CHAPTER 3

CORONAVIRUS IN TURKEY

EFFECTS ON DAILY LIFE AND CHANGE OF HABITS IN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

We live in a world that has become increasingly interconnected and interdependent, and dealing with a pandemic in such an environment is extremely difficult. Systemic vulnerabilities and uncertainties pose a great danger to the ecosystem that we exist within. Turkey as a bridge country that connects continents, civilisations, economic zones and transportation routes carries a high risk of being infected by the global spread of a virus. Soon after the first case was diagnosed in Turkey, starting from April, general curfew was declared in major cities on the weekends and exclusively imposed for people under the age of 20 and over 65 every day for approximately three months.

‘Coronavirus in Everyday Life Survey’ was conducted among 3,000 people over 18 years old, between April 8 and April 12, aiming to understand how the Turkish society experienced this process, their reaction to the call to ‘stay home’, their daily life practices (such as sleep patterns, eating habits, and use of social media), and their positive and negative expectations of the near future. The study has prominent consequences for understanding and evaluating the public perception of the crisis in times of the pandemic in Turkey.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Daily Life, Habits, Society

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Introduction

The 21st century began with great expectations as the goals were set at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. The Millennium Development Goals were identified as eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development (United Nations, 2000). However, the first global crisis of the millennium broke out in 2001 with a massive terrorist attack. September 11, 2001 was a day of unprecedented shock and suffering created by a series of al-Qaeda attacks that killed thousands of innocents, caused massive destruction, and had an adverse economic impact on the global scale.

The second global crisis of the century was the great economic recession that occurred between 2007 and 2009. The economic crash that was triggered by a combination of speculative activity in the Western financial markets, focusing particularly on property transactions, metamorphosed to the greatest disaster of the global economic system the world had ever witnessed since 1929. Although the epicentre of the collapse was the US at the beginning, eventually the impact spread around the world to both advanced and developing economies in a very short period of time. The path to global recovery was rugged, and the damage compelled the governments to adapt their policies to the new dynamics of global economy that hardly fits with liberalization strategies.

The third biggest global crisis of the 21st century started with the shocking footage from the city of Wuhan in China in January. On the 31st of December, 2019, Chinese authorities notified the World Health Organization (WHO) of an outbreak of a new disease, which was later named as COVID-19. Although at the beginning it was believed to remain a local problem like SARS that became an epidemic in 2003, it was soon understood that this new disease is the most serious health crisis the world has been facing since the Spanish flu in 1918 (WHO, 2020).

As Covid -19 disease emerged in a very crowded and high-tech city of China that is deeply interconnected with the global system, the speed of the pandemic's spread was extremely high. However, the response was two faced; on one side, hyper-modern, and on the other side, practically medieval. While the scientists were using cutting-edge tools to rapidly sequence the genome of the coronavirus, pass along information about its virulence, and collaborate on possible countermeasures and vaccines, all far quicker than could have been done before,

the only effective responses were to shut down society and economy, close the borders and isolate the ones who were infected (Walsh, 2020).

Contrary to what was hoped, the 21st century came with global political, economic, humanitarian and health crises. The first global crisis radically changed our perception of security, the second one altered our confidence in making money easily, and the third one seems to change how we live, work and relate to each other (Carnelos, 2020). And certainly overall, the economic, social, political and humanitarian cost of the pandemic was the worst of all.

Immediately after the first coronavirus case in Turkey, which was diagnosed in March 2020, all schools including the universities and most of the public spaces, such as mosques, gyms, hairdressers, cafes, and shopping malls were closed, and the measures were gradually expanded to all over the country. President Erdogan asked for a “voluntary quarantine” in which people were required to stay at home except for shopping or basic needs to stem a surge of coronavirus cases. (Toksabay and Gümrukçü, 2020). This call to ‘stay home’ was of much greater importance, especially in highly populated cities, specifically in Istanbul, as a metropolitan city with a population of 16 million could easily become a Wuhan-like epicentre without strict measures.

While the worldwide spread of the disease urged the governments to take some extra precautionary acts, Turkey joined the club and closed its borders. Airports were closed, travel restrictions were imposed, all national and international flights were cancelled, and people who came from abroad were quarantined for 14 days starting from February. According to a PEW Research Centre Analysis, due to pandemic, at least 91% of the world’s population, or 7.1 billion people, lives in countries with restrictions on people arriving from other countries who are neither citizens nor residents, such as tourists, business travellers and new immigrants. Roughly 3 billion people, or 39%, live in countries with borders completely closed (Connor, 2020).

In March, April, and May, people in Turkey began experiencing the negative effects of not only the pandemic, but also the counter-pandemic policies in social, economic, and psychological terms. The implementation of nationwide lockdowns disrupted the daily lives of the general public, and had a profound impact on their social interactions. Therefore, this paper aims to understand the sociological characteristics of this period from the perspective of Turkish society.

Methodology

This study focuses on understanding how daily life has changed with pandemic in Turkey in the first months of Covid- 19 disease. Our basic hypothesis is that the pandemic causes new habits and positive or negative effects on society. We also wanted to make predictions about the new challenges and figure out different dynamics regarding cultural, political and sociological aspects with the results of the analysis. Online survey model and participant observation were used in this quantitative research. Besides, official websites and social media pages of news channels were investigated as an ethnographic field. The questions were prepared in March 2020, online questionnaires were sent to 3,000 people who live in 76 cities from all regions in Turkey between April 8 and 12, and the results were analysed and shared with the public between April 12 and 19. Demographic traits included gender, age, education, income, socio-economic status, family status and occupation. Sample size of the survey is 3000, and the margin of the error is 1,65%. The data of the survey were analysed using SPSS. The methodology was designed as correlational and descriptive research.

The Results of ‘Coronavirus and Everyday Life Survey’

The very first question aims to focus on the discourse of ‘staying home’ and its problematic socio-economic background. When the quarantine began in almost every country and most parts of Turkey, the Turkish Ministry of Health tried to encourage people to stay home with the message “stay at home”. As the purpose of this paper is to emphasize the significance of comprehending daily life and its necessities, when Turkish society’s economic circumstances are taken into consideration, is it really applicable for everyone to stay home or not?

The first question of the study is “Are you in a situation that requires you to go out regularly?”, and 65% of the participants stated that they have to go out due to work, health problems, family care, or general responsibilities. Although the call to stay home focuses on the health of the individuals in society, it seems that economic necessities can be more crucial than possible health issues. For instance, many people made stocks by going to supermarkets or shopping malls, especially during the first days of Covid-19, and this instinctive behaviour is related to the anxiety of society. On the other side, it is worth bearing in mind that being able to stock necessities is mostly about one’s socio-economic level.

Table 1. Do people have to go out regularly or can they stay home every day?

People are aware of the disease transmission risk, yet still they have to continue working due to the fear of losing their jobs. Valentino- DeVries, Lu and Dances' research was published in The New York Times Magazine, and their data highlighted the difficulties of circumstances when people have different levels of incomes in metropolitan areas of America. It is generally agreed today that the decision of staying at home is a luxury (Valentino- DeVries, Lu, Dances, 2020).

What Has Changed in Our Daily Lives in the Times of Coronavirus?

Approximately 40 questions were asked in the survey to understand the changes in the daily lives of the participants after the coronavirus pandemic. The most prominent topics are changes in eating habits, sleep patterns, daily activities, and use of social media. The research also investigates the level of anxiety, and exactly 60% of the participants indicated they often have fears because of the uncertainty about the future. Besides, the study evaluates the activities we have done during the quarantine days, and what the meaning of 'social distance' was while being stuck inside. Social distance as a term is a controversial word, and even though we keep the distance physically, and we are isolated from each other, social solidarity has been more crucial than ever. As a human being, people need interaction, and they are socially dependent inherently. Thus, they have used social media, teleconferences or group messaging to maintain social infrastructure and their mental health. Lastly, the second part of the paper concentrates more on the positive and negative expectations of the post-corona world in Turkey.

a. The relationship between eating habits, age difference, and socio-economic class

‘Days with Coronavirus in Turkey Study’ shows that 56% of the participants stated that eating habits changed dramatically during the coronavirus period. This rate is 56% in participants under the age of 25; 60% for the ages between 26 and 35; 62% for the ages between 36 and 45. It is 54% for the ages between 46 and 55, and 33% in the participants over the age of 56. These changes are most commonly manifested as the irregularity of eating times (43%), consumption of more homemade food (36%), and eating more (35%).

Throughout the study, we observed that the participants over 55 years old are more careful about health issues and tried to stick to their usual daily routines. As informed above, people at 65 and over were prohibited from going out for more than three months. People who were 55 and older continued working and going out, but especially people in that age with chronic health issues behaved more carefully as senior adults are at higher risk. Moreover, since retirees in this age group spend more time at home, their daily life practices were not altered as much as those belonging to younger groups.

Sixty percent of the young participants identified that their daily eating patterns have indeed changed. The rates are higher for young people under the age of 25. For example, 49% of young people and students stated that irregularity in their eating times increased, 51% ate more home-cooked meals, and 44% ate more. Students who do not study at a school in their hometowns returned back to family houses right after the announcement of the first pandemic case in Turkey. After the news that schools would be closed for three weeks as of March 16, students formed long queues in bus terminals. This was a matter of concern in the media as it would increase the spread of the disease. When considered from an economic perspective, it was a wise solution for students to stay in family homes during this period. Living alone in a shared house or a dormitory could be challenging for students without support of their families during the quarantine comparatively.

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Eating Habits after the Pandemic

Table 2. Eating Habits after the Pandemic

Table 2 illustrates that some participants decreased the number of meals, ate healthier, ate less, or consumed more dumplings or convenience food. Besides, when the answers are examined in detail, the vast majority of those who claim to eat healthier belong to the middle and upper economic class, while the majority of those eating less belong to the low-income group. As in many parts of the world, including Turkey, coronavirus has caused a financial crisis, and the low-income masses have been affected more drastically. Coronavirus will emerge as a sociological phenomenon that reveals the gap of economic inequalities. Chartres says Covid- 19 hit the poorest people in developing countries, and he asks extensive questions for laying emphasis on the issues of global poorness and pandemic: ‘What impact will COVID-19 have on global food and nutrition, and what are the implications for foreign aid budgets?’ (Chartres, 2020)

Prior investigations about eating habits in pandemic mention the popularity of making bread as an activity. The consumption of pastries increased by 18% in adults and 30% in young people. Many people preferred to make bread at home for both hygienic reasons and being productive during the lockdown. “In March, searches for bread cooking on Google increased 100 times compared to the previous month while videos containing home bakery recipes on YouTube were viewed by more than 3 million people on YouTube.” (McCarron, 2020) In addition, millions of people all over the world shared photos of the bread they baked using various hashtags on social media. Results provided by *Euronews* show that in the third week of the lockdown, flour sales increased by four times in Spain, two times in England, and 140% in France (Cereceda, 2020). The reason for the increase in the production and consumption of

baking goods, especially bread, should be explained not only by hygiene, but also by the effort to relax, to cope with stress, and to continue producing. “Baking bread during isolation is an activity the purposes of which are threefold: providing sustenance; filling newly available leisure time; and offering a way to demonstrate one’s skill and activities on social media” (Easterbrook- Smith, 2020).

A survey was conducted with 3,533 people between the ages of 12 and 85 in Italy, ‘The perception of weight gain was observed in 48.6% of the population, and 15% of respondents turned to farmers or organic food consumers, purchasing fruits and vegetables’ (Renzo and Gualtieri, 2020). According to the research of Heinz Lohmann Foundation in Germany, “18% said that they had been cooking in a healthier way. For 70% of those polled, this meant eating more fresh vegetables and salad than before, and 48% talked of eating more vegetarian dishes. Some 38% said that they had baked more than before.” (Deutsche Welle (DW), 2020)

Our research confirms that the time spent with family has increased, and people have eaten more home-cooked meals and snacks during this period. The survey made by BBC across the U.K. reaches a very similar conclusion. ‘Changes in young people’s eating habits, tracked during the lockdown in England, show both increases in snacking and families eating together’ (Coughlan, 2020). According to the surveys provided by *Statistica*, people who live in the U.S.A. have consumed more home-cooked meals (47%), they’ve eaten less delivery food (28%) and more snacks (27%) (Conway, 2020).

b. Changes in Sleep Patterns and Covid-19

A hashtag with the word of ‘can’t sleep’ has become a trend, and according to Parkview Report, ‘insomnia’ has been one of the most googled terms throughout the quarantine days, (Devanathan, 2020). Many studies have established a relationship between sleep patterns and coronavirus, and the most significant outcome of this relationship is anxiety. People’s sleep patterns have been disrupted because of the changes in their daily routines, inability to cope with uncertainty, decreased physical movement due to lockdown, and eating at irregular hours; therefore, people began to feel tired and unhealthy all the time. Sleep Medicine Expert Devanathan demonstrates people are often asking some questions, such as ‘What’s going to happen next? What are we going to do? How are we going to deal with it? How’s it going to affect our lives in the short and long term?’ (Devanathan, 2020).

These concerns complement each other and direct us to figure out the paradox of insomnia after the pandemic. Sixty percent of the participants in our study remarked that their sleep patterns have changed. The highest rate belongs to the unemployed people (81%), employees

on leave (79%), students (75%) and home office workers (65%). People who did not work in this period didn't have to wake up early in the morning as they usually do. They also experience intensive anxiety due to economic ambiguity which is one of the main reasons of insomnia. Similarly, students' sleep patterns have changed as well. They didn't go to school during the pandemic and experienced great uncertainty about their future, but they spent a lot of time watching TV series, and used social media most of the day. Although home office workers woke up at about eight in the morning and started to work early, they indicated that their sleep patterns changed due to high anxiety, heavy workload, and late-night bedtime. Twenty-one percent of home office workers slept at midnight; 11% at 1 am; 13% stated that they slept at 2 am, and 12% at 3 am.

Our research shows average wake-up time was 8 am, and bedtime was midnight before the coronavirus. In the quarantine days, wake-up time was recorded as 8.30 am and bedtime as 1 am. It is a well-known fact that the biggest change occurred in young people. Young people and students woke up at 11 a.m. and slept at 2 a.m. Their concerns were not only about being in lockdown, yet, it is more related to having financial independence, being able to find a job or continuing to school during the pandemic.

According to Xiao and his team, who studied sleep quality in China in January and February 2020, 'levels of anxiety were significantly associated with the levels of stress, which negatively impacted self-efficacy and sleep quality' (Xiao and others, 2020). Xiao and his team tried to assess the relationship between social capital and sleep quality in self-isolated individuals. The data of the survey established that people who have contact with friends, family, co-workers, and organisations felt less anxiety during Covid-19 and had less sleeping disorders. The cause of anxiety is often unpredictable. The news of *Health Magazine* comments that coronavirus anxiety can lead to insomnia (Gillespie, 2020).

c. Daily Activities and Increased Use of Social Media

Millions of people stayed at home, whether mandatorily or willingly due to reasons mentioned above for almost three months. How they spend their time at home during pandemic bears significance for their body and mental health. Seventy-six percent of the participants say that they often spend time with their families. Different studies show that staying at home during the pandemic affects family relationships both positively and negatively. Has the relationship amongst family members affected positively? The study revealed that cooperation at home strengthens family relationships. On the other hand, Turkey also showed an increase in domestic violence against women such as many other countries in quarantine (Mert, 2020).

Since Covid-19 is an infectious disease that has no vaccine yet, people are more sensitive about hygiene. Wearing masks, washing hands frequently and consuming cleansing products such as disinfectants/colognes are the primary measures to prevent the disease from spreading. The second most common activity is house cleaning, and it increases in the age group between 36 and 55, unemployed people and housewives. Fifty-four percent of the participants affirmed that they do house cleaning very often, and 26% claimed to do it occasionally.

The third most common activity is social media usage with an increasing number in 54% of the participants in Turkey. The highest use of social media occurs in young people between the ages of 18 and 25, and adults over 56. Due to social distancing, people have had the need to communicate via social media accounts. According to the *New York Times*, usage of Facebook has increased by 27%, Netflix has increased by 16%, and YouTube by 15.3% (Koeze and Popper, 2020). On the other hand, business, education, and social life had to adapt to online systems instantly. The use of online meeting applications, such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype, WebEx and FaceTime has become widespread across the world. The usage of Zoom increased 30 times in April, with more than 300 million daily users, and the transition from a free version to premium memberships increased three times (Sherman, 2020).

We asked participants how they spend their day, and their answers can be seen in the table below. People in Turkey have focused on family relationships, used social media, watched TV series/movies, cleaned up their homes, and baked. On the contrary, the least common activities were sleeping, reading books, and doing sports.

Table 3: How do you spend your time at home?

Young people (high school seniors and university students between the ages of 18 and 25) expressed that most common activities they did were spending time on social media (68%), watching TV series/movies (60%), helping with cleaning and chores (47%), and sleeping (40%). In March, the distance learning model was introduced in partnership with the Ministry of National Education, the Higher Education Council, universities, schools, and various education institutes. However, the rapid transition from face-to-face learning to online learning in addition to the lack of time to prepare the necessary infrastructure has caused some issues of adaptation for both students and teachers. According to our study, 41% of university students said that they participated in online classes, and 29% of them found it efficient. Whereas participation rate is 67%, and efficiency rate is 27% in high school students. The hybrid learning model combining online and traditional classrooms will soon become widespread. This learning model is crucial for especially students from other cities or abroad because of the visa issues and travel restrictions that might occur in the following semesters. Besides, considering the statistical data, efficiency seems to be a problem that universities and other schools should focus on while developing their online learning models.

d. Positive and Negative Expectations about Corona and the Post-Corona World

People from all around the world deeply felt anxiety. Uncertainty, losing jobs, economic crisis and being isolated from family and friends have caused many health problems in societies, which lead this pandemic to become an anxiety wave. The level of anxiety varies according to socio-economic class and level of educational. Sixty-eight percent of the participants with a high level of education feel anxious whereas this ratio is %64 in the level of elementary education and %48 in the level of primary education. Moreover, the number of participants who claim to be anxious is %65 in higher economic class; %58 in middle and %54 in lower economic classes. People with the highest level of anxiety are well-educated home office workers (74%) due to long working hours. Homes that became a place all for working, living, and socializing negatively affected their psychologies.

Scientific studies about the relationship between coronavirus and anxiety are being carried out by universities and various institutions worldwide. Uskudar University Epidemiologic Research Group conducted a survey with 6,318 participants, focusing on phobia and pandemic in Turkey (UU, 2020). The statistics show that uncertainty (50%) is the biggest reason of concern. In this study and that of ours, participants indicated that they feel more grateful for life than before and acknowledged the significance of things they possess. Besides, some of the important results of the corona phobia study include the increased value given to healthcare workers (82%) and the public opinion of government's control over the crisis (46%).

In these social circumstances surrounded with anxiety, understanding the normalisation period and subsequently post-corona world is as crucial as understanding the Coronavirus. Considering different pandemics like SARS and MERS spread in the 2000s, it is easy to see how global health issues will affect every aspect of life. Three thousand people participated in our study and contributed with their positive and negative expectations regarding the aftermath of the epidemic.

Seventy-eight percent of participants think the economy will deteriorate all around the world whereas 58% think that will be the case for Turkey's economy. We can observe the participants' concern on the uncertainties and negative developments in the economy considering the data retrieved. According to the news of *Anar*, "50% reported loss in their income, 36.2% stated increase in expenses, and 14.9% mentioned loss of jobs due to the pandemic." (Dokuz Sekiz News, 2020).

Sixty-five percent of the participants emphasize that public health and psychology will deteriorate during the post-corona period. Numerous reasons, such as social isolation, hygiene, constantly wearing masks, staying away from family and friends and lack of vaccination affect the psychology of society. The rate of people who believe that social isolation and current measures will weaken social relations among people is 34%. Last of all, the other topic participants affirm their negative expectations is politics. Twenty-seven percent of them expect deterioration in world politics whereas this ratio is 22% in Turkey's politics.

Given personal comments of the participants, there are positive expectations in health, climate, nature and spirituality outshine. Seventy-five percent of the respondents say that they have higher awareness of health. In the study, 70% of the participants expect that ties amongst family members will get stronger. This expectation was the highest in low income participants (82%). Some positive expectations about the post-corona world are:

- Global environmental care will increase (61%)
- Consciousness on environmental clean-up in Turkey will increase (46%)
- Healthy eating habits will increase (30%)
- Communication among friends will get stronger (22%)
- Turkey will have positive changes in terms of politics (10%)

Conclusions

Pandemics are large-scale outbreaks of infectious disease that have occurred throughout history and appear to be increasing in frequency in the near future. As the third global crisis of

the 21st century, Covid-19 has a much greater potential to cause devastating social, economic and political damages that may create longstanding and deep scars within the society than the other crises. Although the swift actions against the pandemics imposed by the Turkish governments have been effective so far, still there are a lot of uncertainties and unknowns, which have a negative impact on our daily lives.

Our study shows how the pandemic changed our behavioural routines and spread fear and anxiety among people across the country. According to our research it is evident that the decision to “stay” or “not stay at home” is not a personal choice, but mostly an indicator of people’s socio-economic class. As many people have become unemployed during the lockdowns, and the economy was halted for months, economic concerns are becoming more salient. However, the impacts go beyond economic problems, influencing people’s well-being, and creating an enormous negative pressure on both their social life and their mental health.

In the absence of a vaccine, the pandemic builds its new normal by transforming our daily lives and forcing people indoors. The survey shows us that more than half of the respondents have changed their eating habits. According to the data there is an increase of homemade recipes, and people used this new opportunity to improve their healthy cooking skills and eating together with the family. In fact, the ones who began to eat less during the pandemic are not on a diet, rather they are less paid workers or jobless people, and they lack money to pay for more food.

Like eating habits, sleeping patterns have also changed. According to the survey, 60% of the respondents confirmed that their optimal wake and sleep times are shifted more than 1 hour later. The adolescents and students are the most affected groups. Having spent more time on social media, house cleaning, watching TV since the outbreak of the pandemic are some other findings. As people have more time to spend at home, housework is more common for all ages. The survey, in general, shows us that the data are very similar with the surveys that were done in other countries. People under the suppression of global crises act in similar behavioural patterns.

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