

## Gendered Aspects of Policies to Fight the COVID-19 Outbreak<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Countries have taken different measures to limit the spread of COVID-19. However, it is unclear how such measures affect the daily lives of people in different cultural contexts. Using a qualitative research method and the framework of gender roles, this study analyzes the potential effects of the Turkish government's policies to fight the COVID-19 pandemic on married men and women in Turkey. The respondents answered the open-ended questions developed by the researchers on the Google platform. 20 men (aged 27-54) and 20 women (aged 22-55) participated in the study. The respondents' experiences were grouped into three themes: gender-related problems; adaptation and new habits/hobbies; and balancing between positive and negative effects. While men stressed the economic effects, women focused on social relations or deeper values of life. The findings were discussed within the framework of Gender Schema Theory and Social Role Theory.

### Keywords

Turkey  
government policy/measures  
COVID-19 pandemic  
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gender differences

### About Article

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## COVID-19 Salgınıyla Mücadele Politikalarının Toplumsal Cinsiyete Dayalı Yönleri

### Öz

COVID-19 yayılmasını sınırlamak ve etkisini azaltmak amacıyla ülkelerin aldığı önlemler birbirinden farklılaşmıştır. Ancak, farklı kültürel bağlamlardaki insanların günlük yaşamlarının bu tür önlemlerden nasıl etkilendiği merak konusudur. Nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak hükümetin COVID-19 salgınıyla mücadele politikalarının Türkiye'deki evli bireyler üzerindeki potansiyel etkileri toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri çerçevesinde incelenmiştir. Araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen açık uçlu sorular Google platformunda uygulanmıştır. Araştırmaya 20 erkek (yaş ranj: 27-54) ve 20 kadın (yaş ranj: 22-55) katılmıştır. Katılımcıların deneyimleri dört ana tema ve birkaç alt tema altında gruplandırılmıştır. Erkekler konunun ekonomik yönü açısından değerlendirmeler yaparken, kadınlar sosyal ilişkiler ya da hayatın daha derin değerleri açısından değerlendirmelerde bulunmuşlardır. Bulgular Toplumsal Cinsiyet Şema Kuramına ve Sosyal Rol Kuramı çerçevesinde tartışılmıştır.

### Anahtar Sözcükler

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sokağa çıkma yasakları  
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## Introduction

This study analyses the gendered effects of the Turkish government's measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been among the worst global health crises of our time. It was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020a), and it rapidly spread across the globe. As of January 13, 2021, it is affecting 219 countries and territories around the world, and there have been 92.100.033 confirmed cases of infection, including 1.972.386 deaths (Worldometer, 2021, January 13).

The policies and measures that different countries have introduced to limit the spread of the virus and to mitigate its effects include, for example, different forms of curfews, lockdowns, travel restrictions, distance working, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and wearing masks in public places (Demirbilek et al., 2020; International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2020). A comparative study of 54 countries showed that the more severe national containment measures, such as stay-at-home orders, curfews, and lockdowns, were associated with a decrease in the number of daily new cases of confirmed COVID-19 infection (Wong, Wong, Tang, Au, Lau, & Wai, 2020). However, pandemics can also have other effects, as countries may experience, for example, individual and collective panic. The various control strategies that countries implement can, therefore, aim at either containing the disease itself or preventing fear and social dissolution (Strong, 1990).

In Turkey, the policies and measures were coordinated by a strong central government. In response to the spread of the virus, strict measures, including social distancing, curfews, travel bans, quarantines for returning nationals, and closures of schools, universities, stores, and entertainment venues were implemented (Demirbilek et al., 2020; IMF, 2020). The government also imposed several mandatory weekend curfews, and those over 65 or below 18 years of age were not allowed to leave their homes. Wearing masks became mandatory in all public spaces in most Turkish provinces. On March 14, flights to nine European countries were suspended (Think Global Health, 2020), followed by a suspension of all international flights on March 27 (Demirbilek et al., 2020). Moreover, land borders with Iran and Iraq were closed (Salcedo, Yar, & Cherehus, 2020), and pandemic boards were established in each city to monitor the measures and to take additional ones if necessary (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020a).

The measures taken by different governments had different effects on the spreading of the virus and often even caused considerable economic costs as severe lockdowns sank most countries' Gross domestic products (GDP). In Turkey, for example, the tourism industry was

particularly severely hit (IMF, 2020). But it seems that the effects of the measures against the spread of COVID-19 on the daily lives and well-being of both men and women in different countries and cultural contexts have not been adequately studied. Most studies on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have focused on its economic effects (e.g., Fernandes, 2020; Gamil & Alhagar, 2020; Ivanov, 2020; Sansa, 2020) or people's mental health (e.g., Asmundson & Taylor, 2020; Moreno et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). Studies dealing with the effects of the pandemic on people's daily lives are relatively few. Moreover, the gendered dimensions of the pandemic outbreaks and related governmental measures have been studied relatively sparsely (Smith, 2019). In one of these studies, Flor et al. (2022) found that the pre-existing inequalities between women and men have been intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another study conducted in Pakistan showed that women perceived a greater risk of infection, complied more with government measures, and coped better with this process than men did (Rana et al., 2021). Thus, there is a knowledge gap concerning how men's and women's daily lives are affected by government measures in different cultural contexts with local norms and gender roles. Therefore, this exploratory qualitative study aims to investigate the government measures' (stay-at-home orders, curfews, lockdowns, etc.) potentially different effects on the daily lives of married men and women in Turkey. Analyzing how government measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic may affect women and men differently in various cultural contexts is important for creating effective culture-specific policies and intervention strategies to deal with such pandemics.

Studying married men and women, rather than singles, allows us to uncover gendered role expectations affecting people's attitudes and behaviors as well as possible new tensions in home settings. In cultures that see men as the head of the household and responsible for the family income, lockdowns and curfews may prevent men from upholding culture specific gender role expectations. As the COVID-19 pandemic has created fears about decreased family income and loss of employment (Kirzinger, Kearney, Hamel, & Brodie, 2020), resulting frustrations may contribute to increasing conflicts at home.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2020), OECD (2020b), UNIDIR (Filipová, Dalaqua, & Revill, 2020), and activists around the world warn that stay-at-home orders and self-isolation measures restricting the movement of people also contribute to an increase in women's exposure to domestic violence. Similarly, various media reports point at such gender-based violence as a potential side-effect of the government policies and measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Harrison, Giuffrida, Smith, &

Ford, 2020; Oxfam, 2020; Roesch, & Amin, 2020; Taub, 2020; Trew, 2020; Wanqing, 2020). These fears and reports are not unsurprising, as research has suggested that domestic conflicts and violence are more prevalent in households that are economically distressed (Benson & Fox, 2004; Renzetti, 2009). Especially relatively patriarchal societies are at risk. According to an OECD report, for example, about 35% of married women in the Middle East have experienced intimate partner violence (OECD, 2020b). However, the lockdowns and curfews may further increase the already high rates of domestic conflicts and violence, as new tensions can arise, and women and children have no escape from their abusers.

### **Gendered Cultural Norms and Roles**

Culture is one of the most fundamental variables shaping our lives. Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist, defines it as “the collective mental programming of the human mind, which distinguishes one group of people from another” (Hofstede, 1998; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). This programming influences people’s patterns of thinking as cultural frameworks provide, for example, important guidance for people’s evaluations of stressful life events and their choices of coping strategies (Chun, Moos, & Cronkite, 2006; Heppner, 2008). Both the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020b) and many researchers highlight the importance of the cultural context in efforts to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Airhihenbuwa et al., 2020; Fairhead, 2016; Southall, DeYoung, & Harris, 2017). The cultural context has been argued to affect not only people’s perceptions of illness and the outcomes of government policies and measures aimed at containing pandemics, but also the societal willingness to implement them (Victor & Ahmed, 2019). A recent study on cross-cultural differences in handwashing patterns (Pogrebna & Kharlamov, 2020) found that cultural differences in people’s behavior concerning hygiene affected the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, although people often exhibit xenophobic responses when they feel vulnerable, such responses are moderated by culture (Kim, Sherman, & Updegraff, 2016).

As different cultures have varying expectations of what is appropriate for men and women, the policies and measures introduced by the authorities to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, such as self-isolation, curfews, and lockdowns, may affect women and men differently. Therefore, being informed by gender-related social norms in different cultures can help us minimize the negative effects of pandemics and develop strategies better suited to local contexts.

The values, norms, and rules of a society are acquired through various socialization processes. In general, the socialization processes regarding gender roles, referring to the attitudes, duties, and responsibilities of men and women in society, begin in the family context (McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003). Research has shown that from birth, parents treat children differently depending on their gender and communicate with them in different ways (Birns, Cascardi, & Meyer, 1994; Carter, 2014; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Ruble & Martin, 1997). Gender stereotypes or beliefs regarding gender-appropriate behavior lead to different treatment of men and women, which in turn creates gender differences in behavior (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Ruble & Martin, 1997). Two prominent theories provide rationales for the development and division of gender roles and their effects on behavior.

Bem's (1983) Gender Schema Theory (GST), which is a cognitively based theory and uses an information processing approach, seeks to explain the development of gender roles. According to the GST, the cognitive functions of a child have an important effect on shaping gender roles. Children learn how their cultures define the roles of men and women by observing individuals in the culture in which they live and then internalize this knowledge as a "gender schema." During the socialization process, these schemas are developed through children's interactions with parents, other children, and adults, as well as exposure to the media. In order to form a gender identity, children must manage to label themselves and others as men and women. This gender schema is then used to organize subsequent experiences.

Another predominant theory for understanding how cultural beliefs about gender guide individuals' behavior is Social Role Theory (SRT) (Eagly & Wood, 2012; 2016; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). During the gender role socialization process, expectations about what constitutes appropriate behavior for men and women, also called gender role stereotypes, lead women and men to learn to behave differently in different conditions. In traditional gender role stereotypes, women have been viewed as the primary caretakers of children and responsible for the maintenance of good relationships. In contrast, men have been viewed as breadwinners and financial providers for the family. Through gender role socialization, both men and women develop appropriate personality traits and skills, adapting their social behavior to gender-typical role requirements (Eagly et al., 2000). In the literature, most studies that use SRT as a theoretical framework to study gendered differences support the theory's premise that males and females act according to gender role-related social norms. It has been suggested that both women's and men's social roles influence their behavior in

role-appropriate directions (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Franke, Crown, & Spake, 1997; Forsyth, Heiney, & Wright, 1997).

Expectations about feminine and masculine gender roles lead women and men to learn to behave differently in different conditions (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Ruble & Martin, 1997). In masculine cultures, the roles of men and women overlap less. In these cultures, men are expected to behave assertively and competitively (Hofstede, 1998), and gender role-related stereotypes can promote gender inequality. According to Hofstede Insights, Turkey is a collectivist and hierarchical society with uncertainty avoidance and little tolerance for unknown situations (see Hofstede Insights, 2020). Turkish culture has also been described as scoring high on both femininity (Hofstede Insights, 2020) and masculinity (Akdeniz & Seymen, 2012). For example, Koca, Asci, and Kirazci (2005) found that whereas women had relatively high scores on femininity, men scored high on masculinity. Arguably, these cultural characteristics and patriarchal social structures (Engin & Pals, 2018) contribute to high levels of gender discrimination in Turkey. Indeed, Turkey is ranked 130<sup>th</sup> in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index out of 153 countries (WEF, 2020). According to a study examining Turkish family structures, tasks such as cooking, ironing, washing clothes, doing the dishes, serving tea in the evening, cleaning, shopping, and childcare are mostly done by women. Men, on the other hand, were more interested in jobs such as maintenance, repair, and payment of monthly invoices (Bespinar, 2014). This gender gap motivates an analysis of the potentially gendered effects of government policies and measures to fight the pandemic in Turkey.

## **Method**

### **Participants, Materials, and Ethical Standards**

For this study, the respondents were recruited through a combination of snowball and strategic sampling. The first respondents were located and invited to participate in the study by using the researchers' social contacts in several parts of Turkey. Obviously, these respondents belonged to the middle class. As oversampling a particular network of peers can lead to selection bias (Griffiths, Gossop, Powis, & Strang, 1993; Kaplan, Korf, & Sterk, 1987), several respondents functioned as starting points for finding new participants. Moreover, to compensate for the potential weaknesses of this non-random selection, strategic sampling was also used to make the sample more representative of the population of interest such that it was finally comprised of 20 married men and 20 married women. The men were between 27 and 54 years of age, with a mean age of 40.50 ( $SD=7.98$ ), while women were

between 22 and 55 years of age, with a mean age of 34.60 ( $SD=8.74$ ). Typically, women marry younger than men in Turkey. Ten respondents also reported that some of their relatives or acquaintances had been infected with COVID-19, which is common among the general population in Turkey.

A questionnaire with questions suitable for the purpose of the study and open-ended answers options were developed. The introduction section contained information about the aim of the study, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality of data, and informed consent. By answering the questions, the respondents gave their informed consent to participate in the study. The respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences of the measures taken by the Turkish authorities and of the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on their daily lives. Qualitative data were collected in June 2020 by using a form available on the Google platform, as meeting with the respondents was not possible due to the pandemic. This data collection method eliminated the interviewer effect, which may result from different reactions to the personality of interviewers and how they present the questions (Malterud, 2001). Although the Google form could not capture non-verbal information, it made data collection accurate. Moreover, writing down their responses at home was deemed to give the respondents time to reflect and to answer the questions as honestly as possible, minimizing possible bias in the results caused by social conventions.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Analyses were made separately for men and women. To ensure anonymity, each subject was assigned a number from 1 to 40, such that the first 20 participants were women and the last 20 men. After being anonymized, the qualitative data was subjected to a thematic analysis that began with open coding. It was first coded by searching for elements that were meaningful in relation to the research question (Hjerm, Lindgren, & Nilsson, 2012, p. 46). After several readings, some codes turned out to be theoretically and analytically more interesting than others and a set of codes assumed a more stable form. Axial coding was also used, as some codes turned out to be interconnected, that is, there were thematic relationships between the coded categories (Hjerm et al., 2012, p. 63).

Investigator triangulation (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985) was used to increase the credibility of the analysis, as three researchers collaborated on the analysis. The researchers first coded independently from one another and then discussed these open codes and defined axial codes together. While conducting an open, inductive analysis, sensitizing concepts can arise a priori

to analysis (Bowen, 2008). The researchers brought sensitizing concepts to the analysis from Gender Schema Theory (GST) and Social Role Theory (SRT).

Three themes emerged from the analysis: gender-related problems; adaptation and new habits/hobbies; and balancing between positive and negative effects. In the section below, the themes are presented together with quotes from the participants.

## Results

### Gender-related Problems

There were distinct gender-related differences in the type of problems the respondents reported having experienced. Nine of the men said that they had faced financial problems as a result of the pandemic, while only two women mentioned similar problems. For example, respondent 21 said that, “I did not work for two months. My income decreased; my expenses increased.” However, the most frequent problem (six respondents) faced by women was that their social life had become more restricted. Moreover, more women than men, six versus three, reported that they had experienced psychological problems. It is, however, difficult to know whether men are simply less likely to admit and discuss such issues or whether there is an actual gender difference.

Some men explained that their psychological problems were work-related. For example, respondent 9 said that “I’m worried about losing my job. I’m getting stressed.” Moreover, getting safely to work and through the day without catching the virus could be challenging for those who could not stay at home: “I have to personally pay more attention when commuting and at work, because other people do not show the necessary understanding in this regard” (Respondent 32). Respondent 30 said that the pandemic “turned everything upside down. There were concerns about getting infected, and we were always in panic.” For women, many of the problems derived instead from the increasing social isolation and workload at home, especially when family members got sick. As respondent 11 explained,

It [the pandemic] has affected me negatively. We have been locked inside the house, and we have been constantly disinfecting. We started to disinfect everything we buy. Since we could not order food from outside, I started to constantly cook at home. At home, I do hairdressing and so on. In short, we have done all such work on our own. We couldn’t see our close relatives and loved ones. When we got sick, we could not go to the hospital. We tried to get information over the phone.



Some women also explained that not only their increased domestic workload and restricted social life but also their concern for their children had a negative psychological effect on them. Respondent 12 complained that,

It affected negatively in every sense. Our social life has been restricted, my children's education has been interrupted, and during our stay [at home] we have been negatively affected psychologically. There were moments when I had a lot of psychological difficulties. In the beginning, anxiety was higher. As a mother, taking care of children and motivating them was difficult.

However, when asked about the respondents' first reactions to the government's mandatory stay-at-home order over the weekend, women complained more about it restricting their social lives, but they paradoxically also reported being more comfortable staying at home. While men reported a wide array of feelings, ranging from feeling "good because I could be on vacation" (Respondent 24) to "feeling like I am in prison at home" (Respondent 26), no sentiment dominating their experience, ten women said that they did not have difficulty being forced to be at home. Their responses were often associated with some experienced benefits of being able to spend more time with their family members. As respondent 15 explained, "in the beginning, it was good not to go to work. It was nice to be with my son." However, as time went on, also negative feelings started to increase: "I was confused, I thought the curfew would not be extended. I was glad that it would be two to three weeks; the school and being at home was very tiring. As the curfew was extended, my anxieties increased. I finally accepted it, but I became overwhelmed" (Respondent 7).

Thus, from the gender perspective, emanating from distinct social roles, there appeared to be differences in what kind of problems women and men experienced as a result of the pandemic and the government measures to diminish the spread of the virus.

### **Adaptation and New Habits/Hobbies**

Getting used to spending more time at home and facing the threat that the pandemic posed was challenging for several respondents, as many of their old routines could not anymore structure their everyday lives. As respondent 26 lamented, "all my old habits disappeared."

For some, increased isolation meant that alternative ways of communicating with friends and relatives emerged. Respondent 35 explained that "in the beginning I had difficulties, because I felt lonely and had to be isolated from social life. Afterwards, I got used to both loneliness and staying away from social life. Compared to the past, I started to

communicate with people mostly over the phone.” Women, as the primary caregivers of children, expressed greater worries that their children would be negatively affected by the isolation. However, even when this led to much anxiety, a process of adaptation took place, sometimes expressed in religious terms as faith in *qadr*, destiny:

The thing that I feel most sorry about is that my daughter is 5.5 years old and I can't find any games, activities. I'm very depressed now....I wondered if the virus can be transmitted, if there will be a problem, and I experienced anxiety disorder, most often when I saw the young die. Later, I got used to saying, “the death is Allah's command; Allah's servants take precautions” (Respondent 7).

Adaptation has its limits, however, especially for women, if the workload increases too much. The home has traditionally been women's domain in Turkey. Now that all family members must spend more time at home, women's domestic workload and the responsibility that women experienced created mixed feelings. These feelings ranged from a desire to make the food more appetizing for the family, as many were depressed by the need to stay at home during the curfew, to finally becoming tired of constantly cleaning the house:

I am psychologically collapsed. My son is small, and I am now struggling to keep him inside the house. Yes, I have loved the kitchen as long as I have known who I am and have felt comfortable. I make everything from cakes to meals. However, as the pandemic came, I started making them more delicious. I also like cleaning very much, but eventually I realized that I am sick of cleaning (Respondent 6).

Some respondents became increasingly occupied with their old hobbies. However, as “all old routines are breaking down” (Respondent 7), new habits and even hobbies often emerge to take their place. Indeed, most respondents reported that they had taken up new habits and hobbies, which seemed to be somewhat gender specific. For men, they mostly had to do with music, physical workout or manual labor. For example, respondent 31 said that “I began to walk”, while respondent 21 “played more guitar.” Respondent 25 “did repairs at home”, respondent 30 “built a greenhouse” and respondent 39 “learned to work as a carpenter.” Others “started watching more movies” (Respondent 34) or “reading books” (Respondent 24). Women also reported watching more movies, reading books, and often rediscovering their old hobbies. Respondent 19 said that “I spent a lot of time on my existing hobbies. For example, growing plants on the balcony, sewing.” However, many of the old and new activities they took up were clearly associated with traditional gender roles. For example, respondent 9 said that “I learned how to knit” and respondent 11 said that she “learned to

cook dishes that I did not know before.” Moreover, women who had been responsible for shopping for the family, discovered new ways to do this online when shops were closed or it was perceived to be too risky to leave home: “I learned to shop on the internet” (Respondent 13).

### **Balancing between Positive and the Negative Effects**

Several respondents reported that they had experienced both conflicts and positive effects. Being forced to stay at home, being increasingly isolated from old social contacts, and facing possible financial problems created tensions in many families. Moreover, being forced to spend more time than usual with family members created strains on family relations. As respondent 15 said, “Constantly spending time with my husband did not do us any good.” Indeed, ten men and eleven women reported having pandemic-related conflicts at home.

Often, such conflicts had to do with children who did not go to school during the curfew. The tensions could be related to the disappearance of old routines that had previously structured families’ daily lives. Respondent 35 said that “small controversies have occasionally taken place when the children wake up late and we do not have breakfast together.” Sometimes, however, much anxiety was created for women as primary caregivers:

Not being able to go out was difficult even for adults. It was even more difficult for children. Because of this, there were minor conflicts with the children. We strive to remain calm and cautious...As a mother, taking care of children and motivating them was difficult (Respondent 12).

Even more serious conflicts arose. Respondent 20 explained that in her case the pandemic gave rise to psychological domestic violence: “Our conflicts have increased. I am exposed to emotional violence by my husband. I would even consider divorce if it were not for the children, so I did nothing.” Sometimes these conflicts also led to physical violence. Respondent 15, a woman, said that “I have been subjected to physical or emotional violence by my husband ... I did nothing but I was totally alienated from my partner.” Respondent 24, a man, explained how staying at home had given rise to increasing fighting:

Life at home was enjoyable in the beginning, but over time, conflicts and intolerance began to surface. Because of intolerance and impatience, we experienced conflicts with the children...and yes, we have fought with each other...We have not yet been able to find a solution and the problems continue.

At least in one case, the problems that the pandemic and the measures to curb the spread of the virus created were associated with increased alcohol consumption: “It was

corrosive because my husband was psychologically demoralized...so I drank alcohol” (Respondent 14).

However, not all effects were negative. Although almost all respondents said that the pandemic had created problems for them, even domestic violence, thirteen also reported having experienced surprising positive effects, which were often gender specific. The most frequent positive effect experienced by men, as the primary breadwinners, was that they spent less money during the pandemic (6 respondents). None of the female respondents referred to spending less money. Instead, the most frequent positive effects for them were being able to spend more time with the family (5 respondents) and rediscovering some deeper values of life (7 respondents). As respondent 12 expressed it, “We had the opportunity to spend more time with the family. We understood how valuable even the ordinary things we complain about are.” However, sometimes such a rediscovery was also related to diminished consumption, although women did not express it in terms of saving money: “I remembered the values we forgot. I have realized that I don’t really need most of what I see” (Respondent 8). Even some men reported such a rediscovery of values and inner peace: “My inner peace has increased, and I had the opportunity to get to know myself a little more” (Respondent 35). Also, engaging in seemingly mundane activities had now a higher value, as respondent 39 explained: “I recognized the value of things like idly wandering the streets.” Such a rediscovery was often associated with social relationships: “I realized how precious the things that we do as part of daily routines and see as ordinary actually are, such as going out and visiting parents” (Respondent 3).

### **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to investigate the COVID-19 pandemic and government policies’ potentially different effects on married men and women in Turkey. Because of the existing gap in the literature, a focus on the daily lives of married women and men in a Turkish cultural context, with a theoretical framework informed by culturally specific gender roles, was believed to be analytically fruitful. In line with GST (Bem, 1983) and SRT’s premises (Eagly & Wood, 2012; 2016; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000), the overall results of the present study showed that the measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 have had somewhat different effects on men’s and women’s daily lives.

According to SRT, social structures contribute to the development of gender stereotypes about what constitutes appropriate behavior for men and women. As a result, gender stereotypes affect men’s and women’s behavior in role-appropriate directions (Eagly

& Wood, 2012; 2016; Eagly et al., 2000). The result of this study pointed at gender differences in the type of problems the respondents experienced, which likely reflect the relatively patriarchal (Engin & Pals, 2018) and masculine (Akdeniz & Seymen, 2012; Koca et al., 2005) social structures in Turkey, where men are mostly the primary providers for the family, and women are the primary caretakers of children.

The results indicate that some of the experienced problems were gendered. Almost half of the men said that they experienced financial problems, while only a few women mentioned such problems. The most frequently mentioned problem by women respondents was instead the restrictions on their social life created by the need to stay at home to avoid infection especially during the weekend curfews. However, although women lamented the limitations on their social lives, they were also more comfortable staying at home as compared to men. As mentioned before, this difference likely reflects the relatively patriarchal (Engin & Pals, 2018) and masculine (Akdeniz & Seymen, 2012; Koca, Asci, & Kirazci, 2005) social structures in Turkey, where, in line with SRT, men are often the primary breadwinners and women are expected to take care of children. There were also gendered differences in adaptation to the new situation and in the types of new habits and hobbies that were developed during the pandemic.

One striking finding of this study was that some respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic and the related government policies and measures also had positive effects on their daily lives, and even here the experiences were gender specific. While men were focused on the economy, women made assessments in terms of social relations or some deeper values of life. According to GST (Bem, 1983), the way parents behave towards children is guided by their gender schemas that consist of gender stereotypes about the roles of men and women, such as men being breadwinners and women being caretakers. Especially in traditional cultures, these gender schemas are likely to create gender-differentiated parenting practices. With girls, these practices focus on warmth, affiliation, interpersonal closeness, and maintaining interpersonal relationships (autonomy-supportive parenting practices), and with boys they focus on assertiveness, aggressiveness, power, and dominance (parental control practices) (e.g., Kochanska, Barry, Stellern, & O'Bleness, 2009; Mandara et al., 2012; Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry, & Snow, 2009). Not surprisingly, the gender differences regarding the experienced positive effects of the need to stay at home during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to reflect similar gender role stereotypes.

Moreover, the results of the study support the concerns expressed by various sources about increasing domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., OHCHR, 2020; OECD, 2020b; 2020c; Harrison et al., 2020; Roesch & Amin, 2020; Taub, 2020; Trew, 2020; Wanqing, 2020). The relatively strict measures to tackle the spread of the pandemic, such as weekend curfews that forced both men and women to spend more time at home, may have contributed to an increase in women's exposure to domestic violence. This result is in line with previous findings that domestic violence is generally more likely in economically distressed households (Benson & Fox, 2004; Renzetti, 2009). It is also widely believed that, especially in traditional cultures, boys' aggressive behavior receives more encouragement and fewer restraints by the parents. From the perspective of gender-differentiated parenting practices, men's physical aggression may be encouraged by specific physically oriented masculine social roles (Archer, 2004). As men are perceived as being responsible for the family income in masculine cultures, government policies and measures that prevent men from upholding such culture specific gender role expectations may create tensions in many families and even trigger domestic violence.

In conclusion, our research contributes not only to an understanding of the general effects of the government policies and measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic on people's daily lives. Informed by the gender role framework, the results also point at differences and similarities in men's and women's behavior and experiences in Turkey. Not only are there enormous differences between countries' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic; there is also a knowledge gap concerning how people's daily lives are affected by government policies and measures in different cultural contexts. We suggest that both Gender Schema Theory (GST) and Social Role Theory (SRT) can provide a useful framework for cross-cultural studies to understand the effects of the pandemic and related government policies and measures on people's daily lives.

### **A Few Words about the Generalizability of the Findings**

Generalizability has been a complicated and controversial topic in qualitative research. Ability to generalize is usually limited, since the aim of most qualitative research is to provide explanations rather than to generalize findings to individuals or groups beyond those under study (Bryman, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this qualitative study, we analyzed the potentially gendered effects of government policies and measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey. The sample consisted of 20 married men and 20 married women, who were recruited by using a combination of snowball and strategic sampling, which are non-

probability sampling techniques. Considering the non-representative sampling that was used, there are serious limitations to generalizing the findings to other groups. But, despite these limitations, we can use the concept of transferability, which is similar to but distinct from generalisability. Transferability means that the results of a study can be applicable to similar situations. However, unlike the generalisability, it is not up to the researcher to judge whether the results are transferable to other similar situations in other contexts. Instead, it is up to the readers to make such judgements (Bryman, 2018). In other words, it is the readers who consider, based on the details that appear in the study and their knowledge of other contexts, whether the findings are transferable. Thus, readers who have experience of similar situations can make possible connections that make the results of the current study transferable.

### **Limitations**

The results of this study do not claim to be representative of all married men and women in the Turkish cultural context. The data was collected from a relatively small group of participants with non-probability sampling techniques, which were unable to produce generalizable findings. Instead, the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis should be seen as an initial charting of the different experiences of men and women in the Turkish context. Hence, it is important to further test the findings of this study with other studies conducted with different groups. It would also be beneficial for future research to use other data collection methods that produce, for example, larger quantitative data sets or observational data.

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