

# Gender and telework: Work and family experiences of teleworking professional, middle-class, married women with children during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the teleworking experiences of professional, middle-class, married women with children in Turkey in the context of Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of the study is to understand how switching to telework affected their family and work life during the Covid-19 lockdown. Semi-structured interviews were held during the lockdown measures with 18 women for this purpose. Interview questions include description of an ordinary day before and during pandemic; sharing of domestic chores by the spouses and teleworking experiences during the pandemic. A thematic analysis revealed how their work and family lives have been changed by Covid-19 lockdown. The study has revealed four major themes: women's domestic status during the pandemic, women's work status during the pandemic, status of the husband at home, and women's teleworking experiences. Findings revealed that teleworking regulations that have been implemented due to the pandemic have the risks of detaching women from professional work, precarizing their labor, and consolidating their roles as traditional housewives.

## KEYWORDS

Covid-19, gender, telework, work-life balance

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Studies on the impact of pandemics on work and family life have become crucial by the spread of the new coronavirus. Precautions against Covid-19 pandemic are now promoting new forms of work. Covid-19 pandemic has started in an era in which teleworking has already been widely practiced. We have only limited insight on how telework affects women's work-life balance.

The pandemic has changed the social life in all aspects. In most countries, distance education has started in concurrence with the shift to teleworking, along with lockdowns and social distancing regulations. Even though how men's and women's work-life balance is affected by telework is a well-studied topic in the academic literature (Holloway, 2007; Huws et al., 1996; Silver, 1993; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001), how pandemic lockdown measures affect this balance remains rather uncertain.

Teleworkers are required to work at home within social isolation. In this new environment, childcare at home and housework obligations have increased. The increased domestic workload and care-giving are partly due to the decreased opportunities for outsourcing and partly due to the urgency of many household chores as the children are obliged to stay home under pandemic measures. The question of how married women with children are affected by these new arrangements arises, taking into account the gender roles in the sharing of domestic chores. This study, adopting a *doing gender* perspective, focuses on how work and family roles of married middle-class professional women with children are affected by telework conditions under Covid-19 lockdown measures and aims to provide an insight on gender dimension of telework under lockdown measures.

This study aims to present the social implications of the Covid-19 pandemic in the field of work under pandemic conditions among middle-class families, specifically taking into account the gender dimension. The transformation of the work-life balance in the family, work, professional, and public roles of middle-class women resulting from extraordinary circumstances, Covid-19 pandemic in the given case, is brought to light. Thus, insights into how the work and family life of the working women transform along with the switch to telework in the absence of public, organizational, and family policies are provided for the literature.

## 2 | TELEWORKING AND GENDER

Even if the labor force participation of women is converging to that of men's participation in industrialized countries, the household chores are substantially still done by women (Alon et al., 2020, p. 2). Teleworking, being a flexible work arrangement, is presented as a viable solution to work-life conflict. Despite the fact that teleworking opportunities seem to be even for both genders, the statistics put forth that 63% of women prefer telecommuting while only 49% of men do (Alon et al., 2020, p. 9).

Disadvantages of teleworking for women are that they get lower-waged part-time jobs as they lack better alternatives due to their undertaking of domestic responsibilities and have the role of the primary child care taker obliged. Further, studies indicate that by the new forms of flexible work, workers get individualized, lack solidarity, self-esteem, and collective activism which have been provided by stable work relations (Greenhill & Wilson, 2006).

### 2.1 | Telework and work-family conflict

The conceptual framework for the work-family interface is considerably large. The concept of "work-family conflict," that is one of the most extensively used concepts in the field along with work-family spillover, work-family facilitation, work-family enrichment, work-family border, work-family boundary, and work-family integration, is stated as "mutually incompatible pressures from work/family roles cause inter-role conflict and make the fulfillment of either family or work expectations difficult" from the role theory viewpoint (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77).

While some studies on telework reveal positive outcomes in terms of work-life balance, a plethora of studies indicate negative effects for women due to the fact that telework strengthens gender stereotypes. Sullivan and Lewis (2001) construct two models of arguments regarding these positive and negative impacts: flexibility model and exploitation model. The former model includes findings that telework presents opportunities for balancing home and work lives. The latter model, on the other hand, includes findings such that telework is a way in which women are exploited both at home and at work, socially isolated, forced to face more demands on both turfs and exposed to stricter control by their husbands (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001, p. 125).

In accordance with the first model, there are studies that have manifested positive effects of teleworking, given the increased participation of women in the workforce and of men in the household chores (Sayer, 2005) and improved company policies (Lewis, 1997). Especially women with school-aged children favor telecommuting. However, these studies that provide evidence on positive aspects of telecommuting are overshadowed by findings that teleworking intensifies work-life conflict.

A second cluster of research indicates that telework does not automatically solve women's work-family conflict; on the contrary, deepens it. The main argument of this cluster is that the effects of telework differentiate depending on gender. It was shown in the review study by Beigi and Shirmohammadi that work-family conflict experiences differ on the basis of gender and that one of the factors that makes this conflict harder for women is the parenting role, whereas work-family conflict, even free of this factor, varies across genders (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017, p. 391).

This second cluster of research has come up with the following line of findings about how telework contributes to the intensification of work-family conflict for the women: Flexible work arrangements aggravate work-family conflict by consolidating traditional family roles of women (Connell, 2004; Estes et al., 2007), do not result in the expected shortening of time allocated to domestic chores (Alon et al., 2020; Everingham, 2002; Hochschild, 1989; Silver & Goldscheider, 1994), end in the precarization of female employment (Standing, 1989), and do not affect male and female employees in the same way (Peterson & Wiens-Tuers, 2014; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001).

The cause of work-family conflict experienced by women is attributed to the additive effects of teleworking on workload and domestic chores (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018). The conflict may result in a position that women make more effort to build and maintain a balance between professional and domestic identities (Nippert-Ing, 1995) and experience tension between them (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). Consequently, as stated by Hilbrech et al. (2008), telework is practiced as a way of extending women's traditional domestic roles and responsibilities.

As the studies reveal, telework, despite being a system with the great potential of balancing work and family, fails to satisfy the expectations when gender roles are disregarded. Wilson and Greenhill (2004, p. 21) indicate that telework is presented as a quick solution to adapt to the uncertainties in contemporary risk societies and that this solution is implemented at the expense of women's working lives being shaped by home responsibilities. These consequences are expected to be more severe under the circumstances of pandemic-influenced extraordinary work and life arrangements which women do not have access to mediating mechanisms to reconcile occupational and domestic spheres such as granny care for children while they work or paid housekeeping labor due to strict to pandemic measures.

### 3 | PANDEMICS AND TELEWORK

There have been several pandemic outbreaks since the last century, such as H1N1, H1N5, Zika virus, HIV, SARS, and MERS. The latest pandemic, Covid-19 started at the end of 2019 and has had unprecedented global effects in 2020 when this article is written. Precautions for this outbreak have major educational, occupational, familial, and public outcomes. The precautions in Turkey include shifting school education to distance education, work on site to work at home, social isolation measures, national curfews for particular age groups (18 and below, 65 and above). These regulations would lead to all care work and chores to be carried out at the isolated home sphere. It is still

unknown how these chores and work are exactly carried out by males and females of a household during this isolation. The effects of household arrangements in such extraordinary situations on the work-life balance in Turkey have not been thoroughly studied.

Research on economic crisis show that in such extraordinary phases, the outsourcing of domestic chores and care-giving, that are traditionally perceived to be women's responsibilities, has diminished considerably, thereby increasing workload of the women (Floro et al., 2009; Seguino, 2009). Studies focusing on the extraordinary situations that arise due to pandemics have similarly found that isolation practices have more serious effects on women (Davies & Bennett, 2016; Harman, 2016). Davies and Bennett (2016) have shown that women had more severe problems than men, due to the limited access to health care services, and due to social and economic deprivation during the Zika and Ebola epidemics. Harman (2016) has determined that family systems depended upon women's invisible household efforts during the Ebola crisis.

The issues indicated by the previous research on epidemics give a clue on what we can expect to experience in the current Covid-19 pandemic. However, unlike Zika and Ebola epidemics, Covid-19 pandemic has affected developed world as seriously as the rest of the world and hit middle-classes as well as working class households in many countries.

#### 4 | WOMEN AND WORK IN TURKEY

Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted dual earning middle-class families' access to outsourced domestic services. Given the disruption of the normally outsourced services of house cleaning, childcare in the house and kindergarten services in these households, both the domestic chores and paid work, are carried out at home. There are very few clues that this increased load in the household carried equally by men and women. Especially in Turkey, in ordinary daily life, women take a disproportionate share of the domestic duties and spend 261 min per week versus men's 21 min, thus Turkey is one of the countries in OECD where domestic work is unequally undertaken by genders (OECD, 2016).

Female employment rate in Turkey is lower when compared to OECD countries. Labor force participation rate of women in OECD countries is 52.5%, whereas the rate in Turkey is 34.2% (OECD, 2018). It is indicated that (Toksöz, 2014, p. 39), among the employed, professional and semi-professional occupational groups, office and customer service work are the main areas that female employees have a higher ratio than males and on the rise. There is a relatively high rate of women employed in white collar jobs, first and foremost in the public sector.

Just as in the world (Budig & England, 2001), there is a motherhood penalty and having a child leads to lower wages in Turkey. This penalty is about 1% in some countries like Canada and it gets as high as 30% in Turkey (ILO, 2018). The most important reason for the nonparticipation of women in the labor force in Turkey is the personal and family responsibilities (EUROSTAT, 2019). White-collar middle-class women generally use the mechanisms of hiring a nanny, getting their mothers take care of grandchildren and employing a house cleaner to clear these hurdles (Aycan, 2004).

The work-family conflict of the working women is a valuable indicator of the deep roots of traditional gender roles in the Turkish culture. Family, "reinforces the separation between sexes by the clear sex typing of traditional male and female work roles" (Sunar & Fişek, 2005, p. 16). The core of this segmentation is based on whether the roles are built upon domestic labor. The role of women is mainly recognized as the undertaker of the domestic labor. Even in modern urban families, "there is no decrease in the traditional domestic expectations of women because of employment, regardless of the status of the job" (Sunar & Fişek, 2005, p. 16). The evident reflection of this result is the conflicts between domestic and occupational roles of women.

In Turkey, where working hours are the highest among OECD countries and the ratio of the time that women spend for domestic chores is in the highest three countries in OECD (OECD, 2016) and carry the biggest part of domestic burden, how quarantine and lockdown measures affect their work and family routine is a particularly

important question. As the working women with children are seriously overloaded with the double shift; having children at home, being unable to get help with the domestic chores, being unable to take children to the grandparents' due to the social isolation, there is the risk that the second shift becomes a heavy burden.

When the pandemic reached Turkey on March 11, 2020, schools were immediately shut down and distance education was started, lockdown was enforced for persons above 65 years of age, work that can be carried out via communication technologies was switched to teleworking, and subsequently a lockdown for persons below 20 years of age was implemented. Following these measures, the question arises as to how women, who are subject to discrimination in the working life due to motherhood and who take most of the responsibility of the traditional domestic workload that has multiplied under the conditions of the pandemic, along with the assistive intermediary mechanisms being omitted, setup the work-life balance.

This study aims to discover the telework experiences of middle-class women who are married with children in the pandemic lockdown period in Turkey.

## 5 | TELEWORK-FAMILY CONFLICT THROUGH DOING GENDER PERSPECTIVE

*Doing gender* perspective, that has developed by the leading research of West and Zimmerman (1987) and has been positioned in the patriarchal power structure by the contributions of Butler (1990, 2004), focuses on the issue of how gender is performed depending on the social constructs in professional and organizational research. According to this approach, gender comprises of roles that we learn and internalize through interactions in the organized social constructs. Systems like education, family, and work organizations are the centers of gendering practices.

A number of studies have focused on gendering practices in work organizations (Billing, 2011; Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Gherardi, 1994; Kelan, 2010; Martin, 2001, 2003, 2006). These studies have revealed how gender stereotypes are created and protected (Billing & Alvesson, 2000), how male norm is established (Billing, 2011), and how gender roles are reproduced in the daily communication practices in workplace relationships (Martin, 2006) in formal organizations. As for contrasting mechanisms, there are also studies that point to the possibility of “undoing gender” in organizations (Deutsch, 2007; Kelan, 2010; Martin, 2003, 2006).

Literature about flexible work arrangements delving into the gender practices in organizations indicates that despite the fact that flexibility presents opportunities, telework does not have an improving effect on gender stereotypes (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Several studies have revealed how traditional gender roles are kept intact in the family as well as in work organizations (Deutsch, 2007; Halleröd, 2005). The research supports the conclusion that telework strengthens gender stereotypes by providing a continuity between home and work and jointing the gender stereotypes in both mediums (Haddon & Silverstone, 1993; Phizaklea & Wolkowitz, 1995). From this point of view, telework does not directly resolve work-family conflict. The reason for this phenomenon is that during telework, traditional gender roles are reproduced by the mechanisms of childcare, domestic labor, gendered family structures, gendered time use (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017).

Culturally it becomes possible for women to start working by negotiating gender roles and undoing gender. In urban middle-class Turkish households where the traditional gender roles are currently negotiated, the soft power driving these negotiations include getting childcare assistance from grandmothers through the family network and getting paid labor for childcare assistance and housework (Aycan, 2004).

Studies about flexible work arrangements frequently point to the fact that home environment has the disadvantage of reproducing traditional gender roles. However, the doing gender perspective is based upon the challenge of this process and the opportunities brought forward by the reversal of the process, as well as this reproduction, including telework conditions. As a result, the doing gender perspective presents the potential to explain the outcomes of telework in the newly formed conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic and in the absence of the aforementioned soft power, within the scope of possible transformations in the gender roles.

## 6 | RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to understand how teleworking under pandemic regulations in Turkey have influenced domestic and occupational experiences of professional, middle-class women married-with-children. Given this perspective, answers to the questions of how the workload in the context of teleworking has changed, how the domestic workload in the context of all family members staying home has changed, how and to what extent home and family chores are carried out by women, and whether this domestic burden creates a conflict with workload in the "new normal" of Covid-19 are sought. The reason for the designation of work-family conflict in this study is to reveal within a qualitative point of view how women experience this conflict by means of gender roles.

## 7 | METHOD

The *doing gender* perspective necessitates a qualitative methodology to understand the experience of telecommuting women both in the family and work life in the context of the pandemic. Based on the experience of these women, it is aimed to unveil from the women's perspective how they do and undo gender in their relationships with their husbands and children and in their occupational relationships, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, qualitative method is employed in this study. The research is aimed to determine the experience of women regarding the balancing efforts between home and work in the teleworking period necessitated by the quarantine measures and how this experience has transformed their points of view regarding family and work roles. The purpose is to discover themes for this aim.

Interviewees have been selected by purposive sampling and snowball sampling among married-with-children women with bachelor's degree who were working in middle or higher positions in various sectors, and at that time switched to teleworking. With purposive sampling, some participants have been selected from the social milieu of the researcher and the other participants have been selected via those participants by snowball sampling. Eighteen participants, in total participated in the study.

All the participants were informed about the research and that only the initials of their names will be written in the text in case of restatement and thus, they will be remain anonymous in the study. All of the participants gave consent for participation in the study. The age, profession, number and age of children, and the husbands' profession and working status have been presented in Table 1, the names of the participants having been shortened with initials of their first and last name, and the sorting is made on chronology of interviews.

Semistructured interview was selected as data-gathering technique. Interview questions focus on four issues: demographic information of the participants' household; how an ordinary day passes before and during pandemic; how domestic chores are shared by the spouses; and teleworking experiences during the pandemic.

Interviews have been carried out online with Skype software program. All of the conversations were recorded in visual and auditory forms in separate programs. All of the participants were asked to be alone and away from other family members during the interview, thus most of the participants preferred night hours when children went to sleep. The interviews were conducted between April 15, 2020 and May 8, 2020 and lasted for 37–126 min. As the normalization process had brought about the reopening of kindergartens and workplaces at the beginning of June, 2020, interviews were finalized. The recorded interviews have been decoded and put to thematic analysis.

In the process of thematic analysis, six steps of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed in order to uncover new themes. (1) Data have been read; (2) preliminary codes were created; (3) themes have been created based upon these codes; (4) themes were reread and reviewed; (5) conceptual relationships have been determined; and (6) report have been written.

Themes have been defined in three phases, after three rereadings of the decoded material and reapplication of thematic analysis. In the process of defining themes, decoded data were reviewed and the final themes were created after the logical relationships in the interviews were finalized based on the participants' expressions.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of participants and households

Participant pseudonym (age)	Occupation	Number of children (age)	Profession and working status of the husband
EF (32)	Banker	1 (3)	Engineer (telework)
SY (34)	Kindergarten teacher	1 (5)	Architect (telework)
NG (40)	Accountant	2 (10, 8)	Financial consultant (telework)
RÇ (35)	Software developer	1 (7)	Bank department head (telework and on-site work 2 days/week)
AA (36)	Lawyer	1 (7)	Lawyer (telework)
ZK (42)	Interior architect	1 (9)	Architect (telework)
HA (40)	Banker (risk management department)	1 (12)	Corporate loan officer (telework)
NY (45)	Academician	1 (11)	Engineer (telework)
GE (47)	Teacher	2 (14, 9)	Assistant principal (telework)
BK (32)	Architect	1 (4)	Special education specialist (telework)
BS (38)	Graphic designer	1 (9)	Risk manager (office work)
EZ (47)	Engineer	2 (13, 11)	Engineer (telework)
CA (32)	Social media consultant	1 (5)	IT officer (telework)
EV (43)	System analyst	1 (15)	Bank co-director (telework and on-site work 3 days/week)
FA (39)	Dentist	2 (9, 7)	Doctor (Stays at a hotel near the hospital, due to the risk of virus)
KT (40)	Human resources specialist	2 (14,11)	Bank department head (telework and on-site work 3 days/week)
DA (38)	Specialist in governmental office	2 (10,8)	Specialist in international organization (telework)
NZ (31)	Environmental engineer	1 (3)	Mechanical engineer (telework)

## 8 | FINDINGS

Findings of the study revealed four themes on (1) women's domestic status during the pandemic; (2) women's work status during the pandemic; (3) status of the husband at home; and (4) women's teleworking experiences. First of all, the participants expressed their experiences on how their domestic status changed by the Covid-19 regulations.

### 8.1 | Centralization of Women's domestic status

Most of the women express unreservedly that they have taken more responsibilities at home due to the whole family being in lockdown. The greatest burden is the increased hygiene control.

KT: "The company I work for immediately switched to teleworking. So, I've been at home, haven't even been out for grocery shopping, I called in. I am a very strict person when it comes to hygiene rules... My husband commutes [to work]; although he is clean, he is not as strict as I am. Now there are

the kids, they cannot comprehend the virus, the disease. At the beginning of the pandemic, I was very rigid; I gave all of them them spray cologne, like giving them a lunchbox and told them to spray it to their hands whenever they go out. I mounted instructions on the front door; about taking off shoes, about sanitizing hands before getting in and so on. I checked them every time they come home. But I was exhausted after 10 or 15 days; the kids were fed up, husband got tense, saying I was all over them all the time.”

FA: “Beforehand the kids were at school and Y [husband] was at the hospital. We could only come together on three evenings. A cleaning lady came once a week. Now she doesn't. Y was assigned to Covid ward, and he stays at a hotel nearby the hospital so as not to carry home the virus. Now children are with me all the time. As I had to close my clinic due to the virus, I'm at home; otherwise I wouldn't be able to take care of them. But I'm anxious, because it's really hard to take care of two children. ‘Wash your hand! Has it been 20 seconds?’ or ‘Do not put those shopping bags on the counter before wiping!’, ‘Don't touch your mask!’ I check them. We talk on the phone with Y [husband], I tell him about how the day was and he is like ‘Congratulations, I see you are promoted to coordinatorship!’.”

Although the hygiene concerns seem to increase domestic chores, it is also evident that lockdown in a way lightens the domestic workload. Around 2 weeks after the countermeasures have started to be implemented, especially the domestic routines of women changed and workload was reorganized. For instance, BK says “The domestic chores got lightened, that's a fact. Because there are no visitors, not even neighbours come in. So we clean and tidy house less often. I don't fuss much. Actually I feel even more relaxed than normal times.”

Some participants indicate they are actually find these regulations more convenient. For example, SY says:

“It was hard to leave D [daughter] to the babysitter and leave home [before the pandemic]. Now we cook and watch movies together. Sometimes we take D to the playground in our residential area. Except of the fear of the virus, I'm actually fine now. I'm ok with my work deadlines; we don't have too strict work routine in public sector to tell the truth. I find it difficult now to commute to work.”

Many participants like SY expressed that they would prefer teleworking, if they would chose. Women mentioned that a relaxed time routine, being with the children and less physical efforts makes telework attractive for them. However, participants also indicated that the extra time remained to themselves by teleworking is substantially spent for child care, not for career goals or individual needs.

## 8.2 | Drifting apart from paid work

As stated above, many women had a positive attitude on working from home, particularly for child care concerns. It may be misleading to consider women's positive attitude toward being with family at home without further analyzing how domestic responsibilities were taken by men and women. As it is, during the lockdown, the underlying reason for lack of conflict at home between work and family could be explained by the lighter workload of women. The participants have stated that their workload was diminished during the quarantine. For example, as a teacher, GY says:

“Online courses have been shortened after the switch to distance education. Also we used to have weekly meetings, which have become shorter when done online. Thereby, our workload has



significantly diminished after the transition to teleworking. But the principal and assistant principals still commute [to work].”

EF stresses that the reorganization after the teleworking has a sexist undercurrent which can explain the lighter workload of women under quarantine regulations:

“We speak on the phone and Whatsapp with colleagues from the bank. For instance, they assign more work to men in the off time. It caught my attention that women, especially those who have little children, are not generally called late at night or at the weekend. It was not like this before [switching to telework].”

DA also has similar observations:

“In the public sector, especially women are more relaxed. I observe it in the pandemic period as well. That is, many of my friends got unemployed in the private sector due to many businesses getting shut down, but we are nearly free and in a much better position than normal at the moment, we don't have unemployment concerns. I also think that we, as women, are luckier. For example, when a field trip is arranged, it's generally single and male employees that get assigned.”

Regarding how staying home has consolidated traditional domestic roles of women, CA has indicated the following:

“I had plans for my prospective career to put into action when my workload eased off. I would learn using software for my self-improvement. Now I'm at home due to the lockdown and my workload is relatively lighter. But what have I done with my time? I spent it in the kitchen. We tried new cake recipes with my daughter. While I enjoyed myself, as Z [daughter] had fun, I've felt guilty for drifting apart from my career plans. I'm a nervous wreck in that respect.”

The statements of the participants point out that workload and professional identity have been rearranged to be closer to the traditional gender roles in the pandemic period. In other words, women have been getting closer to their domestic roles while drifting apart from their careers and professional identities as they stay at home.

## 9 | ROLE OF THE HUSBAND

Most of the participants express that their husbands make effort in childcare and domestic chores; however, these efforts do not result in the desired benefit, due to the expended time and energy, obtained results, and extra workload that arises after the effort (such as washing the dishes after he cooks). For example, GE says:

“I have brought up my sons well, each one is jack-of-all-trades. They never clutter, they even cook. But F [husband] is really awkward. Say, milk is spilled, and I incidentally ask him to clean it up, oh my God! He gets the mop, spreads the spilled milk even more and quits. For that very reason, I didn't ever ask for his help in this period. Only shopping...”

The interviews indicate that women and their husbands had agreed on equal contribution in household chores during the pandemic lockdown, but women have complaints about the slovenly performance of their husbands. This

situation is generally explained by the women as not being due to willingness of the husband to participate, but rather due to his inexperience in housework.

NZ, who is the mother of an only child, points out that she has to take care of her husband who telecommutes as much as her child:

"I have to deal with E [daughter] nonstop. 'Mum, let's play.', 'Mummy, I'm hungry.' B [husband] is always in a meeting, always on the computer. When he's not there, he's like he just returned home from work [tired]. So the entire burden is on my shoulders. I get the door; I make three meals a day. Something for E, something else for B... Even worse, my husband is picky. I'm in bit of a jam; I take care of not one but two kids!"

The limited participation of the husband in domestic chores is explained by some interviewees as a result of the heavy workload. For instance, EF states that her husband is in online meetings during the whole day and points out that there is an attitude difference based on gender in teleworking:

"I'm also in very long meetings with clients, but the N's [husband] situation is very different. I'm rarely called from work out of working hours. But when it comes to N, there is no time limit. They call in the morning, they call in the evening. On weekdays, he basically does not leave his room."

DA, similarly, has expressed that her diminished workload along with her husband's workload remaining the same, affects their domestic division of labor:

"My workload is pretty light now; I work on just a couple of documents, and I send them online which is easier. It's been like that for about a month, but my husband's condition is just the opposite. He's snowed under with work. So it automatically becomes my responsibility to deal with domestic chores, take care of my husband and the kids. He [husband] is pretty content with this arrangement. The other day, he asked me 'What's for dinner?' He never asked me this before."

It becomes clear that the workload of couples has become asymmetric in the pandemic period. This asymmetry creates opposite trajectories for women and men where women are pushed into domestic sphere and men into professional work.

## 9.1 | Difficulties of teleworking

Although women mention benefits of teleworking on their domestic duties, they also find it unsustainable. Difficulties of teleworking theme is based upon the participants' concerns such as teleworking as it is now damage their careers in the long term and the cause precarization of their employment.

RC: "However much effort I made, I could not create an office atmosphere at home. We changed a room into an office for F [husband], he works there. I work in the living room. E, [son] sometimes cries, sometimes runs around, I need to take care of him and work at the same time and at the same place. On top of that, the business of our company has gone down due to the pandemic. I'm afraid that as a first step they dismiss us [women with children] for poor performance."

BK draws attention to the invisible barriers that teleworking poses for women:

"We couldn't drop A [daughter] at my mum's at the beginning of the lockdown. Because, they are in the high-risk group and are under lockdown. Consequently A was with us all day everyday for about 2 weeks. Supposedly we were going to share household chores with V [husband], but V didn't help at all. When he had to change A's clothes, for instance, and I was in a deep focus on the work, he called out from other room asking in which drawer the trousers of A were. To work effectively at home, I should probably lock up the room and throw away the key! I don't know... In short, 'home office' looks like an illusion to me."

Most of the participants have expressed that teleworking is ineffective, despite the fact that they are glad to save time off from getting dressed and commuting to work. The primary reasons are the responsibilities of domestic chores and childcare being heavy and nondeferrable during the pandemic. BS compares the prepandemic working from home experience with the current teleworking conditions:

"I think teleworking is ok. It's even the better way. For example, a few years ago, before I started my current job, I was freelancing in translation. The conditions back then were quite different. First of all, M [daughter] was not born yet. Second, is my mum didn't pass away yet. She used to bring us meals she cooked; sometimes we would go to her for dinner. My husband was commuting to work. I could work nonstop 6-7 hours on the computer at home. But now everything has changed. I have M and I have to spend all my energy on her 24/7. We cannot order food for her, so I have to cook. We cannot get a cleaning lady or hire a nanny, for the risk of infection. Therefore the opportunities of previous times simply vanished."

These statements of the participants prove that teleworking is not the solution for the work-life conflict of women during the pandemic unless domestic sphere and duties are supported by gender equality policies.

## 10 | CONCLUSION

The study proves that, just as in the previous epidemics of Ebola and Zika (Harman, 2016) the society leans mainly on the invisible efforts of women in the Covid-19 pandemic. The increase of the domestic workload of women and centralization of traditional gender identity play a major role in this. Covid-19 pandemic has shown that traditional domestic roles of women have become centralized, the current pandemic and teleworking conditions have unsettled professional work rhythm of women and have detached them from their work environment, the presence of the husband at home has increased the burden than decreasing it, and as a result of these factors, teleworking in the current circumstances is not viable for women. Now the mediating mechanisms which hold family and work in balance such as granny care for children, nanny and house cleaning services are unavailable are not functioning as before. Findings indicate that women's invisible labor replaced them.

According to the results regarding the *centralization of the domestic status*, having children make teleworking preferable for women. What underlies this preference is the concerns of women in childcare and this concern substantially coincides with traditional gender roles. Thus, women who save time through teleworking transfer this time not to their personal or career goals but to their children's care or sometimes household care.

The domestic workload of women requires not only an auxiliary physical effort, but also an increased mental effort of planning and distributing these chores. It is apparent that this increased effort becomes a heavier responsibility on the shoulders of women. Due to this phenomenon, the domestic status of women becomes centralized and unavoidable. Thereby, it makes teleworking exacerbate the work-life conflict for women. As a result, domestic and care workload, as stressed in the previous literature, are on the rise contrary to expectations

on telework (Alon et al., 2020; Everingham, 2002; Hochschild, 1989; Silver & Goldscheider, 1994; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001).

The centralization of domestic roles of the women during the pandemic is a direct consequence of traditional gender roles. Women, even if they are employed, take the responsibility of household chores, performing the traditional gender roles. Even though it is decided to have an equal-sharing of domestic tasks in the family, women take the final responsibility for these chores, resulting in the undertaking of traditional roles and doing gender. This inclination can be partly explained by the cultural code that “home environment” is a “stage” that is culturally perceived as the female domain (Sunar & Fişek, 2005).

Corollary to this tendency, the increased domestic efforts of women pertains to the exploitation model. However, women have a certain degree of satisfaction as telework enables them to spend more time with their children and to elaborate their home efforts. These findings reveal, in contrast to the exploitation model which argues that women are more severely controlled by their family and husbands (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001); and that women have developed empowerment from traditional roles in the domestic field. They utilize this empowerment in determining how their husbands will join in the domestic field and they may expel the husband to a peripheral position by doing gender. Further research is needed to see whether the transition period according to the course of the pandemic will perpetuate the current gender roles in the family or the practices of a more egalitarian division of labor will prevail.

According to the results regarding the *drifting apart from paid work*, teleworking's impact of reduction of professional workload is perceived favorably. Most of this satisfaction is based upon the fact that the extra time gained by teleworking can be spent to childcare (Holloway, 2007). This attribution shows that teleworking for women means practically work-to-family conflict. Whereas on the workplace front, the effects of pandemic consist of a reverting to the traditional gender patterns, just as at home. Women have been assigned less work, and the intensity of work has been lower. On the other hand, husbands' work pace has remained unchanged. An increased domestic effort and decreased professional workload seem to feed the traditional gender role interaction cycle. Such a dual reinforcement of traditional gender roles has posed the risk of alienation of women to employment, career, and professional identities. As a result of this, satisfaction on adhering to ethics of care and dissatisfaction on alienation to professional identity increase the professional and domestic border tensions that have been referred in the academic literature (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Holloway, 2007; Nippert-Ing, 1995).

In the alienation of women from work, there is a dual process. On one hand, as the domestic status gains importance, women expend more time and energy for domestic duties. On the other hand, as previous studies (Billing, 2011; Kelan, 2010; Martin, 2001, 2003) indicate managers in work organizations generally assign work on the basis of gender stereotypes, like sparing women who are married with children, also in case of layoffs, putting those women at the top of the “dismissable” list. The gender stereotypes are sustained both at work and at home in the telework context. These stereotypes, currently, have diminished the paid workload of women, thereby postponing work-family conflict. However, there are clues that, in case the workload increases, women will experience difficulties in carrying out their work tasks due to the already increased domestic workload. It is possible that women will be using this conflict as a motivation factor for undoing gender when they are faced with circumstances that entail unsustainable traditional gender roles.

According to the findings regarding the *role of the husband*, male partners have very limited share in the planning and distribution of domestic efforts (Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Peterson & Wiens-Tuers, 2014). They undertake responsibilities that have been assigned by their partners; hence they are in an “assisting” position. However, especially intensely working husbands need care as the full-time employees at home and increase the domestic workload of their wives causing a “second child” effect rather than easing the domestic burden.

Husbands, in the best case scenario, undertake the role of assistance in the domestic field. One reason is the traditional roles assumed prior to the pandemic. Even if the husbands would like to share the increased domestic burden during the pandemic lockdown, the traditional domestic roles they have taken on before the pandemic have rendered them inexperienced in domestic chores. Mechanisms like outsourcing domestic labor and family network

support, that had concealed the inequalities in domestic workload sharing, have become unattainable due to the pandemic regulations. This situation has increased the workload of women in the Covid-19 pandemic just as it had during economic crises (Floro, 1996; Seguino, 2009) and Ebola epidemic (Harman, 2016). The fact that the circumstances of the pandemic have forced nearly continuous presence at a traditional domain like home seems to have consolidated traditional gender roles for the moment.

These findings lead to a central theme on *difficulties of teleworking* for women. Teleworking, despite the time-saving potential, has many gender traps. The pandemic has revealed once again that, without public policies and interventions for a fair division of domestic and care work, it is impossible for women to reach a work-life balance by telework. In fact, this study presents that in the follow-up of the unavailability of buffer mechanisms such as grandmother babysitting, kindergarten, nanny care, and cleaning services; teleworking has the risk of becoming an intermediate form that in the process of women's labor is closed into home and gets invisible rather than being a permanent solution for work-life balance.

This study overall reveals that during the pandemic responsibilities including but not limited to childcare, distance education, domestic chores have been carried out mainly by women, telework has consolidated traditional gender roles and has brought out the risk of alienating women from the labor market. These conclusions contribute to the literature by revealing the preliminary tendencies about how women are affected in the family and in work life by the flexible work arrangements due to the pandemic and by indicating the points of interference in the course of events for the management of the pandemic.

Findings shed a light on the regulation alternatives that work organizations can utilize about how to organize telework during the pandemic. In order to achieve a work-life balance, work assignments are made to men and women in accordance with gender stereotypes. Especially women with children have a relatively lower workload. However, this results in moving away from occupational roles. Instead of this practice, equal-right task assignment and encouraging male employees to utilize flexibility options due to family responsibilities could be implemented. For this practice to be applicable, it is recommended that managers take into account the needs of the employees rather than ignoring present culturally gendered work load in the family.

Consequently, this research done in the Covid-19 pandemic reaffirms what Ashcraft (2020) states; the transformations triggered by the pandemic in public and private spheres create a new form of "viral masculinity" and has a tendency to redefine women with a domestic existence. Pandemic period has bounded public patriarchy with private patriarchy more tightly but more intricately. Women are not able to have a workspace of their own at home where they can work uninterruptedly. On one hand, they work less effectively due to the lack of a workspace; on the other hand, they work less due to the gendered distribution of workload at paid work. Even if women feel content because telework allows more time to spend with family and reduces workload, it is not surprising that this is not sustainable and women have concerns regarding a regression toward being a housewife and drifting apart from career development.

## 11 | LIMITATIONS

The findings reflect experiences of married women with children only. Husbands' perspectives are not involved. The reason for this limitation is that only very few married men with children have volunteered to participate in the study. Therefore, the design of the research was reorganized to reflect only the experiences of women. In addition, the study has focused on the experiences of middle-class professional women with children. Further studies that would reflect different experiences of different ethnic, class, age, and gender groups would give a more integrative picture of the effects of Covid-19 pandemic.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data Availability Statement Research data are not shared.

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