they were working in Erzurum [at a university located quite far from the university at which the present study is conducted] ... Now, I believe experts can easily participate in thesis defenses.

Further, same participant also stated the following about online meetings, “Another thing is that as seminars and meetings are held online as webinars, the participation rate has increased. Before this, it was difficult to arrange our schedules. Personally, I would like these to continue...”

The participants also evaluated the “advantages of conducting lectures from home”. For instance, 11P1 said “We have a tight course load, so, we do not have to go to a physical classroom, remain standing during lectures, and be present at classrooms at different hours, which are tiring. 1P2 expressed “We had to spend the time, I normally would have spent outside or for commuting, at home.” Regarding theme of personal/familial contributions, the codes “development of problem-solving skills”, “spending time with family members” and “spending time to work” have been determined. Although the problems of being at home and working at home are frequently mentioned during the pandemic process, mothers also stated that they have the chance to spend time with their children and/or spouses. There were some who stated that they were pleased with the positive reflections of this process. For example, about “development of problem-solving skills”, 6P1 said “I participated in a meeting with my colleagues while stirring the soup on the stove.”, 1P2 expressed “I do not think that the pandemic slowed things down; on the contrary, it sped things up, I complete more tasks.”. During the pandemic, female academics have simultaneously faced different roles as professionals, mothers, and spouses as well as the responsibilities brought about by these roles. Being able to address the requirements of all these roles have resulted in female academics becoming better problem solvers. They have frequently followed multiple tasks at the same time during the pandemic. Being able to address the requirements of all these roles have resulted in female academics becoming better problem solvers. They have frequently followed multiple tasks at the same time during the pandemic.

Although the problems arising from staying at home and working remotely are frequently discussed, the

mothers also mentioned the opportunity to “*spend more time with their children and/or spouses*”. Some participants expressed their contentment with the positive outcomes of the process. Example quotations of this code are mentioned below:

For example, my younger child used to talk much less when we left the house, and their grandmother took care of him during the day. Now we are also at home, so is their sister. They started to form complete, interesting sentences; the way they talk, and their attitude has changed. This is, of course, great for our familial relationships. We can spend more time with one another. (3P2)

I think it is good also for children to have their parents with them, communicate more with them, and interact more with them. It is good for us as well. Because they will never be children again. (5P2)

Now, we are always together during the day, and I am able to closely monitor my child's learning process. I could only have some coffee with my spouse at the weekend; now, we can get some coffee during break times or have dinner a bit earlier. (6P1)

The problems of female academics during distance education

The answers about the problems they experienced during the pandemic process were gathered under two themes: Problems related to the *online education process* and *personal/familial problems*.

The participants stated that even though the online education process has brought about certain benefits, it has also resulted in a variety of problems. The codes under the theme of “Problems encountered in online education during the pandemic” are as follows: “*lack of experience*”, “*lack of interaction*”, “*live lesson process/technical problems*”, “*evaluation process*” and “*increase in the workload in the lessons*”. The participants indicated that the *lack of online teaching experience* was initially a problematic source of anxiety. Some problems confronted during this process include the reduced active participation of interaction of the students during lectures and the sporadic problems with the technical infrastructure. These problems reduce both job satisfaction and motivation. About *lack of online teaching experience*, 5P2 mentioned:

If we were to assess the distance education process, [the main problems are] not being able to interact with or see the student. Of course, you can have them turn on their cameras and microphones, but our technical infrastructure does not support this as if in an integrated classroom.

One of the most disturbing issues of the participants in the online education process is the little or no *interaction with the students*. Regarding this, 10 P2 participants stated the following:

It has been challenging for me not being able to engage in interactions and communication with students in distance education as I used to during regular lectures. Still, even though we are more used to distance education now, I feel as if I am talking to myself during lectures. This hurts my motivation...

Similarly, 7P2 also noted:

I do not quite enjoy lecturing without any students in front of me, looking at an empty screen, my slides, notes. It feels challenging, that is why I always turn on my camera. I see myself on the screen. At least it is a human face.

In addition to the lack of interaction with the students, 2P1 expressed the difficulties caused by *live lesson*

process/technical problems:

Holding a lecture for over the determined period in distance education is exhausting. It is not like a mutually interactive course session held face to face. Both controlling the process and attaining and teaching the course objectives at the same time is really exhausting.

The university at which the present study is conducted requires four different assessments within the semester and a final examination at the end of the year within the scope of the assessment and evaluation system. This system was maintained for online lectures as well. Preparing assignments suitable for the online system, collecting, and archiving these assignments, checking assignment submission, and grading the submissions has entailed additional workload on top of lecture preparation and organization. Adjusting these for the online education process requires a certain amount of time and consideration. Statements about this are included under the code of *evaluation process* and *increase in the workload in the lessons*. For example:

We are constantly evaluating papers. My computer is struggling to keep up with the load of the files. I always download submissions; I try to read them without downloading them [at first]. This takes time; for instance, I once spent an entire day cleaning up my computer. I had downloaded every submission by students. Reports, assignments, exams... (1P2)

In addition to giving online lectures, remote working seems to have also brought about a plethora of problems. The problems the theme of personal/familial problems are grouped under the following codes: “Role confusion/redundancy”, “loss/disruption of support”, “inability to take time for herself”, “decreasing academic studies”, “not sharing the workload”, “workspace/office need”, “multiple people having classes/being at home at the same time”, “inability to socialize (self/child)”, “the incapability of taking care of their children”, “arranging their daily lives around class hours”.

The woman is considered to be both a spouse and a mother in addition to the responsibility of maintaining order at a home within the domestic context. Assuming their professional role at home in addition to all these pre-existing roles, women have seen both the number of their responsibilities and issues surge considerably. Although academic women have always had the roles of women, professionals, mothers, and spouses, they had to perform these roles simultaneously and in the same place during the pandemic period. The most common problem expressed by the participants is that they have more than one role, and they have to perform these roles in the same place and time period. Regarding this, 2P1 stated the following:

We are now experiencing a process in which many roles overlap, clash and conflict in the domestic setting. We have simultaneous roles. Of course, I have the role of a mother; separately I have the role of the lady of the house. When all these roles pile up, it is possible to see that all becomes increasingly difficult.

The same participant expressed that he was experiencing role confusion as follows:

I mean, regardless of my efforts to make my lectures effective and be a good and professional lecturer, this struggle affects my other roles. My other roles also influence me as a lecturer, which brings us to the matter of priorities.

11P1 expressed this situation as follows: “This may cause a negative effect such as role confusion. For example, [my child tells me that] the door is ringing while I am lecturing. I can say that I experience role confusion. This is a negative aspect.” 5P2 indicated:

One of the most difficult points for me during the pandemic was the overlap of all roles and times. I mean, we are mothers and spouses at the same time, so we have had to integrate these responsibilities into our professional obligations and as these different roles and times are all together, there were and are certain problems.

The participants soliciting support for household chores or childcare before the pandemic indicated the inability to procure this professional help during the pandemic as a challenging and tiring factor. Regarding the “loss/disruption of support” code, 6P1 stated:

I used to hire a housekeeper, but now I cannot do that due to the pandemic. I have to do all the household chores now. I mean, I only had to cook, wash the dishes, and do the laundry. The housekeeper did the rest, but now I have to do everything.

Similarly, 3P2 stated the following:

You have extra chores now that you no longer can hire a housekeeper. Then, you have to give up something, push something away. For example, when it comes to academics, one of the points overlooked by female academics is academic studies and research.

With their increasing responsibilities during the pandemic, the participants complained about not being able to *make time for themselves* or to *spare the time for their academic studies*. Furthermore, they also stated that not being able to find their own *working space and time* has made the process even more difficult. Regarding to the code “inability to take time for herself” 1P2 indicated,

When the pandemic is over, I want to take long strolls with my car. I missed doing that a lot... Right now, I have no personal space. No space to listen to myself...I cannot find the motivation when I am at home even if I have nothing to do. I need to change places, go to the office to get in the mood. I have found myself in a cycle; for example, I empty the dishwasher at home if there is nothing else to do.

Similarly, 10P2 stated, “*I cannot perform the working process, because I like working on my own, individually. So that I can be silent, focus, and pay attention. I cannot do that at home, particularly due to having children around.*”, and 3P2 also expressed:

For example, it was effective in terms of planning my time. I mean, not being able to make time for oneself. Because I go to class, have the child eat something, go to another class, put the child to sleep, go to another class, leave class and then at night it is. ... I mean, I could not even get my hair dyed because there is no time... You think you should do other things instead of that. Choose to do something else. You get crushed under so much responsibility, you cannot keep up with yourself, I mean with the things about yourself, about your work.

About the code workspace/office need 7P2 mentioned:

I have never worked at home. And I do not work at night. So, I need to get out of the domestic environment. I used to go to the library when I was a student. Now I can only work at my office.

Due to temporal concerns and increased responsibilities, the participants indicated that they could find neither the time nor the motivation to conduct academic (decreasing academic studies) studies or that they had to work at night, sacrificing their sleep. Regarding to this, 8P2 stated:

I am working at night now because it was initially challenging to set up the system with children being around during the day. We are always together with the children, and one of them being quite

young, you cannot leave them alone for a long time.

4P1 expressed:

Some university-related work can be done somehow, as I said before, by sacrificing some sleep but this is not good, I mean individually; I cannot make time for my academic research, maybe it is about me. I do not know, but I was not able to conduct any studies during this period. This was the most negative aspect for me.

6P1 put into words such as:

Of course, there is also the question of academic work. In other words, the studies under our responsibility concerning the subjects about which we are curious. We cannot overlook this. Most of the time, I do not sleep at night. I stay awake. My sleeping cycle has been considerably disrupted.

About reduced the volume of their academic studies, 4P2 stated, “*For example, I am an academic, but my academic studies declined, I cannot work. Because I do not have the time for my studies. I already have 30 hours of lectures. I take care of my children during breaks.*”

4P1 pointed out that, “*This year, for instance, I was not able to conduct any good academic studies. The studies I initiated remain incomplete, I could not complete them... Days go by, and I cannot do anything.*” and 8P2 expressed “*Being at home is restrictive particularly for female academics regarding their academic research. Even if they delegate some of the work like childcare, cooking and household chores, the time remaining is still limited.*”

Only one participant among all stated that they were able to make time for her academic research. The examination of her case revealed that her daughter is relatively older and that she is not with her mother most of the time due to her own classes during the day. About this, 11P1 expressed:

I had a lot of collected data. I had many studies planned. I was able to find time to [arrange] the data entered and waiting to be analyzed or cited. This was one of the good sides of the whole process. At home, I first tried to act as if I was at work. It was challenging for us with the child. I told her to think as if I was not home that day...

These responsibilities and the issues they bring about vary depending on the number of children the participants have as well as the age(s) of the child/children. The participants with more than one child and/or whose children are younger expressed more difficulties. For example, 5P2 stated:

The roles of the parents are different. I mean, they are different according to children or, I do not know, due to their positions. For example, children are more likely to wish to be greeted by their mother. While fathers can also do these, children prefer their mothers. At this point, the needs of children are also crucial. My children are quite young. I believe that may be problematic.

8P2 mentioned as follows:

I believe when you become a mother, you have more control over younger ages, younger children need their mother more. That is why they may want to spend more time with you.

The participants also indicated that the situations of female academics may vary depending on the conditions. For example, 3P2 stated “*The job of their spouse, whether they are married or have children, the number of children... These are all important. Also, the age(s) of the child or children is/are also significant.*”

Additionally, the participants complained about “multiple people having classes/being at home at the same time”,

the “inability to socialize”, “the incapability of taking care of their children”, “arranging their daily lives around class hours”.

Many people having class at the same time (as both students and teachers) put a strain on the mother and other members of the household. About the code “*multiple people having classes/being at home at the same time*”, 2P1 mentioned:

As my spouse is also a teacher, he continues teaching at home. At this point, we divided the house among the three of us. Everyone has their own school where they complete their school-related tasks. Two people as teachers and one person as a student. Naturally, our voices may overlap inevitably.

Similarly, 1P2 stated:

*All three of us have remote courses. Me, my spouse, and my daughter. So yes, we had the most difficulty in terms of class hours. At first, during the first days of the pandemic, we had overlapping classes. I also have a younger daughter. So, there are actually four of us. There were problems at home when three of us had courses at the same time. Who is going to have their class and where? In addition to these, about the code “*incapability of taking care of their children*”.*

10P2 expressed:

My spouse is also a teacher. He also has courses. So, my children see their parents constantly on the computer. We had difficulties in terms of computers because we had classes with conflicting hours... My 5-year-old daughter was also challenging. She used to wait for us by the door and cry. Because she could hear us in the room giving lectures, crying because her mother could not pay attention to her.

About the “*inability to socialize*”, 4P1 expressed “*I feel guilty because I want to spend time with my child, but they want to be with me at all times. In normal circumstances, my child needs to socialize at their age.*”

About “*arranging their daily lives around class hours*”, 2P1 indicated:

We look at the schedule and see that there are many classes that day, trying to make specific plans for that day. For example, I tell my spouse that nobody should disturb me as I have a lot of classes. I tell them that I cannot cook. Or to take care of the child ... Yet the real problem begins at this point. We are at home at all times. Since we cannot go out due to our workloads and being in a continuous cycle, naturally our tolerance may start to decrease. Even if we make plans, delegate tasks and responsibilities, some conflicts occur after a while.

Similarly, 3P2 stated:

We do not have a clear-cut organization. I try to come up with an order or organize things around class hours... While I teach online, my children are with me at home. Feeding them, taking care of them, and giving lectures. Putting them to sleep and giving them food during breaks. For example, you arrange the times for meals based on the class hours of the child.

The principal factor exacerbating these problems might be the fact that the workload borne by women is not shared (code of “*not sharing the workload*”). Most of the female academics participating in the study complained about having to assume responsibility for domestic chores and the lack of task sharing. In fact, they stated that the house has become a comfort zone for men. Example quotations of this code are mentioned below:

(Regarding their spouse) He has always been busy. He is always busy. He is always busy; it seems as if I have nothing to do. That is why I feel more tired. (1P2)

I mean, I have had a lot of chores around the house with my husband also being at home. Sometimes, he came up to the kitchen when I started cooking and asked if there was something he could do. But overall, her husband was able to work quite comfortably. He confined himself in the living room for the entire day, conducting his online interviews easily. He had his coffee and tea. He did not have any problems. So, I took up the task of cleaning the house even though there were others at home. (7P3)

The impact of womanhood on the problems encountered

The participants indicated that being a woman is the primary reason behind these problems upon being asked about the impact of their womanhood on their issues. They argued that culturally, being a woman resulted in assuming all domestic responsibilities, that their professional role has been disregarded during the pandemic as they had to stay at home, and that they had to assume all responsibilities. When asked about the relationship between the problems experienced during the pandemic period and being women, it was seen that the answers were gathered under two themes: “Cultural influence” and “Gender”.

They stated that the “culture” has contributed to their problems, claiming that Turkish culture delegates many household responsibilities to women and that there is a common belief that household chores are not supposed to be done by men. Example quotations of this code are mentioned below:

When you leave home for the university to work and when you are not home, others at home have no expectations about your other roles. But when you bring work to your home, when you work from home, others at home now start having expectations about your other roles related to them. (2P1)

I think we were raised that way. Personally, I believe I was raised that way. I have three brothers. I grew up in a house with a lot of men. That is why my mother and I were constantly responsible for household chores... I think women are gravely affected by this process. I am really curious about the home-office working situation of women in Turkey, percentage-wise. Because I am not in a marriage allowing me to work from home. Actually, I have heard about a study on this topic, claiming that the productivity of male academics has increased while that of female academics has decreased. (1P2)

Regarding to code “gender”, 3P2 said:

This is the truth: as women, you have more work to do, more responsibilities in a patriarchal society than men. As a manager, I came to work and saw that the faculty members who had not been present a lot came to the school, even male colleagues. This is because of the responsibilities at home. The child who is normally at school stays at home, everyone is at home, there are a lot of things to do at home and he might have a lot to do at home, so he decides to come to the school. But as a woman, you do not have this chance to leave. You have no alternatives.”

6P1 expressed “Gender. I believe this is directly related to gender.” A striking point came to the fore among the findings. During the pandemic, many female academics complained about the lack of task sharing at home. On the other hand, some academics indicated that they have not experienced such an issue. They stated that they delegate tasks at home, not seeing their workload increase substantially. 2P1 expressed, “As we share domestic tasks effectively, I have not had many problems. Besides, my husband is really understanding. I mean,

he has always been understanding, even before the pandemic regarding my professional obligations".

At this point, I must say that I have had an advantage. We shared that burden together, my husband and I... Be it taking care of children or cooking, we supported each other to the best of our ability whenever we were available. Plus, we helped each other out. (10P2)

What is worthy of attention in these statements is that task sharing also occurred before the pandemic. These families seem to have always shared their chores among themselves. If the tasks and chores are not shared before the pandemic, it does not develop during the lockdown due to the pandemic. In other words, even though every member of the family is at home, domestic chores are not delegated among the family members if there have not been any task-sharing habits. 7P3 expressed:

Now, for example, my husband is also at home. His pace does not change when he is home. I did not see him being willing to assume some of the domestic duties, cooking, for example, as a man... If I stay home, I prepare dinner... He does not assume the same responsibilities. His concerns, stress are the same...

When the interviews with the participants were evaluated in general, it is seen that the pandemic process is quite challenging for female academics, and having to perform multiple roles in the same place makes them tired in many ways. However, it has been determined that this process has advantages such as spending time with their families and being aware of many digital applications.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to identify the experiences of female academics who work at the same university with children regarding distance learning and working from home during the pandemic, their problems, gains, and opinions about the impacts of being a woman on their experiences within this process. The participants stated that the pandemic and the process of distance education have had both positive and negative aspects during the interviews.

They indicated that they have gained remote teaching experience while starting to make active use of a wide range of technological applications during the process of remote education in the context of the pandemic. They underlined the importance of these experiences, regardless of the difficulties brought about by distance education. Many studies have obtained similar findings (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020; Bergdahl & Nouri, 2020; Sindiani et al., 2020; Marek et al., 2021).

However, even though the classes have been held online within the scope of distance education, the lack of eye contact and communication with students was an apparent deficiency, according to the participants. In fact, they stated that this was exceptionally challenging. The educational system in place allows students to turn on their cameras and microphones; however, separately admitting each student was found to both take time and disrupt the flow of the course. Issues related to the technical infrastructure were also indicated to be troublesome as far as the overall process is concerned. Studies dealing with distance education during the pandemic have also observed similar problems (Hebebcı et al., 2020; İnce et al., 2020; Kurnaz & Serçemeli, 2020; Sindiani et al., 2020; Yıldırım-Şahin, 2021).

The participants stated that the assessment system at the university was significantly tiring during this process and took considerable time. The assessment system, which was maintained during distance education as

well, involves four separate examinations within the year and a final exam at the end of the year. The participants were thus required to collect documents from emails or various applications while scoring and archiving these documents. This has increased the workload of the participants. On the other hand, the participants stated that they would continue collecting documents through online applications and conducting shorter examinations even after the pandemic is over, deeming these opportunities as gains that they have realized owing to distance education. Furthermore, they argued that the webinars and live chat sessions organized during the pandemic may be maintained in the post-contagion period, along with the chance of arranging thesis dissertations over online platforms (Zoom, Meet, etc.).

The difficulty of being a woman in academia and the fact that gender is at the forefront even in the scientific world have been discussed in many studies (Altınoluk, 2018; Bircan ve Erdoğan, 2020; Halifeoğlu, 2020). This was felt even more in the process of working from home during the pandemic. As far as staying at home during the lockdown is concerned, the participants complained about a wide range of issues stemming particularly from their femininity. They argued that being a woman required them to be a mother and a spouse at the same time, with all responsibilities, and that they had assumed multiple roles and struggled to fulfill the obligations entailed by these roles. However, they also claimed that their role as female professionals was sometimes forgotten or neglected. They indicated that they had to sacrifice their sleep to perform their duties as female professionals or minimize their mandatory academic workload. Not sleeping and trying to conclude the day without sleeping much were often expressed by many women (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020). Additionally, some participants also stated that not being able to find a space of their own to work at home was considerably challenging. The inability to find a working space (Crabtree et al., 2020) is considered a problem by many female academics. The participants also voiced their complaints about men working at the same house with them not facing most of these issues or not being forced to cope with them.

Almost all participants stated that their academic studies had come to a halt. With domestic and childcare-related responsibilities being added on top of the tight course schedule of academics working from home, they were rendered unable to make time for their own studies. At this point, female academics had to use the time normally devoted to themselves and their academic studies to fulfill other responsibilities. Many studies in this regard have stated that the limited time female academics have is spent responding to e-mails, reading, and grading assignments, and recording class sessions, with no time for reading and writing articles (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020). Mavin and Yusupova (2020) described the situation as follows: "Considering the centrality of research productivity in recruitment and promotion, COVID-19 has become yet another motherhood penalty". The studies published during the pandemic have revealed that men made a greater number of publications when compared to their female colleagues (Crabtree et al., 2020; Çelebi, 2020; Gabster et al., 2020; Godlee, 2020; Krukowski et al., 2020).

The participants included in the present study did not face the risk of losing their job because they work at a public university. However, they stated that they had to postpone the studies required for their academic progression. Many other studies have found that women face the risk and anxiety of job loss (de Paz et al., 2020; Petts et al., 2020; Ham, 2021).

Research has found that despite their employment status, women have mainly assumed childcare-related responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Andrew et al., 2020; Crabtree et al., 2020; Krukowski et al.,

2020; Lester & Lacey 2020). The challenges faced by female academics, particularly those with children, were widely discussed in many studies (Collins et al., 2020; Yıldırım & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). The problems female academics encounter vary depending on the number and age of their children (Lutter & Schröder 2020). The younger the children, the more problems female academics face (Minello et al., 2020). However, the extent of these challenges and problems may also increase based on the dominant culture. Turkish culture allocates almost all responsibilities when it comes to housekeeping, cooking, and childcare to women. Due to these cultural norms, once the woman arrives at her home, expectations mount regardless of her employment status (Çelebi, 2020). This was addressed by most of the participants, who argued that cultural norms remarkably influenced their problems. Similarly, in the study of Yıldırım Şahin (2021) conducted with female university students studying from home during the pandemic, it was determined that female students had to take care of both their housework and their lessons. These norms burden women with all their responsibilities, even though both men and women continue to work from home during the pandemic. While women juggled the responsibilities of household chores and childcare alongside their work, men had the luxury of primarily concentrating on their professional tasks, with occasional involvement in childcare and assisting with cooking (Gans, 2020). In fact, this situation has transformed the house into a comfort zone for men working from home.

Even though the participants underlined the major influence of culture on their problems, studies conducted in other countries have also produced similar results. The study by Minello et al. (2020) involving female academics from Italy and the US, an account by Yıldırım and Eslen-Ziya (2020) from France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, the UK, and the US, and another article by Gangster et al. (2020) argued that women were affected more by the situation. Gallardo (2021) indicated in a study that women showed little progress following the completion of their doctoral degrees, that their career progress seems to be hindered by familial obligations, that motherhood may influence scientific productivity and, consequently, academic promotion, and that it is difficult to balance the academic roles of teaching, researching, management, consulting, etc. with motherhood. It is evident that this problem, already present, has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Most participants complained about the lack of task sharing at home. In addition to this, they were also deprived of the chance to seek professional help when it came to housekeeping and childcare. As indicated in many studies, this has led to significant problems for women (Crabtree et al., 2020; King & Frederickson, 2021). However, a limited number of participants also indicated that they were able to delegate some responsibilities through task sharing. Yet these participants also stated that their pre-pandemic conditions had also been similar, with an understanding of collective living in their household. On the other hand, they complained about playing the most significant role in the decisions to be made or tasks to be completed. One might infer that existing domestic habits remain the same under extraordinary circumstances. At this point, the persistence of the usual domestic situation despite changing circumstances and the fact that this is to the detriment of women are both interesting and concerning.

The participants expressed their discontent as they were not able to take care of their children to the extent they would like to. Furthermore, they also seemed to feel disheartened due to the lack of socialization for both their children and them. Mavin and Yusupova (2020) found it unfortunate that their daughter was deprived of many rituals marking her transition into adulthood, such as graduation, balls, vacations, times spent with friends, etc. The study by Crabtree et al. (2020) recorded a statement by a participant considering herself "a bad

mother and a bad academic" as she was not able to take care of her children and conduct her academic studies. This statement is an explicit reflection of the extent to which female academics face increased workload, stress, and anxiety levels.

The participants indicated that they plan their daily activities around their online class sessions, which is quite tiring. Multiple people at home having online classes at the same time and the necessary measures to be taken in order to cope with this problem are another issue encountered during the pandemic. Constantly having online class sessions at home, multiple family members being obliged to participate in online classes simultaneously while using the same Internet source, and sharing a working space with other people were all indicated as challenging factors during the overall process (Crabtree et al., 2020).

Despite these problems, the participants expressed their contentment with the positive effects of staying at home in terms of their domestic life and the chance of spending more time with their spouses and children. Regardless of all the negative consequences, many studies also include statements celebrating this positive aspect of the pandemic process (Crabtree et al., 2020; Mavin & Yusupova, 2020). Furthermore, even though merely a handful of participants mentioned the issue, the fact that the hours normally spent commuting are now being spent at home and that conducting classes at home reduces physical fatigue were welcome developments for some academics (Crabtree et al. 2020).

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has been a worrisome, exhausting, and problematic process for all. Already in a disadvantageous position within the academic world, female academics have seen their problems worsen. The roles intermingled with domestic responsibilities during the pandemic have exhausted women both physically and mentally. Their academic productivity has been hindered as they were unable to make time for their scientific work. The findings obtained from the present study show similarities with the outcomes of other studies concerning the experiences of female academics around the globe. One might thus argue that the challenges faced by female academics are not culture-specific and that the feelings experienced and felt are similar despite the differences in cultural settings. Even though distance education is considered a remarkable gain, the technical difficulties faced during the process and the lack of interactivity were found to be demotivating factors.

SUGGESTIONS

The participants included in the study work at the same faculty. Furthermore, the university they work at was able to make a smooth transition to remote teaching as they already had the infrastructure for distance education before the pandemic. Class sessions were held online. Similar studies may be conducted with female academics working at different universities with varying opportunities. Research may be conducted on the experiences of single female academics or those without children. Additionally, the perspective of male academics, spouses, and children may be considered in terms of the process faced by female academics. The number of participants in the present study is limited because the data were collected through interviews. Based on the outcomes of this study and other studies, a survey may be formulated to reach a wider audience. Policies and practices compensating for the difficulties particularly experienced by female academics may be

created based on similar research studies.

Acknowledgements

We saw in the sources we used for the present study that we were not alone. We conducted this study under similar conditions with our participants, who have personally experienced the challenges. We sincerely hope that in addition to contributing to similar studies in the future, this study may help our colleagues who are mothers so that they are not alone, being a source of motivation for them.

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