Chapter 2

"Working at Home and Living at Work, but….":
Challenges of Online/Remote Education for Women Academics in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Due to the pandemic, online education has made trouble for students regarding access, academic performance, motivation, and remote work difficulties for instructors. In this study, the experiences of working from home and online education of women in academia in Turkey will be understood and explored. The qualitative research method, namely in-depth interviews, was used to acquire detailed knowledge about the issue. The similarities and/or differences of the experiences were discussed according to the three main profiles that emerged. While unmarried women have benefited from this process and increased their professional activities, married women with children were seen as the most disadvantaged group in work-life balance, home conditions, and professional careers.

INTRODUCTION

Inequality in education, as a multifaceted and multidimensional issue, affects various groups with significant disparities in the way it is encountered by each person and/or group. Besides, education, as a living system, has been influenced by economic, political, and cultural factors. Recently, a notable event that can be classified as a health-based factor that is, the outbreak of COVID-19, has resulted in the closure of schools. According to World Bank (2020), "with the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), among many disruptions to normal life, 160+ countries have mandated temporary school closures, leaving ~1.6 billion children and youth out of school." (p. 1). Therefore, the education system and educational inequalities have been shaped by a new phenomenon, namely the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a

shift from in-class face-to-face education to online/distance education. Based on the level of education and country, online education has been launched via national TV channels or other computer-based applications enabling synchronous meetings such as Zoom, Skype, Google Meet. However, the issue of online education is too complex to be examined by considering only students. There is a need to look at other participants of education from the gender perspective: teachers/faculty and administrative agents. In this study, higher education and academics, specifically women academics, will be scrutinized in terms of online education and working at home due to the pandemic.

In a short time after the announcement of lockdown across nations and the closure of universities, millions of faculties worldwide started to work at home and teach via computer-based technologies. According to UNESCO (2020), as of March 2020, coincident with the pandemic declaration by World Health Organization (WHO), 62 countries have announced university closure and forced them to initiate online education. As Boa (2020) stated, "due to the sudden emergence of the COVID-19, most faculty members are facing the challenges of lacking online teaching experience, early preparation, or support from educational technology teams" (p. 114). Apart from these general teaching and technical problems regardless of gender, there is a need to discuss a different aspect of the issue: gender-based problems and challenges due to working at home. In this way, it will be possible to understand and grasp the gender-based issues and gender inequality in terms of teaching, professional life, and work-life balance due to the pandemic as a crisis.

BACKGROUND

There have been notable studies and debates on the profound impact of the pandemic on gender equality in a variety of realms, including household and work (Boca et al., 2020; Manzo & Minello, 2020; Kalaylıoğlu, 2020; Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Czymara et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2020), as well as academia (Gabster et al., 2020; Oleschuk, 2020; Kim & Patterson, 2020; Burk et al., 2020). These have commonly addressed the fact that the pandemic has aggravated social inequalities to the disadvantage of women[1].

According to early statistics on productivity and publishing as the concrete output of academia during the pandemic, Covid-19 has significantly and negatively influenced the productivity and publishing of woman academics from different majors (Frederickson, 2020; Amano-Patiño et al., 2020; Anderson et al., 2020; Isselbacher, 2020; Rafidi, 2020; THE, 2020; Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2020). On the contrary, as Kitchener (2020) claims, "men are submitting up to 50 percent more than they usually would". Consistent with these facts referring to the gender gap, Minello (2020), as a woman academic, states that the pandemic is unequally affecting the productivity of women because of more caregiving load than men. She also uses the term "maternal wall" related to having less time for academic studies and writing articles to describe this disparity. In this sense, the number and age of children have played an essential role for the time devoted by parents to meet their needs/demands. For example, the needs of preschool children (ages 0-5), which are mainly based on fundamental physical caregiving, are different from the needs of children in primary school, which are related to helping with their homework (Collins et al., 2020, Boca et al. 2020). The study of Adams-Prassl et al. (2020) justifies this statement: women in the USA, UK, and Germany significantly spend more time on "homeschooling and caring for children" than men do. In Turkey, similar results were obtained (Kalaylıoğlu, 2020). If a woman is working at home, fulfilling all caregiving duties, homeschooling, and working might be hard for her.

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