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The Effect of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Mindfulness of Women Academics: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19, which turned into a global pandemic, has spread worldwide in a short time and adversely affected individuals and countries economically, socially, and psychologically; academics are not an exception to this situation. Academics are one of the groups that feel the situation most clearly in this period. This study aims to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mindfulness of women academics. The study employed the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, to understand the experiences of women academics more deeply. The study group of the research consisted of 11 women academics who were selected using the criterion sampling method to achieve the maximum diversity in working in state and private universities with different titles. Due to the difficulties caused by the pandemic in conducting face-to-face meetings, the data were collected through semi-structured online interviews that lasted almost 45-50 minutes. The study's main question was "What are the family, work, and personal life experiences of women academics from a mindfulness perspective during the COVID-19 pandemic?" Phenomenological analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. According to findings, two main points emerged about the structure and essence of the phenomenon: Cognitive and emotional, and they were divided into sub-dimensions as pre- COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 periods. The results detailed the impact of women academics' experiences during the COVID-19 process on their mindfulness.

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Keywords:

Women academics, mindfulness, COVID-19, phenomenological study

1. Introduction

In December, 2019, a pathogen was identified and named as 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19). COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide in a short time and negatively affected individuals and countries economically, socially, and psychologically. Each country has taken different measures and restrictions to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in the late 2019 (Bonaccorsi et al., 2020; Han et al., 2020; Koh, 2020). First of all, it is necessary to give a summary of COVID-19 process in Turkey to understand the multifaceted effects of it. The first coronavirus case in Turkey was detected in March 2020. According to the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health (2021), in June 2021, more than 5 million people had been infected up to that time and approximately 50 thousand people had died. Following the outbreak of the first case in March 2020, face-to-face education in schools and services in public places were suspended, and travel restrictions were imposed. Stay-at-home restrictions and lockdowns started in April 2020, and at the end of May 2020, the restrictions were lifted during the "controlled social life" period. Face-to-face education was gradually started in primary and secondary schools in October 2020. However, with the increasing number of cases, face-to-face education was again suspended in November 2020, and distance education was resumed. In December 2020 curfew

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restrictions were imposed again (Sert-Karaaslan, 2021). In March 2021, the gradual transition to face-to-face education was started again, but in April 2021, it was returned to distance education with a rapidly increasing number of cases. In May 2021, restrictions reached the strictest level with a 17-day lockdown. As of June 2021, gradual normalization started and face-to-face education started in schools until July 2, 2021. Between March 2020 and June 2021, universities always continued their educational activities through distance education.

Women academics are one of the groups apparently influenced by the conditions that the pandemic caused (Deryugina et al., 2021; Minello, 2020; Oleschuk, 2020; Parlak et al., 2021; Pinho-Gomes et al., 2020; Tasci, 2021; Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). With the COVID-19 pandemic, the sudden change in the system caused the transition to distance education and learning, more time was spent on house chores and on child and elderly care, the psychological health needs of students and faculty increased, and the time available for academic studies decreased (Deryugina et al., 2021; Minello, 2020).

During hard times like the COVID-19 pandemic, mindfulness is an important concept that enables a person to observe without judgment (Belen, 2021). The most commonly used definition of mindfulness is a state of awareness that emerges through paying purposeful and non-judgmental attention to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4). Mindfulness refers to a personal attitude of being aware of and open to what is happening here and now (Brown & Ryan, 2003). With a receptive and non-judgmental attitude towards present experiences, including feelings, cognitions, sensation, mindful people can bring experiences to awareness.

Mindfulness has been described and studied as a state that means a momentary condition (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and a stable trait (Bishop et al., 2004). According to Brown and Ryan (2003) considering it a state, mindfulness is inherently a state of consciousness enhancing attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality, like eating a meal with full of concentration on the moment-to-moment taste experiences and also being aware of the feeling in the stomach. Mindfulness as a state can be enhanced by interventions that conceptualize mindfulness as a set of skills that can be learned and practiced. These skills are observing, describing, acting with awareness and accepting without judgment (Baer et al., 2004). The interventions include mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 1982), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) (Segal et al., 2002), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) (Linehan, 1993), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) (Hayes et al., 1999).

A common point of all the conceptualizations of mindfulness is that mindfulness is bringing the mind kindly to where the body is and consists of cognitive and emotional dimensions (Baer et al., 2006; Bishop et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2009). The cognitive dimension includes paying attention to what is happening now, observing emotions and thoughts, and being aware of bodily sensations. In contrast to mindfulness, behaving mechanically without awareness of one's actions is called automatic pilot (Segal et al., 2002). The emotional dimension refers to accepting all emotions without trying to change them and being non-judgmental towards feelings and thoughts. It also requires being kind, compassionate, and open towards all emotions.

Holas and Jankowski (2013) proposed a cognitive model of mindfulness which emphasizes executive functions and attentional processes, which are of great importance in initiating and maintaining a state of mindfulness. Studies show that mindfulness meditation practices support the development of two facets of executive cognition. The first is sustained attention which is the ability to focus attentional resources on specific stimuli in a sustained manner. The second is attention switching which refers to the capacity to voluntarily shift the focus of attention between stimuli (Chambers et al., 2008). Mindfulness training are associated with considerable improvements in selective and executive attention and unfocused sustained attention abilities (Chiesa et al., 2011). They also enhance emotion regulation, including reduced intensity of distress and negative self-referential processing, increased emotional recovery and ability to engage in goal-directed behaviors (Roemer et al., 2015).

Mobility restrictions, stay-at-home restrictions, lockdowns, online education, social distancing, isolation, quarantine, and all of the precautions for the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed daily routines and adversely affected women, particularly working ones. During this coronavirus time, schools and universities

shut down. Different kinds of working arrangements like flexible working and working from home were implemented. In sum, all family members had to stay at home during the periods when strict measures were taken. With the loss of childcare and the changing working conditions, new demands arose, and the domestic workload of women increased (Minello et al., 2020; Petts et al., 2020; Parlak et al., 2021; Wenham et al., 2020). As a result of gender inequalities in-home responsibilities, women's academic productivity and scientific output were affected more negatively (Deryugina et al., 2021; Gabster et al., 2020; Tasci, 2021; Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2020). Studies showed that women submitted proportionally fewer manuscripts than men during the COVID-19 lockdown months (Squazzoni et al., 2020; Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2020). Besides academic disadvantages, all these changes and responsibilities required focusing attention on multiple tasks, which may have caused an increase in stress, anxiety, and emotional difficulties (Kumar & Nayar, 2020; Wielgus et al., 2020).

The purpose of the current study is to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on different parts of the lives of women academics from a mindfulness perspective. Different parts of their lives include family, work, and personal life experiences. By comparing their pre-Covid and post-Covid lives, the study focuses on how the pandemic made a difference in their lives in relation the concept of mindfulness. For this purpose, the study employed the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods. The phenomenological approach is a method that will help to get a deeper understanding of the effects of the pandemic. The current study will answer the following question: "What are the family, work, and personal life experiences of women academics from a mindfulness perspective during the COVID-19 pandemic?"

The research was carried out by a group consisting of 11 female academics. These women were chosen for the study group in such a way as to acquire the most possible diversity in terms of their positions at public and private universities, as well as the various titles they held. In most of studies, mindfulness is assessed via self-report questionnaires (Baer et al., 2006). However, qualitative interview data can be valuable sources of information about one's mindfulness, considering that it is a subjective phenomenon having different types (Grossman, 2011; Sauer et al., 2013). Thus, the interview technique was preferred as the data collection technique in the current study.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Model

In this study, the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods was used to understand more deeply the experiences of women academics regarding the impact of the COVID-19 phenomenon on mindfulness (Creswell, 2013). Because the objective of phenomenology is to comprehend human experience, it is anticipated that the phenomenological approach will aid in gaining a deeper understanding of the pandemic's consequences (van Manen, 2007).

2.2. Research Sample

The sociodemographic characteristics of the participant are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participant*

Participant Female (PF)	Age -Title	Research Area	University	Marital Status	Children
PF-1	43-Prof.	Physics Engineering	Public	Married	2
PF-2	43-Prof.	Mathematics	Public	Single	-
PF-3	33- Ass. Prof.	Marketing	Private	Married	2
PF-4	37- Assoc. Prof.	Education	Private	Single	
PF-5	34- Ass. Prof.	Education	Public	Single	
PF-6	34- Ass. Prof.	History of Science	Private	Single	-
PF-7	38 Ass. Prof.	Business	Public	Married	1
PF-8	36- Ass Prof.	Law	Private	Single	-
PF-9	42 Assoc. Prof.	Medicine	Public	Single	-
PF-10	35- Ass. Prof.	Economy	Private	Single	-
PF-11	48- Prof.	Education	Private	Married	2

The current study's participants were determined using the criterion sampling method (Creswell 2013). The

study group of the research consisted of 11 women academics who were selected in such a way as to achieve maximum diversity in terms of working in state and private universities with different titles. When the participants' demographic information is examined, it is seen that maximum diversity was achieved in terms of university, title, age and research area. Research participants are 11 women between the ages of 33 and 48 (see Table 1).

2.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

Firstly, each interviewee was contacted by e-mail and asked to participate. All the contacted academics agreed to participate, and the interviews were scheduled online or in person. Secondly, the authors conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews that lasted about 20-70 minutes. Finally, the interviews were transcribed and submitted for the participants' approval. Approved transcripts were coded. Participants' names were coded as PF1-PF11. As a tool for collecting data, a semi-structured interview form with cognitive and emotional sub-questions about the academic women's experiences was developed in order to better comprehend the effect of the COVID-19 phenomenon on their mindfulness. The final shape of the form was then determined by an expert review.

2.4. Data Analysis

Phenomenological analysis aims to capture the essence of experience. Therefore, a phenomenological study has a unique analysis process that differs from other qualitative research designs. The general phases of phenomenological data analysis are data preparation, phenomenological reduction of the data, creative variation, and disclosure of the essence of the experience (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, to reveal the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mindfulness of women academics, the interview audio recordings that constituted the research data were first transcribed and made ready for analysis. After this process, each interview text was read by 2 researchers to gain a holistic perspective. Then, by analyzing the interview texts, it was tried to reach the structure of the experiences of the women academics.

This study used the 'interpretive phenomenological research' design (Love et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2009). "Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a qualitative thematic approach rooted in the philosophies of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography" (Love et al., 2020, p.1). "Interpretive phenomenological analysis is concerned with examining lived experience where meaning is embedded in experience (Langdrige, 2007). According to Peat et al. (2019), "the hermeneutic underpinnings of IPA offer researchers the opportunity to move beyond superficial descriptions of findings and offer insightful interpretive accounts of participants' lived experiences" (p. 9). "During the analysis process, the following four processes were followed: These are 'bracketing', 'phenomenological reduction', 'imaginary variation' and 'synthesis of meaning and essences' (Giorgi, 2009). While reading the interview texts, efforts were made not to affect the data analysis as much as possible by the researcher's knowledge, thoughts, prejudices, and values. In the phenomenological reduction process, the expressions used by the women academics to describe their experiences were divided into different units according to the meanings they contain and the nuances between these meanings. While making the imaginary variety, the hidden meanings were revealed by going deep into the experiences of the women academics. As a result of this process, meaning units and structural profiles were created based on the expressions used by each participant. The final phase of the analysis identified common themes and demonstrated the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic on the mindfulness of female academics. One's experience with the phenomenon and how the meaning is formulated from it can be understood through interpretation. Phenomenological data analysis in this study helped us better grasp the experiences of academic women in this regard.

2.5. Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Istanbul 29 Mayıs University (Approval code: 2021/03).

3. Findings

As a result of the analysis of the research data, in line with the opinions of the women academics participating in the study, two main points emerged about the structure and essence of the phenomenon: Cognitive and

emotional, and they were divided into sub-dimensions as pre- COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 periods (Figure 1.).

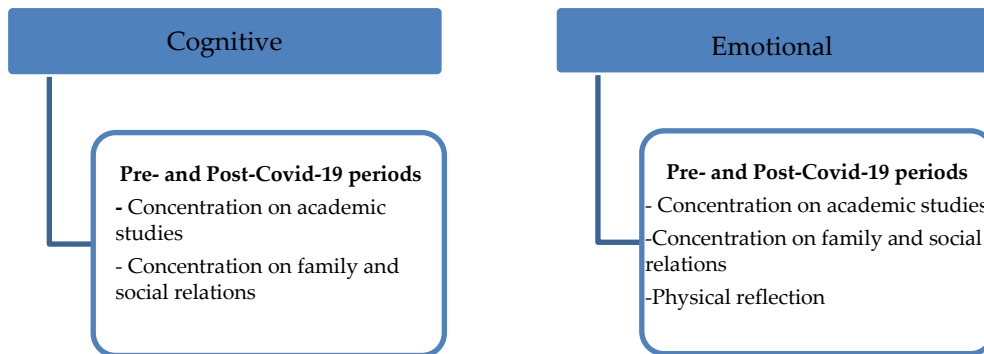


Figure 1. Cognitive and Emotional Dimensions

3.1. Cognitive Dimension

When the cognitive levels of the points the women academics concentrated on during the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods were examined, it was discovered that four of the women academics did not feel any difference in terms of concentrating on their courses, and that these four women academics spent a very fruitful period in terms of their academic studies. As a result, it was understood that these four women academics did not experience problems at the cognitive level.

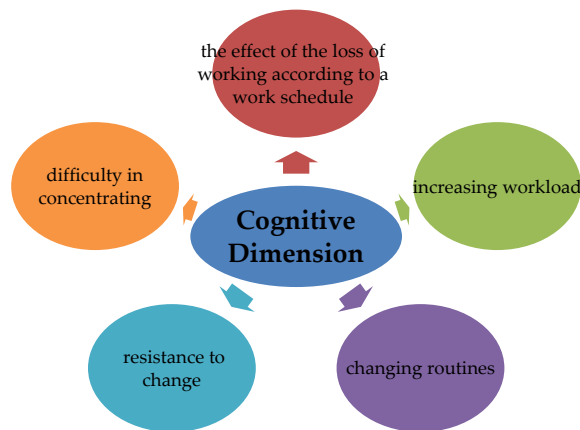


Figure 2. Cognitive Dimension

3.1.1. Focus on Academic Studies

When the cognitive level of the points the women academics concentrated on during the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods were compared, it was discovered that four of the women academics felt no difference in their ability to concentrate on their courses and that these four women academics had a very productive period in terms of their academic studies.. As a result, it was understood that these four women academics did not experience problems at the cognitive level.

For example, participant PF-1 expresses the effect of the process on her academic life as follows:

It didn't make much of a difference to me. That is, in terms of teaching my lessons, it is of course much more difficult to teach online. Because there is no student in front of you; communication and interaction are much less. It's much more difficult, but I didn't have a problem concentrating. I mean, I can concentrate in the same way as I could before (PF-1).

On the other hand, 7 women academics stated that they had problems concentrating on their lessons and that they spent a lot of time especially trying to adapt to this new form of teaching and to prepare mentally and felt incompetent in the process of using technology in the lessons. Among the problems experienced, tension, uncertainty, lack of concentration, negligence, academic inefficiency, and unwillingness are the most

emphasized ones. For example, participant PF-8 expresses the negative impact of the process on her academic life as follows:

Working from home has made me unproductive... I can't concentrate on my academic works. I can't do research. I'm tired of trying to work at the same desk all the time without communicating. We are always at home...even though we spend time with each other, I feel psychologically burnt out. I am no longer sufficient in terms of love and patience... (PF-8).

Similarly, PF-7 expresses the problems experienced in the academic adaptation process as follows:

Since I was not used to working from home, it took me a long time to concentrate and adapt to this process. Think about it; you suddenly switch to online education... You have neither material preparation nor mental preparation... I did not know what to do for a while. In terms of curriculum, I was not prepared for online education. I like teaching interactively. The university student needs to take part in this process, participate in the discussions in the class; it is necessary to encourage the student to think. Otherwise, university education will not reach its goal. Therefore, I have tried many methods and techniques to involve students in the lesson and to attract their attention. But you know, when resistance to change was strong, I felt exhausted from time to time. I couldn't concentrate (PF-7).

One participant (PF-6), on the other hand, expresses the repercussions of the tension experienced in this process as follows:

If we consider the whole process, we were all at home at the beginning of the quarantine, and the education of the children, my daughter who goes to primary school, naturally caused a lot of tension. While we all were working in separate rooms, we also tried to help our daughter concentrate. That is, you should not only struggle to concentrate but also help your children concentrate. And of course, this also made it difficult for me to concentrate, why, because you need to handle more things, you have more things to think about. Before Corona, I didn't have to think about such things (PF-3).

Another participant states that it reduces academic productivity as follows:

In my academic life, I had problems in continuing the lessons effectively and in the process of continuing my research. In fact, at the beginning of the pandemic, I could not do anything in March-April. I guess I was shocked. I had to suspend my academic studies with the feeling of having given up on life. This was also reflected in lessons. I was very reluctant in teaching my lessons. The students did not show any interest in the lesson anyway. We've been mutually unproductive (PF-9).

A participant, different from the other participants, stated that online meetings increased the workload due to the removal of the boundaries between academic life and private life:

Before the pandemic, we were meeting and interacting face-to-face. Until June 1, we started to meet on zoom, online platforms this time ... it was okay that the meetings were from zoom but too much, but it was the thing that made it difficult for me was the request for meeting on Zoom regardless of time such as 19:00, 18:00, 20:00, 22:00.... It took much time and exhausted me. I am not complaining, just I mean it was different. My workload increased. Sometimes I said, "put on your pyjamas, take your tea at home, go to the computer, teach your lesson, but no". It was difficult. Most of the time, I connected at university. My workload increased a lot (PF-2).

Regarding academic life, one participant describes whether the factors affecting her ability to focus on her work are related to thoughts about the corona or the work itself. *For example, doing the job online or preparing for an online lesson. This is naturally related to the conditions of the pandemic. When the pandemic is over, I think that working online will also be over. I do not think that my relations have been affected much. The pandemic does not affect me in a catastrophic manner. I think I am only affected in terms of my working and social environment, so I can't say more about it (PF-6).*

For example, a participant explains the reason for going to the office to increase her academic concentration as follows:

One of the reasons why I do this is because the home environment has changed. Before the pandemic, home was a quieter place. Now the house is more crowded because some of the family members are also not working, they are also working from home. I don't have children, but we live as an extended family, so there are often children at home... Thus, the people at home affect my concentration negatively. The house is now a disturbing place; on the contrary, in my office at the university, there is no noise, because there is nobody at the university, so I sometimes work in my office from morning to evening. Now this is a better place to concentrate as it's away from unnecessary socialization activities.... That is, my office replaced my home (PF-6).

3.1.2. Concentrating on Family Relations

When the cognitive level of the points that women academics focused on during the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods were compared, it was discovered that nine of the women academics had difficulties concentrating on family relations, while two did not. *I didn't have any problems in my family relations ... my kids are big; they can take care of themselves. They can follow their own internet lessons. Thus, I also don't have to monitor or supervise them ... The pandemic process is difficult for everyone, it's hard for me too, but I didn't have any personal problems (PF-1).*

According to PF1, the pandemic does not have a negative effect on concentration, and it even helped her to concentrate more:

I had to work more because of my administrative duty; other than this, I didn't have any problems. I mean, of course, the pandemic makes people sad and tired, I don't know, what will happen to this world, people are worried because this is the state of humanity (PF-1).

On the other hand, one of the participants (PF-11) stated that while the COVID-19 process had a positive contribution to family and social relations at the beginning, the same positive contribution was terminated with the prolongation of the process; on the contrary, they now experience conflict in family relations:

I have positive and negative experiences in terms of family relations and social relations because the COVID-19 process has contributed to me like this: First of all, we had the opportunity to spend more quality time with my children. In the beginning, the children were happy. However, as time went by, 3-4 months later, both I wanted to go to work and the children wanted to go to school due to this prolonged stay at home, inability to socialize, quarantine and restrictions. Being together constantly causes various conflicts between us (PF-11).

One of the participants (PF-6) states that the pandemic changed her habits in the process of concentrating on family life as follows:

For example, not coming to the office changed my habit of getting up early in the morning. I don't have a regular life. The habit of going to bed late at night during the quarantine periods occurred, which, for example, disrupted my routines a lot. For the first few months, when that whole country was 'home, I thought I wasn't affected. I was saying it was nice to be home, it was nice to be away from people. But I was emotionally affected very much. I realized this later. I watched movies and other stuff late into the night. I watched 3-4 movies in a row in one night. That's what stuck with me. However, since childhood I was a person who went to bed early and got up early, very regularly, like a military discipline. My mealtimes were fixed. What I would do in my life was certain (PF-6).

3.2. Emotional Dimension

When the emotional effects on women academics before and after COVID-19 are examined, it is understood that the women academics do not feel any difference in terms of concentrating on their lessons, and on the other hand, they experience emotional fatigue, anxiety, and uncertainty problems.

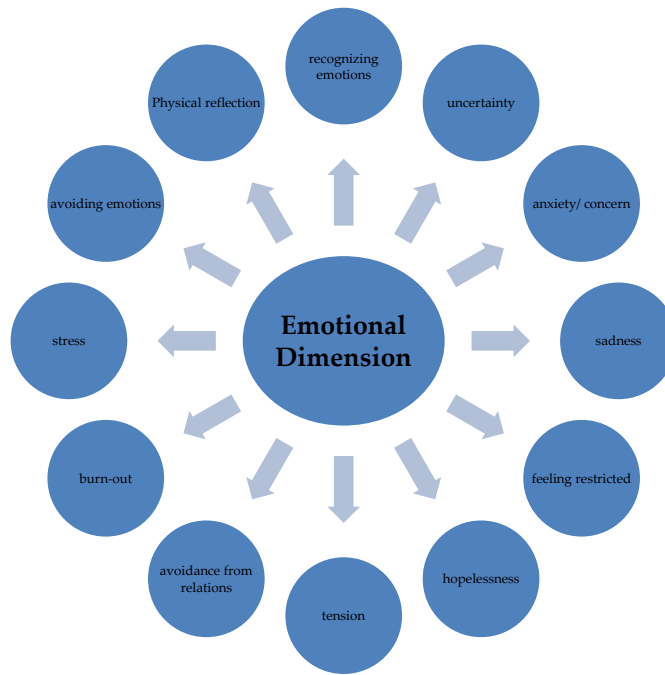


Figure 3. *Emotional Dimension*

3.2.1. Focus on Academic Studies

It is a very ambiguous process; will it always continue like this? This is emotionally tiring. Plus, we have elderly people, and we have patients. I get a little nervous when I think about them. In fact, I do not go to visit other people or if I go, I feel uneasy. Or we can't invite guests to our house. This is a huge problem, a great sadness for me. Or when we do, some of our friends do not want to come when we do, but they are right. That weakening in the social sense made me a little tired... Of course, these lockdowns are also tiring. Being at home all the time on weekends. Being anxious even when going for a walk. Will the police ask or not? These usually cause extra tiredness (PF-1).

It is seen that some participants ignore their feelings and exhibit avoidance behaviours.

... I have never experienced such a lifestyle before. I later evaluated why I did this. Later I realized that "Oh, I was actually very affected". Or I was more affected than I felt... an escape ... This is a serious waste of time for my disciplined life. Right now, for example, I have limited it because I say to myself that it is harmful to me. But then, I would say these days would go by; I thought it would last just for a few months (PF-6).

On the other hand, it is seen that some participants, unlike others, recognize and accept emotions in the pandemic process and struggle hard in this process:

I can't say that I ignored my feelings; I usually shared them in online groups. After all, even though I couldn't meet physically because I was chatting with my friends or talking to my family, my mother, my father, I took these feelings out and at least it can be said that I got rid of them. But of course, that tense period went on until those kids started school, my assistant came full time to help me (PF-3).

One participant describes her feelings of academic loneliness as follows:

In this process, I became academically lonely. Not being able to attend academic congresses face-to-face, not being able to conduct face-to-face education with students, and not having intellectual discussions with colleagues reduced my intrinsic motivation and desire (PF-10).

Some participants explained that besides having an administrative duty, the irresponsible behaviours of their colleagues caused them to experience burnout syndrome as follows:

I experienced the disadvantage of being both an academic and an administrator during the pandemic process. Other academics came to the university once a week or did not come to the university for months. However, I went

almost every day. On the other hand, I tried very hard to keep the official works going. In this process, my friends made me very sad. There were those who did not respond to official emails, those who did not attend their students' thesis defenses, and those who chased after us like children. The majority of them lacked a sense of responsibility and internal discipline.... I mean, the fact that they put the burden on me because I was an administrator caused me to feel the burn-out syndrome...I you ask them, all of them complain about me...I have great difficulty in understanding. Of course, as someone who works at a private university, the attitude of the university is also important... it needs to know how to distinguish between those working and those not working... I look forward to the transition to face-to-face education (PF-11).

Some participants stated that they went to the office during the pandemic due to their administrative duties and this extra workload negatively affected their academic productivity:

The decrease in my academic productivity is not related to the pandemic, but to my administrative duty. Maybe holding meetings on zoom those evenings ... My administrative duty took my much time; thus, it affected my academic work a little negatively, but it's not about the pandemic (PF-2).

3.2.2. Concentrating on Family Relations

One of the emotional reflections of the pandemic on the women academics is the mother role coming to the fore; it is seen that the concerns about children's education increased:

I didn't feel much concerned about the disease because I'm not a person who feels worried a lot about such things, but because socialization is very important to me; thus, what I felt concerned about was not being able to socialize. Since going out of the house is very important to me, I felt tension and anxiety caused by staying at home. Thirdly, as a mother, I feel concerned that the child will fall behind in education, I need to spend more time with them, but at the same time I need to work. I can't spend as much time with the child as a normal housewife. There have been concerns caused by this (PF-3).

3.2.3. Physical Reflection

When the emotional effects of the women academics before and after COVID-19 are examined, it is understood that women academics have got problematic eating - indirect effects (stagnancy, pain, etc. caused by changes in working style).

As a physical reflection of the pandemic process, it is seen that some participants attempted to attain emotional satisfaction by eating more, sleeping more and that they exhibited the behavior of avoidance to get rid of their problems:

I gained a lot of weight during the COVID-19 pandemic. To be happy, I was constantly eating sweets, constantly eating... I was satisfying my emotional hunger with food. I have still this problem. Ambiguity and stress resulted in my acquiring negative behaviors such as eating and sleeping too much (PF-7).

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The present study investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mindfulness of women academics and two main points emerged about the structure and essence of the phenomenon: Cognitive and emotional, and they were divided into sub-dimensions as pre- COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 periods. As a result of this study, it is important to emphasize 3 main points:

Firstly, it is clear from these interviews that in the cognitive dimension, women academics have difficulties in focusing on the academic field and on relationships. The following points are highlighted: Difficulty in concentrating (academic tasks, relations), the effect of the loss of working according to a work schedule, increasing workload, changing routines, resistance to change. When the cognitive level of the points that women academics concentrated on during the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods were compared, it was discovered that four of the women academics did not perceive any difference in their ability to concentrate on their courses and that they had a very productive period in terms of their academic studies. As a result, it was understood that these four women academics did not experience problems at the cognitive level. On the other

hand, 7 women academics stated that they had problems concentrating on their lessons and that they spent a lot of time especially trying to adapt to this new form of teaching and to prepare mentally and felt incompetent in the process of using technology in the lessons. Among the problems experienced, tension, uncertainty, lack of concentration, negligence, academic inefficiency, and unwillingness are the most emphasized ones. As mentioned in previous studies, women academics had to postpone research and publication in this process (Parlak et al., 2021; Petts et al., 2020). When the points the women academics concentrated on during the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods were examined at the cognitive level, it was found that 9 of the women academics experienced problems in concentrating on family relations, while two did not experience any problems.

The cognitive dimension of mindfulness consists of paying attention to what is happening now (Bishop et al., 2004; Segal et al., 2002). From a mindfulness perspective (Brown & Ryan, 2003), the women academics had difficulties being aware of the moment and consciously enhancing attention to the current experiences. They struggled to prioritize both schoolwork and family obligations. However, changing work schedules, working environments, and routines, as well as increasing workloads both at work and at home, led to a lack of focus on both academic work and family relationships. During the COVID-19 pandemic, cognitive difficulties have a greater negative impact on the productivity and scientific output of female academics, especially their publishing rate (Gabster et al., 2020). Staniscuaski et al. (2020) stated that unlike academic fathers, mothers of young children for whom school has been cancelled faced with various challenging responsibilities. Gender inequality in academic work is a crucial problem in which motherhood has a major role.

Secondly, it is clear from these interviews that in the emotional dimension, women academics have difficulties in focusing on the academic field and relationships. The following points are highlighted: recognizing emotions, acceptance, uncertainty, anxiety/ concern, sadness, feeling restricted, hopelessness, tension, avoidance from relations, burn-out, stress, and avoiding emotions. When the effects on the emotional dimension are examined, it is understood that women academics do not feel any difference in terms of concentrating on their lessons but also, they experience emotional fatigue, anxiety, and uncertainty problems. Furthermore, when the effects on the physical reflections are examined, it is understood that women academics have got problematic eating -indirect effects (stagnancy, pain, etc. caused by changes in working style). Changes in the social and academic environment cause psychological and mental stress for working women (Dogra & Kaushal, 2022), especially mothers of young children (Zamarro & Prados, 2021).

From a mindfulness view, accepting all of the feelings, cognitions, and sensations without trying to change them and being non-judgmental towards them are the indicators of a mindful person; otherwise, there will be an increase in anxiety and stress (Baer et al., 2006; Bishop et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2009). Constant exposure to demanding and unrealistic expectations by one's both work environment and home environment trigger feelings of stress and reactions. The intense experience of stress negatively affects the person emotionally, physically, and cognitively (Taylor, 2006). According to the findings, the women academics experienced some negative emotions like anxiety, stress, and hopelessness during COVID-19 days and could not recognize and accept them. This may imply that changing conditions adversely affected their state mindfulness level and this negativity may have also increased their anxiety and stress level. These negative emotions and their reaction to them also had an impact on their bodies. Especially for mother ones, the concerns about children's education and the increase in their domestic responsibilities result in emotional disturbances like anxiety, stress, and burn-out feelings.

Findings also showed that the pandemic is not a homogeneous process; it has different waves (Aiello et al., 2021; Fisayo & Tsukagoshi, 2021). The beginning and later periods of the pandemic did not have similar effects. It is important to understand the psychology of pandemic. To interpret the psychology of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aiello et al. (2021) identified three distinct phases: refusal, anger and acceptance. These differences also affected the experiences of the participants. It has been observed that not only the homogeneity of the process, but also the demographic characteristics of the participants (being married, having children, living with a large family, academic title, etc.) have an impact on their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kimhi et al., 2020).

There are pandemic-related distress and related problems, including depression, anxiety etc. (Taylor, 2022).

Individuals need to cope with these difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies indicate that mindfulness training reduces stress, improves mental health, wellbeing (Gu et al., 2015; Querstret et al., 2020) and cognitive abilities (Chiesa et al., 2011). Considering the results of this study, mindfulness exercises may be helpful for women academics to cope with the cognitive and emotional effects of the pandemic. Traditional (formal) and daily (informal) forms can be practiced mindfulness exercises. Traditional practices include focusing on breath, body, sensations, sounds, feelings, and thoughts while sitting, standing, or lying down. Daily practices include eating, walking, domestic work, human relationships and doing all kinds of work with mindfulness (Stahl and Goldstein, 2010). These exercises can be helpful in recognizing, accepting, and regulating difficult emotions such as anxiety, stress, and burnout, and they can also help children pay attention so they can focus on school and family tasks.

5. Recommendations

Finally, the results of this study show that women academics who have children have problems both in their academic life and in their family relationships, both cognitively and emotionally, as mentioned by Rosenfeld and Tomiyama (2020). They showed that traditional gender roles have significantly affected family and academic life. As a result, many changes occurred in the life of academics, such as spending more time at home doing house chores, and caring for children and elderly people, so they had less time to allocate to their academic studies. Considering these are the cognitive and emotional dimensions of mindfulness, it can be claimed that these problems negatively influence their level of mindfulness.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women academics may need support as they strive to improve their roles. When this need is not supported, it may create tension and imbalance that they cannot withstand for a long time and disturb their psychological and emotional health. Mindfulness may be useful tool for managing this unstable situation. Mindful meditation, for instance, reduces depression, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, self-doubt, and anxiety (Soumya & Sathiyaseelan, 2021). The study has some limitations. Firstly, this study is a qualitative study focusing on women academics. Further studies can be conducted with women from different professions including doctors, teachers, white-collars, etc., to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on their lives from a mindfulness perspective. Secondly, the mindfulness experiences of women and male academics can be compared during the pandemic. Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies can be designed to get the big picture.

6. References

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