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## Motherhood as a School Psychological Counselor during Coronavirus Disease Outbreak

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**Abstract:** The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which affected the whole world and caused millions to be locked at their homes, brought many difficulties in domestic life. Especially, women are the leading group that has been affected the most negatively due to the workload during the days staying at home and experiencing the constraints of traditional roles. In this study, in which descriptive phenomenology analysis was used, the aim was to reveal how mothers working as psychological counselors in schools experienced motherhood during the days staying at home during the epidemic, and how their professional skills reflected on their role as mothers. In this study, in which the criterion sampling was used, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 mothers who are school psychological counselors and could not continue their work since schools shut down during the pandemic. The data were analyzed by Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. Analysis results revealed six main themes that define the experiences of the participants: adaptation to the new order, parenting codes, introspection during the pandemic, distribution of parenting roles, professional reflections in motherhood, and complex motherhood experiences. It is believed that the results obtained from this study conducted with psychological counselor mothers will contribute to parenting practices and to the content of in service trainings for school psychological counselors.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, school psychological counselor mothers, motherhood.

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### Introduction

The circumstances that have emerged with the pandemic, which are important factors that trigger the changes in the psychological and sociological structure of the society, are the cause of many negative effects on the lives of individuals in both material and spiritual aspects (Trauer et al., 2011). As an example of this, Coronavirus Disease Outbreak (COVID-19) outbreak has affected individuals and families all over the world in economic, biological and social terms (Alon et al., 2020; Del Boca et al., 2020). These measures and restrictions include pausing the working life, closing workplaces, transitioning to online education, social isolation, lockdown, and working from home (Fontanarosa & Bauchner, 2020; Ornell et al., 2020). These situations, along with changing the routines and plans of the individuals, caused them to experience loss of control over their daily lives and increased their stress and anxiety (Wang et al., 2020). One of the groups most affected by this process was children and families moved to a new order at home (Alon et al., 2020; Del Boca et al., 2020).

In the new order accompanying the pandemic, it has been determined that many needs of children and family members are met by women with more responsibilities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). Additionally, many studies indicate that women have unequally more responsibilities than men in difficult life events such as war, natural disaster, pandemics, and this situation affects women negatively in the long term (negative impact of job loss on mental health) (Bradshaw, 2015; Mondal, 2014). During COVID-19 pandemic, although the domestic responsibilities of men have also increased due to being in isolation at home, many studies have found that women have more domestic (cooking, laundry, etc.) and childcare responsibilities than men (Alon et al., 2020; Del Boca et al., 2020; Graves, 2020).

The increase of women's participation in the working life during the industrialization period in Turkey has increased the importance of women in the family. However, the responsibilities of women that are based in traditional gender

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roles (dealing with household chores, being responsible for the care of children) still exist. In fact, working mothers define both the characteristics based in traditional roles and the features of the expert knowledge emerged with modernization in their definitions of motherhood (Oztekin, 2019). During the Covid 19 pandemic, it was determined that the responsibilities of women based in traditional gender roles (spending time with children, taking care of children and educating them, taking the domestic responsibilities) were found to be increased. Especially with working women, while the responsibility of childcare was shared with large family members (grandmother, etc.) before the pandemic, the restrictions stemming from the risks of illness to the elderly during the pandemic period led to women not being able to share this responsibility with family members which increased the burden on them (Del Boca et al., 2020). Therefore, women were more negatively affected by the consequences of the pandemic during the Covid 19 outbreak. Moreover, the pandemic period affected many employees and led to different living patterns. During this period, some individuals' need for psychological support increased (Duan & Zhu, 2020). On the other hand, there is no study on how psychological counselor mothers, one of the professional groups that offer psychological support, experience the pandemic period.

On the other hand, it is seen that school counselors are women in many countries including Turkey. It is stated that female school counselors experience more role confusion or conflict than male counselors as they have more responsibilities and roles in their lives (home, childcare, etc.) (Bryant, & Constantine, 2006). It has been emphasized in many studies that this situation affects life satisfaction, well-being and job satisfaction of the female psychological counselor (Bryant, & Constantine, 2006; Martire et al., 2000). In some studies, it was proven that this role confusion and excessiveness have negative effects on the mental health of female counselors (Frone, 2000; Martire et al., 2000). Some (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000) state that this situation provides female psychological counselors with the ability to get self-organized, and makes it easier for them to balance their roles and achieve more positive results.

While school psychological counselors face many challenging factors both in their daily life and under their professional working conditions, it is seen that there are no studies conducted on how they manage the situation that affects the living conditions of people in many ways and requires them to do their jobs at home. Considering the studies showing that women are more affected by the responsibilities of their roles during the pandemic, it is important to know what kind of factors (professional skills and personal characteristics), which psychological counselor mothers should balance. In this study, in which descriptive phenomenology analysis was used, it was aimed to reveal how women working as a psychological counselor in schools experienced motherhood during the days staying at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how their professional skills reflected on their role as mothers.

### Methodology

In this study, the phenomenology pattern, which aims to examine the phenomenon by focusing on defining and understanding the feelings experienced by the participants, was used in order to discover the common meanings underlying the experienced phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Also, Giorgi's (2009) *descriptive phenomenology* method was used in order to describe how psychological counselor women experience motherhood during the days of staying at home during the pandemic and the meanings they attribute to the experience in question according to their own perspective.

#### *Participants*

The study group consists of 15 school psychological counselor mothers, aged between 28-44. In the study, purposeful sampling methods and criterion sampling method, which will facilitate the study of cases suitable for the research problem, were used. In determining the study group mothers, the following criteria were taken into account: "being a psychological counselor in public or private schools", "not going to work during the pandemic period, and" having children between the ages of 0-11". In order to reach the mothers who covered these criteria, information was given about the scope and purpose of the study and announced via social media. Moreover, preliminary interviews were made through phone calls with the participants. In this study, the homogeneous sampling method was used in order to focus on a certain experience, in a certain context and in a certain time period. Thus, the similarities and differences between the participants' experiences were examined in detail. In the research, the names of the participants were "D1, D2, D3,....D15" and demographic information of the participants is given below.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Code	Age	Education	Total Year	School type	Satisfaction	Child number
D1	36	M.A.	9	Elementary	8	2
D2	44	M.A.	20	Elementary	9	3
D3	42	Undergraduate	21	Secondary	7	2
D4	35	Undergraduate	10	Preschool	8	2
D5	28	M.A.	5	Secondary	6	2
D6	32	Undergraduate	8	Elementary	8	1
D7	43	Undergraduate	6	Preschool	9	3
D8	33	M.A.	11	Secondary	8	1
D9	35	Undergraduate	9	Secondary	8	1
D10	37	Undergraduate	7	Preschool	9	2
D11	34	Undergraduate	11	Elementary	7	2
D12	33	Undergraduate	10	Preschool	7	1
D13	33	M.A.	11	Secondary	8	2
D14	32	Undergraduate	10	Secondary	9	1
D15	33	Undergraduate	10	Preschool	8	1

As shown in the table, 10 participants had bachelors' degree, and 10 of them had masters' degree. The years of professional experience of the participants vary between 5-21 and it is seen that they work in kindergarten, primary school or secondary school levels. The professional satisfaction level of the participants is at the range of 7-9 points out of 10, and all participants stated that they received training to increase their professional skills. The number of children of the participants varies between 1-2. When the family type of the participants is examined, one participant's is a large-looking nuclear family (D4) while the others belong to the nuclear family type.

#### Data Collection

The interviews were conducted online by the researchers themselves in order to protect the participants from COVID-19 transmission. Interviews were made by making an appointment with the participants and permission was obtained from all participants to record the interview. The interviews lasted for approximately 35 minutes.

A semi-structured interview form was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the maternal experiences of the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview form was prepared by examining the literature on psychological counseling, motherhood and being a woman. Later, the prepared interview form was presented to the views of 3 academics working in the fields of psychological counseling and women's studies and the form was finalized. The functionality of the interview questions was examined in both studies.

In line with the semi-structured interview questions, the participants were asked questions about their daily routines during the days they stayed at home during the period, the distribution of their domestic tasks, the reflection of their professional skills on the motherhood role and the motherhood position they were in. These questions were deepened with relevant questions. "How do you spend your day at home?", "What are your daily roles at home?", "How does your job reflect on your motherhood? are some examples of basic questions related to interview questions. What was it like before the pandemic? What is it like during the pandemic?" and "When you think about the distribution of roles, what do you think being a mother involves? In your opinion, what does being a father involve? How does this affect your motherhood? What were its effects during the pandemic?"

#### Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interview was first deciphered. The pattern used in the research was "descriptive phenomenological pattern" of Giorgi, which is one of the qualitative pattern types. The following steps of descriptive phenomenological analysis were followed in the study (Giorgi, 2009): (i) *The reading of transcripts/texts obtained from interviews from a phenomenological perspective and reaching an impression regarding the whole phenomenon* (ii) *differentiating meaning units that reveal different aspects of the whole*, (iii) *revealing the psychological aspects of the existing situation as much as the content of the narratives allow*, (iv) *revealing the general structure of the experienced phenomenon*. Moreover, direct quotations were included to reveal the essence of the participants' emotions, thoughts and experiences. In the study, the texts obtained by putting individual interviews with the group of participants on paper were analyzed with the "MAXQDA" computer program. Codes and themes were created separately by the researchers were compared with each other and discussed until a consensus was reached. The main themes were obtained by relating the sub-themes in the transcripts according to their conceptual similarities. Also, researchers facilitated ensuring objectivity by keeping their own feelings and opinions in the background in a controlled way throughout the study.

In this study, it was tried to provide internal validity via long-term interaction, in-depth data collection, expert's examination and participant's confirmation, while external validity was provided through detailed descriptive and purposeful sampling methods. Besides, consistency examination was performed for internal validity and confirmation examination for external validity. Prior research subjects of the researchers have led them to this study. The researchers' subjective study experiences formed a supportive basis for the analysis and interpretation of the data.

### Findings / Results

In this study, the narratives of the participants were examined by phenomenological reduction and a general structural description was created. As a result of the analysis of the interviews conducted in the research, the themes of *adaptation to the new order*, *parenting codes*, *introspection during the pandemic*, *distribution of parenting roles*, *professional reflections in motherhood*, and *complex motherhood experiences* were obtained. Basic themes and subthemes related to the structure are stated and explained in detail with citations from the qualitative data below.

#### *Adaptation to the New Order*

Participants stated that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the order in their lives changed due to schools closing and their inability to go to work, and that they were directed to establish a new order and a new routine. The new order shaped with the pandemic has brought about changes in both the relationships with their children and the parental relationships of the spouses. It is seen that the participants adapt easily to these changes and can easily create a new routine. The situations that enable participants to adapt more easily to the challenges of the pandemic period are clustered around identifying and reorganizing the needs of family members, making plans, and creating joint time activities.

#### *Reframing of needs*

In the story of the participants, it is seen that they made some adjustments or changes in order to meet the needs of both theirs and other family members during the pandemic days. It is seen that this sub-theme, which is defined as the reframing of needs, clustered around things such as taking a pet into the house, clearly defining individual needs, rearranging physical conditions in accordance with the needs in the home, and determining domestic responsibilities with children. Participants state that they can invest in their individuality, alleviate their workload, and thus reduce their stress levels with these changes and regulations. Quotation from a participants, which is thought to best exemplify this experience, is as follows:

P6: *"I sometimes highlight the things that I also enjoy doing and the things that he also enjoys, when we are both happier because there is more energetic. ...As such, I thought that both his needs are met and I am comfortable working, it leaves me time. Honestly, I'm happier when this happens"*.

#### *Daily plans*

It is seen that the participants make plans to spend the day productively on the days they stay at home during the pandemic. The participant P8 *"who cares about spending her days according to a schedule in order to prevent negative experiences that may arise from the pandemic and she is decisive in the shaping of the daily routine at home, "our days progress with a routine." she said. I plan the day with my daughter in the morning and this is good for us. Knowing what comes next is also something that reduces the stress"* says she, expressing that she manages the outbreak period by planning like this.

The routine in the story of the participant P1 is to share the day with all family members, which was determined with the spouse and it didn't include watching television in the evenings. It is stated that these posts have a therapeutic effect on them: *"In the last 2 hours of the evening, my husband wants something special, he does not want the television to be turned on. Sometimes children have some hard time, but it's such a beautiful thing. For example, everybody shares their experiences and little conflicts while playing in the garden during the day. Those last 2 hours are like a therapy. Children pour whatever they have in their pockets and tell what's in their minds."*

#### *Shared time*

With the new routine accompanying the pandemic, the participants stated that joint time activities within the family increased. It is observed that parents try to create more time to play games and chat with their children. Some of the experiences in the participants' stories about common time activities during the pandemic period are described as follows.

P2: *"Sometimes we made cakes, etc. together. We did something in the kitchen. We watched movies together, etc. We played games from time to time, board games. We tried to do as much as possible in that tempo."*

### Parenting Codes

Parenting codes reveal how psychological counselor mothers perceive and frame their roles related to motherhood and fatherhood. These values are clustered around the subthemes *professional caregiver mothers* and *fatherhood as a source of support in the stories of the participants*. It is seen in the stories of some participants that they glorify the feeling of motherhood, which they affirm motherhood, and some position themselves as caregivers for their children. On the other hand, it is seen that some participants define fatherhood as a source of support and leave them limited space for role sharing. In these definitions, although each of the meanings attributed to motherhood does not show equal distribution of the parental roles of the spouses, it creates an effect for mothers that removes inequality without questioning and undertakes a role that facilitates parenting and increases satisfaction.

#### Professional nurturer mothers

One of the meanings that participants attribute to motherhood is professional care, which is seen as one of the professional expertise of motherhood. In the interviews with the participants, her feelings about the meaning of motherhood were strong and passionate in ways that embraced the positive and ambivalent aspects of being a mother.

The story of the participant P11 is one of the good examples of the professional caregiver role of motherhood: *"Being a mother brings many responsibilities. From housework to taking care of the children's self-care, cognitive skills, emotional development, moral development, it is a process that encompasses many things, from protection from abuse at work to hormonal things. But I don't think it's that comprehensive for fathers. Fatherhood can be involved in meeting physical needs, perhaps a little more in the game. Otherwise it is not equivalent to mother's role."*

#### Fatherhood as a source of support

In some of the participants, it is seen that fatherhood is perceived as a resource that provides support to the mother and child in parenting and is positioned in this way in their parenting experiences. This situation reflects on the participants as emotional and mental fatigue. A quotation that best exemplify fatherhood as a source of support in the parenting relationship is as follows (P2): *"I think being a father is a little different than being a mother. The father opens the door to the social world for the child. The mother guiding them should be someone who provides a little more emotional regulation and supports them, as well as accompany them."*

#### Introspection during the Pandemic

When the lives of the participants were examined, it was found that they were able to manage anxiety in the changing life order during the pandemic and they tried to structure the home environment by considering everyone's needs. This situation enabled the participants to spare time for themselves and to turn to their inner world. This theme known as personal transformations seems to cluster around the concepts of *calm* and *introspection*.

#### Calmness

In the story of the participants, it is seen that the difficult aspects of the pre-pandemic intense work pace and establishing the home-work balance are replaced by calm days with the outbreak, and this makes them calm.

For instance, one participant (P9) stated her calmness during the pandemic period: *"I spend this period very beautifully, very orderly and calmly. Spending more time with my son, eating regularly with my family, passing through calmly without running around. It was so good that I say how bad I need it"*.

#### Journey to oneself

Participants defined it as an inner journey to be able to create opportunities to be alone with themselves during the lockdown days of the pandemic. During that period, on one hand, the concerns arising from the pandemic, on the other hand, they turned towards focusing on themselves, staying in the moment and making the moments they are in enjoyable. Also, all participants felt that they changed dramatically after becoming a mother. These changes include changes in self-identity (being a 'mother' - being an 'adult' individual), both positive and negative emotions. With the pandemic, they expressed that they felt that they were sometimes tested in their parenthood with a different life than usual. On the other hand, they think that this makes them grow, mature and develop. The pandemic period has been a stage where many participants can make internal inquiries by being alone with themselves.

The experiences of the P1, who divides her life as before, during, and after the pandemic period, constitute a good example for framing the sub-theme of the journey: *"Actually, if we divide it into before and after, if we consider it as a milestone, I can say this. For example, I have tested my own limits on full-time motherhood. I actually didn't think I was that patient, or that I could be so creative. I guess I didn't believe in myself enough before the Covid-19 outbreak. I could not imagine that I was so strong, that I could be so durable that it means that with every new experience you can do that too. It never occurred to me that I could do this much at the point of motherhood. I also tried to keep myself busy"*

*sometimes. So I took out my drawing notebook, I painted. I had a guitar that I played 15 years ago, I took it out of the closet. I started playing songs again."*

The participant P5 exemplified the possibility of determining her own priorities and needs during the pandemic process as follows: *"What are the shortcomings in my life, what have I done well, what are my strengths, where I have deficiencies, I need to say stop to these and these. It was a process obviously."*

#### *Distribution of Parenting Roles*

Parenting role distributions reflect how the roles of psychological counselor mothers with their spouses in parenting life are distributed and how it affects parenting styles. These experiences are clustered around *the role sharing and inclusive motherhood*.

#### *Role sharing*

It is observed that some of the participants are in a common distribution of roles with their spouses in their parenting and they try to assume joint responsibilities. This situation provides a balanced distribution of parenting burden in the lives of the participants and facilitates parenting.

P5: *"We are doing it jointly, including my son. So my husband and son clean the balcony and wash the sinks. Childcare is something we both do because it is a parenting role. Thus, our responsibilities are distributed evenly and our burden is reduced."*

#### *Inclusive Motherhood*

It is seen that most of the participants assume more responsibilities than their spouses during their motherhood and try to carry out motherhood and housework together. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been determined that this burden has increased more and accompanied by more fatigue and relational conflicts.

When the story of the participants is examined, the story of the participant P3 is a good example in terms of describing inclusive motherhood: *"That is, if you say role distribution, my husband lives parallel to the ground. That's why he doesn't have a lot of responsibilities. I am responsible for the organization of the whole house, the execution of the housework, from its budget to its maintenance and repair. Parents' roles in the house should be equal, but it is not the case. Having most of the responsibilities on me is exhausting and strains our relationships."*

#### *Professional Reflections on Motherhood*

All the participants felt that they benefited from their education and professional knowledge positively during their motherhood as a psychological counselor. These experiences seem to consist of minor changes in routine, *regulation of relationships, increased awareness, flexibility, emotion control and positive parenting*.

#### *Minor changes in routine*

During the pandemic period, one of the situations that participants do not ignore when determining family needs is not to make major changes in their previous routines in order not to increase anxiety. It is observed that the participants are trying to go through the pandemic period with more minor changes in the family life. For instance, P5 describes her experiences of not making marginal changes in her routine as follows: *"It is very important to carry out the process in the house during the pandemic, maintain order, and maintain routines in such situations when a traumatic events occurs. Because I know this, I kept order in the house as much as possible. In other words, the sleep time of the children is not spoiled, like the meal time, the study time. In this sense, my profession added a lot to me. Or how will I protect the children from what news, how much will I share and what will I share. In this respect, my children were not affected by these conditions as much as my other friends' children."*

#### *Organizing relationships*

Participants stated that they communicated and interacted with their children in more limited times due to the intense work pace before the pandemic, and because they were together at home with the pandemic, they were directed to understand their children's needs more and develop bonds, and that they could organize their relationships in a positive way.

For instance, the participant P3 has reflected in her statements that her relationship with her child, which was broken before the pandemic, evolved into a positive relationship during the pandemic period: *"Our relationship with my daughter was a little disrupted before the pandemic. Adolescence, because of her excessive access to social media, her relationships in social media. There was a connection we could not establish. In fact, we had a life rush that we did not have the opportunity to set up. We found that environment during the pandemic and established that connection."*

### *Increased awareness*

One of the common points in the stories of the participants is that their profession prevents automatic behaviour in their relations with their children and they can use appropriate approaches with high awareness. Besides, it is seen that the participants are aware of the need to understand themselves and their children. These awareness ranges from knowing about the developmental stages of children to awareness of potential causes underlying behaviour. Narratives that best exemplify increased awareness through professional skills and its reflections on the mother-child relationship are as follows:

P2: *"If my awareness of my profession was not high or my predictions were weak about what might happen in difficult conditions, we would probably have had this process much more troubled and tense."*

P4: *"A system that constantly monitors you, this profession makes you question and be aware. At least it makes it easier for you to compensate even if you make a mistake. My job gives me awareness about motherhood. Awareness is like a protective shield, facilitating the solution."*

### *Flexibility*

Some of the participants argue that one of the most important skills that their profession gives them is the ability to stretch. They base their ability to stand stronger against the adverse conditions caused by the pandemic worldwide and to make new plans by calming their environment, based on their flexibility.

P4 coded participant profession added flexibility to her. *"My profession reminded that the process we are going through is trauma, that children are also going through a difficult period and that I should be more flexible. With this awareness, I started to accompany them more. I tried to bend the rules while exemplifying with. Thanks to flexibility, I can avoid conflictual forms of relationships with my children."*

### *Emotion Regulation*

It was determined that the participants were able to manage emotions, which they defined as an important professional skill in their history, for both themselves and their family members during the pandemic. The tension situations that manifest themselves with the increased need for movement as a result of the children staying at home reveal the need for increased emotion regulation skills. Participants argued that the source of their ability to achieve positive emotion control as balancing well in their inner world and family relationships.

Participant P1 revealed a good example of this theme: *"We came across a period when children were very anxious and aggressive. What happened? They were caught between the four walls, they could not get out much. Inevitably, such a tense environment occurred in the house. For example, at that time I didn't say don't cry, be quiet, don't get angry, don't shout. Thanks to my job, I learned that they need to experience those feelings too, that I have to respect what they live through and feel. I can say that I had the advantage of coming from this profession during the pandemic period."*

### *Positive parenting*

Positive parenting skills is one of the areas that the participants develop themselves with the acquisition of professional skills. This situation formed the basis for a healthier mother-child relationship during the pandemic period. Also, many of the participants stated that they were good enough mothers. Participants described good motherhood as paying attention to their children, offering them emotional support, and being patient and empathic. As good examples of positive parenting skills observed during the pandemic period is the narrative of the participants with codes P8: *"I see a lot of benefits from the job. The trainings I received contribute to both my self-development and my interactions with others. In case of conflict or tension, I can manage it better. I have a higher sensitivity to talk about emotions and share my feelings. This actually provides me with a better understanding of motherhood."*

### *Complex Motherhood Experiences*

While some of the participants emphasized the importance of mother-child bond and refer to motherhood as one of the most beautiful things in their life, others mentioned the "burden" and responsibility or loss of personal freedom by having a child. They also stated that managing daily responsibilities like childcare, housework creates more burden compared to her spouse and increases stress and fatigue. With these experiences, the internal questioning of the participants about their motherhood has increased. These concepts, clustered under the theme of complex motherhood experiences, came to light as *parental legacy, negative feelings control, relational conflicts with children, emotional and mental fatigue*.

### *Parenting legacy*

One of the most difficult situations for many of the participants during the pandemic period is that the spouses do not adequately take responsibility for both domestic chores and children's upbringing. They base this situation on the

differences in the upbringing process of men and women by referring the cultural codes in upbringing. At this point, the participants emphasize the effect of not giving domestic responsibilities to men at an early age and maintaining the father profile observed in their own fathers. Moreover, they see the impact of the responsibilities undertaken by women unknowingly as a disadvantage. The story of the participant P8 reflects an important example of this: *"Our upbringing patterns and our automatic maternal responsibilities that we assume without question distinguish this. However, if children are raised with similar knowledge, there will be a completely different transformation, especially men in many cultures, unfortunately. This will make it easier to balance parenting responsibilities."*

Some participants noticed their aspects of themselves identifying with their parents during the pandemic. The participant P13 is a good example for this: *"I found that I am much like my mother. I complain a lot; I realized I was starting to continue that traditional cycle, saying things like do you know how tired I am and it is all for you. In other words, this process has brought me to a more tense, more stereotypical situation."*

#### *Negative Feelings Control*

Some participants stated that although they could not go to work, they had difficulty in adapting to the new order at home, their energy and endurance decreased, they had difficulty in controlling their emotions, and they were tired. In this life, it is observed that the lack of spousal support, increased domestic responsibilities and workload, and the inability to keep up with the needs of children are determinants. However, it was determined that these feelings create a feel of guilt in them and that their professional knowledge is effective in this. Because they state that it is very tiring to consider in all details the effects of not being able to produce solutions or having conflicts in communication against the existing workload and accompanying problems on the development of children.

The narrative of the participant P13 is one of the important examples of the emotional difficulties due to the increasing responsibility due to the intensive work of her husband during the pandemic period: *"Because I cannot breathe myself, I cannot continue my work life at home and I considered my husband lucky because he could continue his work, and breathe. I kept telling him that this was an advantage, even though it seemed like a disadvantage because he was going to work. This process has had an even more supportive effect on my strained sense of injustice."*

#### *Relational conflicts with children*

Some participants stated that they experienced more conflicts in their relations with family members during the days of staying at home during the pandemic compared to normal times. The participant P13, on the other hand, sampled the source of the conflicts in their relationships with their children based on spending a lot of time together as follows: *"Something happened because of my husband's work. Since the father is away from home and I have always been in the house, we have experienced what is referred to as face aging among society. Children are not that fond of me anymore. Because I was always the ruler and the nervous side trying to implement things. Therefore, our conflicts also increased."*

#### *Emotional and mental fatigue*

Some of the participants stated that they get tired both emotionally and mentally during the days they stay at home and miss their old routines. The source of these experiences is usually explained by the increased workload at home.

The story of the participant P13 is one of the good examples of the professional caregiver role of motherhood: *"Being a mother brings many responsibilities. Since the number of products we bought from outside was also limited and we had to pay more attention to health, I had to cook constantly. Since my husband is not at home, the planning of these is entirely up to me. At the end, there was a great mental and emotional fatigue in me."*

### **Discussion**

In this study, how school counselor mothers experienced motherhood during the days staying at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, how their professional skills reflected on their parenthood and it was aimed to reveal the essence of what the determinants of this are. Within this context, individual interviews were conducted with 15 mothers using an online semi-structured interview form. As a result of the analysis of the interviews, the structure and essence of the motherhood phenomenon during the COVID-19 pandemic in line with the opinions of the mothers who participated in the study *adaptation to the new order, parenting values, introspection during the pandemic period, parental role distributions, professional reflections in motherhood and complex motherhood experiences* are clustered around the main theme.

In the new order theme, it has been determined that the psychological counselor mothers adapted to the effects of the pandemic process and could change their order positively. In the literature, it is stated that psychological counselors know and can use the resources that will support them facing traumatic life events, especially social support resources (Ortlepp & Friedman, 2002). Within this context, the fact that psychological counselor mothers can make arrangements according to the needs of family members during the pandemic process, establish daily routines and increase the common time to support each other is determined in this studies conducted on this theme in the literature. In addition,

it is stated that people working in the field of mental health, including school psychological counselors, can be professionally resilient when faced with difficulties in life with the knowledge and skills they have acquired and developed (Hodges et al., 2005). Adaptation to the new order observed in this theme may have come from professional support.

In the second main theme which is parenting values, it is observed that school psychological counselor mothers perceive "mother" as the person who is primarily responsible for the child; it has been observed that they consider the fatherhood role as a more supportive role. In some participants' parenting values, meanings related to motherhood are associated with being more responsible, while fatherhood is characterized by having fun with the children and comforting the mother. Being a mother is a life-changing experience that deeply affects all participants in their lives, including their counseling roles. The concept of motherhood is expressed as a subjective and socially perceived phenomenon in the literature (Miller, 2010). Studies indicating that there are traditional features in the motherhood perceptions of working mothers are in line with the findings of this study (Oztekin, 2019). Moreover, working mothers have created a professional role in motherhood with the expert knowledge and awareness earned from modernization (Sever, 2015). Therefore, in this study, school psychological counselor mothers expressed the expert view of motherhood. In addition, the expert point of view of school psychological counselors is related to the high awareness of mothers who are therapists and the reflection of this on their motherhood, as stated in the study by Robinson (2012). However, in Turkey and in the rest of the world, traditional values of modernization are seen as a counter-reaction of employees and it's seen that both the traditional mother and the working mother carries the traditional roles of the modern mother (Berktaş, 2012; Sever, 2015). With the transition to essentialist feminism after the 1980s, motherhood was also influenced by the view of living in nature and essence in modernity (Badinter, 2011). Therefore, both subthemes that emerge in this category, *father as supporter* and *mother as professional expert* are not the opposite of each other but are inward structures, but support each other.

In the third main theme which is self-awareness, it was observed that school psychological counselors were able to calm themselves, focus on their internal processes and experience a transformation during the pandemic process. In the literature, the statement that high levels of awareness of psychological counselors and therapists have a positive effect on both themselves and their clients supports the findings of this study (Williams et al., 2008).

In the fourth main theme which is parenting role distribution, it was determined that although it was emphasized that the roles of two parents were equal, it was observed that mothers took more responsibilities in the pandemic process with inclusion. In other words, although the participants stated that the domestic responsibility on them was higher than their spouses and this increases their fatigue, when the meanings they attribute to motherhood are examined, it is seen that they adopt motherhood as a role that is different from fatherhood and requires responsibility. In addition, it was observed that fathers' participation in both domestic and parental responsibilities had determinative effects on mothers' role. This can be proven by the literature studies of both the pandemic period and the pre-pandemic period. Unrelated to the pandemic, the observations on this theme are parallel to the studies in the literature that state that women's responsibilities arising from traditional gender roles (dealing with household chores, being responsible for the care of children) still continue despite entering the working life (Başak et al., 2013). Similarly, it supports the finding that the duties of working mothers have gradually increased both the traditional roles and the roles brought by modernization (Badinter, 2011; Berktaş, 2012; Sever, 2015). Studies related to the pandemic period also support studies indicating that women's parental responsibilities in difficult life events (Bradshaw, 2015; Mondal, 2014) including the COVID 19 period (Alon et al., 2020; Del Boca et al., 2020; Graves, 2020) have increased compared to men. Although there are studies in the literature stating that these increased responsibilities and unbalanced role distributions affect women negatively (Frone, 2000; Martire et al., 2000), there are also some other studies stating that they affect women positively (Blaskó et al., 2020). In this study, the finding that school psychological counselor mothers dealt with this situation in a healthy way despite the increasing burden and responsibility and fatigue is in parallel with the studies (Blaskó et al., 2020) that stated that it was positively affected in the literature. Their positive effects may be related to high awareness (Williams et al., 2008), organizing skills (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000), and self-care skills (Puterbaugh, 2008) resulting from the vocational skills of the school psychological counselor mothers.

In the fifth main theme which is about the professional reflections in motherhood role, it was observed that the professional skills of the school psychological counselor mothers during the pandemic period (providing routine, organizing relationships, awareness, flexibility, emotion regulation, positive parenting) affected their motherhood roles in many ways. This may be due to the fact that professional skills make individuals working in this profession psychologically stronger (Hodges et al., 2005). Some studies reveal that therapist mothers can use their professional experiences to contribute to their relationships with children and partners at home (Shaw & Breckenridge, 2014).

The sixth and final theme is the complex maternal experiences of school counselor mothers. There is no just one single technique or correct method of being a mother. Motherhood is a complex and strong part in many women's life. Besides, it includes uncertainty as well (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). In this theme, it was observed that psychological counselor mothers who lived more in a traditional dimension especially during their pregnancy, clashed with the knowledge and experiences they gained via trainings and both their relationships and their psychological health were affected by this conflict. In this context, especially in the theme of parenting legacy, it is related to the traditional values

expressed and attributed by the participants about parenting. Especially in this sub-theme of the study, while working mothers develop a counter-reaction to traditional values in modernization, it is also seen that they keep traditional values of motherhood besides the modern ones, which increases their burden. This finding is parallel to some studies (Berktaş, 2012; Sever, 2015). On the other hand, it has been observed that participants who refer to traditional values in their parenting legacy have difficulties in regulating their emotions, especially in difficult times such as the pandemic, experiencing mental and emotional fatigue and conflict in their relationships with their children when they adapt the knowledge they have acquired through modernization and expertise. As mothers are involved in a profession based on self-reflection and self-awareness like psychological counseling, they are likely to understand their own feelings and experience about motherhood. Therefore, the sub-themes of complex experiences are consistent with the current literature on the motherhood dilemma, uncertainties in parenting, and desire for motherhood (De Marneffe, 2004), the burden of traditional codes on the working mother (Berktaş, 2012; Sever, 2015), and the high level of awareness of women working in the field of psychology (Williams et al., 2008).

### Conclusion

This study provides important information about motherhood and professional experiences of school counselor mothers during the Covid 19 pandemic period. In the statements of all the participants, it is expressed that there is an intense pace in their lives during the days they go to work. During the pandemic period, the orders have changed and a new routine has been adopted. While some participants defined this change positively, others highlighted the increased load and fatigue in their definitions. It has been determined that the involvement of the father in parenting and domestic responsibilities is important in terms of enabling mothers to open up space for themselves, experience less stress and regulate their emotions positively. In order to reveal the meanings under this discourse of the participants, the interviews were deepened with sounding questions about what parenting covers. The most striking one among the important information is that the psychological counselor mothers working in schools defined themselves with both traditional and modern role definitions. In addition, one of the other striking findings is that the participants can be more able to resolve the difficulties resulting from role complexity, role excess and the pandemic thanks to their vocational training, psychological resilience and awareness. This result reveals the necessity of in-service training for school psychological counselors in order to increase their professional skills.

### Recommendations

The participant group of this study consists of mothers working as school psychological counsellor and living in Istanbul. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct a similar study with participants from different cities and different family structures. This study covers the motherhood experiences of the school psychological counselor mothers during the epidemic period. In addition, it may be beneficial to conduct a new study on the educational needs of the participants in this period. While this study consists of psychological counselor mothers who are at home and not going to work during the pandemic period, the experiences of psychological counselor mothers who have to carry out their work from home or who need to provide online counseling services need to be investigated separately. Also, this study's participant group's children ages are between 0-11. Conducting a similar study with participants with children of different age groups will be beneficial in order to reach more comprehensive results. In line with the findings of the study, it is seen that mothers who work as school counsellors also need to support their emotion regulation skills. In this direction, it is thought that supportive group studies with school psychological counsellor mothers will be beneficial.

### Limitations

Despite all these contributions, the research has several limitations. Firstly, although it is known that conducting qualitative interviews face-to-face is important in terms of recognizing the visual and non-verbal cues of the participants, online interviews are one of the limitations of this study due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, the study is limited to participants living in metropolitan areas. It is believed that individuals living in small cities may have better social support networks, so they experience this in a different way (Turhan, 2017).

### Authorship Contribution Statement

Yaman: Study concept and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, drafting of manuscript, critical revision of manuscript, final approval. Arici-Ozcan: Study concept and design, acquisition of data, interpretation of data, critical revision of manuscript, final approval.

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