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Do Pandemics Affect Relationships? A Qualitative Investigation on the Effect of a Global Stressor on the Views Concerning Marriage and Divorce

Salgınlar İlişkileri Etkiler mi? Küresel Bir Stres Faktörünün Evlilik ve Boşanma Görüşleri Üzerindeki Etkisi Üzerine Nitel Bir Araştırma

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting the whole world since the beginning of 2020. In addition to health-related and financial effects, there seem to be significant psychological effects, including the effects on people's views and representations of marriage and divorce. This research aims to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affects views on and representations of marriage and divorce by conducting two studies. In the first study, one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with 31 participants (20 single and 11 married individuals) to investigate their evaluations regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people's view of marriage in general and their own views of marriage. In the second study, 298 entries on the most frequently used online social dictionary in Turkey (Ekşi Sözlük; in which 202 of were written under the title "COVID-19 makes people think of marriage," and 96 of them were written under the title of "COVID-19 makes people think of divorce") were analyzed, and meaningful thematic units were formed. Findings indicated that participants mostly mentioned both positive and negative effects of COVID-19 on the views and representations of marriage. There were both common (e.g., loneliness, violence, etc.) and distinct (e.g., sexuality, COVID-19's effect on attitudes towards marriage, etc.) thematic units between the results of the two studies. Results were discussed in the light of the literature on Terror Management Theory, Attachment Theory, stress research, and growth perspective.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, marriage, divorce, views, social representations.

ÖZET

COVID-19 salgını, 2020 yılının başından itibaren, tüm dünyayı etkisi altına almış durumdadır. COVID-19 salgınının, sağlık ve ekonomiye yönelik etkilere ek olarak, insanların evlilik ve boşanma hakkındaki görüşleri ve temsilleri gibi önemli psikolojik etkilerinin de olduğu görülmektedir. Bu araştırma, COVID-19 salgınının evliliğe ve boşanmaya ilişkin görüşleri ve temsilleri nasıl etkilediğini iki çalışma yürüterek anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. İlk çalışmada 31 katılımcı (20 bekar; 11 evli) ile birebir yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılarak COVID-19'un genel olarak insanların evliliğe bakış açısı üzerindeki etkisi ve evlilik hakkındaki kendi yaşamlarına dair görüşleri araştırılmıştır. İkinci çalışmada ise, Türkiye'nin en sık kullanılan çevrimiçi sosyal platformu olan Ekşi Sözlük'te toplam 298 girdi (bu girişlerin 202'si "COVID-19 insanlara evliliği düşündürüyor" başlığı altında, 96'sı "COVID-19 insanlara boşanmayı düşündürüyor" başlığı altında yazılmıştır) analiz edilerek anlamlı tematik birimler oluşturulmuştur. Bulgular, katılımcıların çoğunlukla COVID-19'un evliliğe ilişkin görüş ve temsiller üzerindeki hem olumlu hem de olumsuz etkilerinden bahsettiklerini göstermiştir. İki çalışmanın sonuçları arasında hem ortak (örn., yalnızlık, şiddet) hem de farklı (örn., cinsellik, evliliğe yönelik tutumlar üzerindeki olumlu ve olumsuz etkiler) tematik birimler olduğu görülmüştür. Dehşet Yönetimi Kuramı, Bağlanma Kuramı, stres araştırması ve büyüme perspektifi ile ilgili literatür ışığında tartışılan önemli çıkarımlar bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: COVID-19 salgını, evlilik, boşanma, görüşler, sosyal temsiller.

1. INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters and other forms of socio-political upheavals can have enormous consequences at the individual and community levels (e.g., Onyeaka et al., 2021). Although many researchers have questioned and investigated the impacts of such events with the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) outbreak affecting the globe since the beginning of 2020, the following dire consequences have become the main topic on the agenda. According to the World Health Organization (2022), over 500 million people contracted the virus in two years, and the number of deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic is more than 6 million. Countries implemented different strategies to cope with the pandemic, such as school closures, bans on public events, closing international borders, and lockdown policies. During the lockdown periods, which were mostly

applied before the invention of vaccines, people could not move freely, and they were ordered and, in some situations, forced to stay at home. The lockdown periods had an impact on the economy, education, health care systems, as well as the mental health of the individuals and their family life (Onyeaka et al., 2021). For example, research indicated an increase in depressive, anxiety, and insomnia symptoms during the pandemic (Pieh et al., 2021). Besides, there has been an increase in helpline calls for domestic violence across the globe (UN Women, 2022). During the pandemic, specifically considering the potential effects of lockdown periods, one of the interesting topics discussed by the public and scientists alike has been the possible effects of COVID-19 on relationships, particularly on marriages and divorces. For example, there was news in the media representing the expectation of a “divorce boom” (Race, 2020) and an increase in birth rates (Bilefsky & Yeğinsu, 2020) during the pandemic, especially after the lockdown periods.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unexpected and the most recent of global stressors affecting people worldwide. Yet, the number of empirical studies focusing specifically on what people think about the effect of COVID-19 on relationships is relatively limited, and existing research is mostly based on data from Europe or the USA, which are mostly based on survey research. Accordingly, in this research, we aimed to understand how the pandemic affects the experience and representation of relationships, more specifically marriage and divorce, by focusing on qualitative data from Turkey as a non-Western collectivistic country. People might suggest a positive, negative, or insignificant effect of COVID-19 on relationships, and in addition to the direction of the effect, we aimed to investigate perceived underlying factors of the suggested effects. These factors might enlighten us about the challenging and facilitating conditions for people under global stressors like pandemics, and these factors might be considered while preparing intervention programs.

In the literature, there are different theoretical perspectives offering explanations related to the impact of both natural and human-made events, all of which could help shed light on the effects of COVID-19. For instance, research on stress indicates a negative influence in such cases on relationships. However, some theories such as Attachment Theory (suggesting a close emotional bond with a caregiver at the beginning of life and mostly romantic partner in adulthood) and Terror Management Theory (TMT; referring that people innately feel threatened by their own mortality, to calm their anxiety they subscribe to meaningful worldviews that give them chance to ‘outlive’) suggest positive effects in these cases (Cohan, 2010).

Stress research suggests that as a stress factor, unfavorable events could negatively affect the mental health of individuals (e.g., Freedy et al., 1993; Norris & Kaniasty, 1996) and family functioning (e.g., Adams & Adams, 1984; Davila et al., 1997), or potentially causing economic difficulties which lead to negative consequences for relationships (Norris & Uhl, 1993). Different from stress research, Attachment Theory proposes that when there is a threat or stress factor, both infants (Bowlby, 1969) and adults (Hazan & Shaver, 1994) seek proximity, intimacy, and support from close others, which provides emotional comfort, security, and safety. Thus, the theory proposes stronger bonds between partners and a decline in the divorce rate after such events. In parallel with Attachment Theory, TMT (Pyszczynski et al., 1999; Solomon et al., 1991) points to the positive influence of unfavorable events on marriages, though emphasizing the emergence of different psychological mechanisms. For example, when people are reminded of their mortality or if they think about death, they will experience existential fear (Pyszczynski et al., 1999) and attempt to maintain close relationships and committed bonds, which are the symbols of ongoing life and would be helpful in dealing with the existential fear (Mikulincer et al., 2003; 2004). To sum up, both Attachment Theory and TMT support the argument that when there are threats, people will seek proximity; accordingly, we can expect stronger marital bonds and a decrease in divorce rates (Cohan, 2010).

The analysis of the effects of previous unfavorable phenomena provides evidence for both their positive and negative impacts on marriages and divorces. For instance, the study by Cohan and Cole (2002), which examined the effect of Hurricane Hugo on South Carolina in 1989, leading to substantial economic losses and unemployment, revealed an increase in the ratio of divorces, marriages, and birth rates afterward. In this research, while marriage and birth rates provide evidence for Attachment Theory and TMT, an increase in divorce rates supports the stress research. Cohan (2010) argued that the increase in all three family-related outcomes might also be related to the perspective of personal growth (Holahan & Moos, 1990), which describes stressors as opportunities to question life priorities and relationships. In this way, people either enhance their relationships or exit dysfunctional and abusive ones. Unlike the previous study showing an increase in divorce ratio after Hurricane Hugo, others indicate a decline in divorce rates after such events. This was the case following the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 (Nakonezny et al., 2004) and after the terrorist attack in New York City on September 11, 2001 (Cohan et al., 2009). Cohan (2010)

associated the inconsistent results for the effect of such events on divorces with the actual nature of the event. According to the researcher, although Hurricane Hugo led to high economic losses, only a small number of people lost their lives due to the storm thanks to early evacuation. However, the other two events in Oklahoma and New York were human-made and centered on “death” and “chronic post-disaster rebuilding stress” (Cohan et al., 2009). Cohan and colleagues (2009) suggested that people do not consider significant life changes when the stress and uncertainty are extreme.

On the one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic shares similarities with the disasters mentioned above. It is similar to Hurricane Hugo because of its devastating economic impact: Many people lost their jobs, resulting in substantial economic loss and an increase in global poverty (The World Bank, 2022). COVID-19 also shares similarities with the Oklahoma City bombing and the terrorist attack in New York City on September 11 regarding the saliency of death because approximately 6.5 million people lost their lives due to COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2022). On the other hand, COVID-19 has certain characteristics that differ from other disasters. Instead of evacuating to safer ground, people were asked to stay at home, and maintaining social distant from each other. Additionally, since it is a pandemic, rather than a specific region, the entire country was affected. Considering the similarities and differences between COVID-19 and other disasters, it is important to conduct research to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on relationships.

The theories and models, namely stress research, TMT, and Attachment Theory, provide perspectives to understand and interpret the effect of COVID-19 on relationships. The empirical studies conducted within the frame of these theories mainly compare the statistics of marriages, divorces, and birth rates before and after such events or periods (e.g., Cohan et al., 2009; Nakonezny et al., 2004). Regarding the effect of COVID-19 on marriage and divorce, recent statistics provide support for stress research. There is a decline in the number of marriages after the outbreak of COVID-19 compared to previous years (Kim & Kim, 2021; Manning & Payne, 2021; Westrick-Payne, 2022; TÜİK, 2021; Wagner et al., 2020). On the other hand, divorce rates support the arguments of Attachment Theory and TMT, with recent statistics from different countries such as the U.S.A. (Wilcox & Stone, 2020; Westrick-Payne, 2022), U.K. (Benson & McKay, 2020), and Turkey (TÜİK, 2021) indicating a drop in divorce rates. Particularly, March and April of 2020 (earlier in the pandemic) witnessed a sharp decline in divorces (Benson & McKay, 2020; TÜİK, 2021).

However, we should be cautious when interpreting these statistics because any decline in marriage rates might have been due to the pandemic restrictions (e.g., stay-at-home orders and limited public gatherings). In the same vein, the decline in divorce rates could be attributed to slowed or closed government services, such as the judiciary, during that period and/or the general physical restrictions that made it difficult to initiate and proceed with bureaucratic processes for divorce (Kim & Kim, 2021). As support for this argument, compared to 2020 when the restrictions were very high in Turkey, there was an increase in both marriages and divorces in 2021 and 2022 (TÜİK, 2023). More importantly, although statistics provide a perspective to understand the direction of the effects of the pandemic, as Cohan and colleagues (2009) emphasized, individual-level data are required to understand the mechanisms leading to changes in the rates. However, there are relatively limited number of studies, including individual-level data and emphasizing psychological mechanisms for the effects of COVID-19.

Concerning stress research, according to Pietromonaco and Overall (2020), COVID-19 triggers many external stressors, such as economic strain and social isolation, new roles in the absence of domestic help, etc. and couples might experience a decline in their relationship quality and stability if they do not have access to external resources (e.g., having a low income), possess certain individual vulnerabilities (e.g., suffering from poor psychological health), or have a less adaptive dyadic relationship (e.g., lacking conflict resolution skills). Some statistics indicating a decline in marriages might be interpreted as supporting stress research (Wagner et al., 2020). However, as indicated above, while interpreting the of the decrease in marriage rates as a psychological effect of COVID-19, one must be careful, as such a decline might be related to the official limitations on wedding ceremonies and stay-at-home orders (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020; Wagner et al., 2020).

There are also findings on the effect of COVID-19 on relationships that support the arguments of Attachment Theory and TMT. According to the U.K. Household Longitudinal Survey, during the lockdown period, while 20% of married parents reported a positive influence of COVID-19 on their marriages, only 9% reported a negative influence. Compared to the pre-COVID period, married parents reported that they consider divorce less often (Benson & McKay, 2020). According to a national survey conducted in the U.S.A., married adults reported that their marriage has become stronger during the

pandemic. They committed more to their marriages, and their appreciation for their partners grew stronger during this period (Wilcox & Stone, 2020).

1.1. Overview of the Present Research

Considering the relatively small number of studies based on individual-level data, the current research aimed to gain further insight into the effect of a global stressor (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic) on marriages and divorces by conducting two studies using qualitative methodology. In the first study, we conducted one-to-one interviews with married and single individuals to investigate their views regarding the effect of the pandemic on people's opinion of marriage in general and their own opinions in particular. We questioned the views of participants on other people's opinions – in addition to their own opinions on relationships – because people understand and predict the social world by considering not only their own experiences but also their impressions of others (Aronson et al., 2018). Furthermore, we reached out to both married and single individuals because, on the one hand, married individuals experienced the COVID-19 pandemic with their partners, and it is essential to investigate whether there is a change in the content or meaning of marriages for them. On the other hand, it is equally important to examine the effects of COVID-19 on the perceptions of single individuals because their opinions would also be helpful in understanding the psychological mechanisms that make them consider – or reconsider – the decision to marry. Considering Attachment Theory, for instance, it might be expected that dating couples might consider the transition to marriage because exceptional circumstances make attachment figures more accessible (Fraley & Shaver, 1998). Therefore, through interviews with both married and single individuals, we aimed to explore their opinions about the effects of the pandemic on relationships, as well as the similarities and differences between these individuals, and possible underlying explanations of those opinions.

However, the interview methodology as a data collection tool is susceptible to the social desirability effect because the participants are not anonymous. Recognizing this shortcoming, in our second study, we analyzed numerous entries on the frequently used online social platform (Ekşi Sözlük) written under the titles of “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce” and “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage”. In this online social platform, people anonymously share their ideas on different topics by using nicknames to conceal their identities, resulting in very low social desirability when people share their ideas on such online platforms (Özdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016). Thus, by mitigating the social desirability drawback of the first study, in the second study, we examined the social representations of the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on marriage and divorce via entries on Ekşi Sözlük. Social representations are the communicated and shared beliefs in society and are formed in an attempt to make sense of the world and provide descriptions and clarifications about events, facts, concepts, etc. (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). While investigating these representations, the focus is not on the individuals but on the society (Moscovici, 1984), and methods such as content analyses of daily speeches, interviews, and observations are used to investigate them (Farr, 1994). Hence, our goal in this second study was to understand the social representations regarding the effect of COVID-19 on marriage and divorce through thematic content analysis. In summary, by conducting two qualitative studies, we aimed to fill the gap in the literature and provide a broader perspective to understand the psychological mechanisms behind the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the most recent global unanticipated stressor, on relationships, specifically on marriages and divorces.

2. STUDY 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

In the scope of the first study, 31 participants volunteered, of which 20 were single and 11 were married individuals. The age of single individuals ranged between 23 and 33 ($M_{age} = 27.5$, $SD_{age} = 2.91$; 50% were female). In the same group, 11 (55%) held a bachelor's degree, 6 (30%) held a master's degree, and 3 (15%) held a Ph.D. In terms of the relationship status, 11 of them (55%) had a romantic relationship with the duration range of 2 months and 11 years, whereas 9 of them (45%) had no romantic relationship currently.

The age of the married individuals ranged between 32 and 37 ($M_{age} = 34.64$, $SD_{age} = 1.36$; 45.5% were female). Among them, 11 (55%) held a bachelor's degree, 6 (30%) held a master's degree, and 3 (15%) held a Ph.D. The duration of marriage ranged between 1.5 and 8 years; 7 of the married individuals (63.6%) had a child, and 4 (36.4%) had no child currently.

2.1.2. Instruments and Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the Middle East Technical University Ethical Committee (Approval number: 0050-ODTUIAEK-2022). Participants were recruited via convenience sampling. All participants were provided with an informed consent form that included information about the aim of the study, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The entire procedure was carried out within the framework of the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) and based on complete voluntariness of the participants without any deception. Semi-structured interviews were conducted through online meetings due to pandemic-related restrictions. There were two questions in the interview: “The COVID-19 pandemic is a prominent topic these days. In your opinion, does it affect people’s opinion/view of marriage in general? If yes, what are those effects?” and “Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your opinion or evaluation of marriage? If yes, what are those effects?”. Data for this research were collected as part of a multi-study data collection effort. All participants consented to the use of voice recorders by the researchers. To protect privacy, participants were not referred to by name during the interviews. All interviews were conducted by the two researchers of the current study (one of the researchers conducted interviews with single participants, and the other with married ones). All interviews were conducted in Turkish language, as the native language of all participants is Turkish. The duration of interviews ranged from 1 minute and 5 minutes and 38 seconds (with the average of 3 minutes and 6 seconds) for single participants, and from 1 minute and 17 seconds to 5 minutes and 18 seconds (with the average of 3 minutes and 26 seconds) for married participants. After data collection was completed, all audio recordings were transcribed.

2.1.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyze the data. This analysis involved systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of themes/patterns within the data. It allowed for the condensation of extensive textual content into a few thematic units using a systematic and objective coding approach. These thematic units could be derived through both inductive and deductive processes, with induction providing inferences from the content, and deduction used to interpret content in light of existing theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, an inductive approach was adopted since the themes were not predetermined based on existing literature; rather, thematic units emerged directly from the data. The researchers first analyzed the data independently, and then followed a consensus coding method in order to enhance the reliability of the study. In the process of determining thematic and sub-thematic units, both words and phrases were considered as a unit of analyses. After the data and independently formed thematic units were examined, reviewed, and revised repeatedly, themes and sub-themes were finalized. The identified themes, sub-themes, and example items were translated from Turkish to English by the researchers of the current study.

3. RESULTS

The findings of the thematic analysis of the two interview questions (regarding the effect of COVID-19 on other people’s opinions of marriage in general and the participants’ own opinions on marriage) asked to the two groups (single and married) revealed four sets of findings: The single individuals’ views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people’s opinions of marriage in general (Table 1); single individuals’ own opinions on marriage (Table 2); married individuals’ views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people’s opinions of marriage in general (Table 3); and married individuals’ own opinions on marriage (Table 4). All the themes, the sub-themes, frequencies of the sub-themes, and example items for each of them are presented in the tables.

In the four sets of findings, three common thematic units emerged: “positive effects,” “negative effects,” and “no effect” of the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, both single and married individuals mentioned these three main themes while discussing the pandemic’s impact on people’s opinions of marriage in general and their own opinions on the subject.

Specifically, as can be seen in Table 1, in addition to the “positive effects,” “negative effects,” and “no effect” themes in single individuals’ views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people’s opinions of marriage in general, the single participants also raised the following additional themes: “marriage rates,” “loneliness,” “instinct,” “violence,” and “child(ren) at home.”

Table 1. Single Individuals' Evaluations regarding the Effect of COVID-19 on People's Opinion of Marriage in General

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Example Items |
|---|---|--|
| Positive Effects on People's Opinion of Marriage in General | • Warming up to the idea of marriage (3, 15%) | • It's obvious that there are people very affected. The heading* called 'deciding to get married after the quarantine' was created. (P8) |
| | • Spending (more) time together (5, 25%) | • People are always together, they find the time they couldn't find in that rush, and maybe they experience both the convenience and pleasure of spending time together in their marriage, in their homes. (P7) |
| | • Getting to know each other (2, 10%) | • Because married people will stay at home more, they will spend more time and have the opportunity to see each other's good sides and bad sides better. (P16) |
| | • Preconditions (e.g., getting married out of love and still loving each other and spending time together) (1, 5%) | • If you and your spouse haven't forgotten these (...smiling, chatting, spending time together...), I think the coronavirus circumstance will not change anything in your life, so you can even see it as a different holiday with her/him. (P3) |
| Negative Effects on People's Opinion of Marriage in General | • Increase in divorce rates (8, 40%) | • Divorce numbers increased in China. (P12) |
| | • Not wanting to get married anymore (1, 5%) | • My girl/boyfriend called me recently and said what a ridiculous marriage is. I said, oh, for God's sake, who did you listen to, and I laughed her/him down (...) as it can be seen, it affects people. (P5) |
| | • Getting to know each other (3, 15%) | • Because people don't go out and must live in houses, they see each other's negative side more and have a lower chance of tolerating it, etc. In this sense, it may have affected the views of people who are currently married or living together. (P18) |
| | • Difficulty of sharing the living space (6, 30%) | • Staying in the same house may have been a kind of challenge. (P4) |
| | • Difficulty of spending too much time together (e.g., getting bored with each other) (7, 35%) | • They spend a lot of time in the same house, they get bored. (P9) |
| | • Psychological/emotional difficulties (e.g., high stress, increase in incidents of arguments, becoming oversensitive and impatient during the pandemic) (9, 45%) | • Because of the epidemic (...), people's psychological state may become more fragile. (P10) |
| | • Marriage becoming unbearable (1, 5%) | • I think this process makes marriages more unbearable. (P7) |
| No Effect | • Preconditions (e.g., not respecting each other's spaces, not loving each other) (3, 15%) | • If I marry my partner for love, I wouldn't complain about it (being in the quarantine with her/him). (P3) |
| | • Not questioning/thinking about it, but likely to have no effect (5, 25%) | • I don't think it affects. (P2) |
| Marriage/Birth Rates | • Increase in marriage/birth rates (2, 10%) | • Birth rates may increase after this process because you know people are at home. (P6) |
| | • Inability to hold wedding ceremonies (1, 5%) | • People gave up having wedding ceremonies because it is necessary to avoid crowded places. (P14) |
| Loneliness | • Not being alone (3, 15%) | • One may think that it is better to have someone than to be alone. (P8) |
| | • The difficulty/consequences of being lonely (e.g., people living alone tend to become more introvert) (4, 20%) | • Some people stay at home alone, some do not have roommates, like me. These people may have turned a little more introvert. (P6) |
| | • Loneliness makes you think about marriage/relationship (4, 20%) | • I think those who live alone are more negatively affected (...). It seems to me that they may have had a more positive attitude towards marriage or relationships. (P4) |
| Instinct | • Fear of death and the will to carry on the blood-line lead to a desire for marriage, having children, leaving something behind. (1, 5%) | • Maybe the desire to leave something behind in this life, maybe the desire to have a child. You know, because it activates such survival needs, it may have led unmarried or single individuals to marriage. (P18) |
| Violence | • Increase in psychological/physical violence (3, 15%) | • We follow the news that there is an increase in domestic violence in this process. (P1) |
| | • Increase in violence against women (1, 5%) | • Unfortunately, we don't know what is happening inside those houses at the moment. Perhaps many people, many women, are experiencing violence right now. (P7) |
| Child(ren) at Home | • Difficulty going through the pandemic and lockdowns with a child at home (1, 5%) | • When my coworkers are talking about their children, they say what a wonderful thing school is; there are people who are delirious by saying, "what will we do? I have never stayed at home for such a long time with the children." (P20) |

Table 2 represents single individuals' views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on their own opinions of marriage. In addition to the existing themes of "positive effects," "negative effects," and "no effect", a new theme, "conditions for the effect of COVID-19" was identified based on the participants' comments. For example, participants indicated that negative effects might occur if only the person lives with his/her family but not the partner during the pandemic.

Table 2. Single Individuals' Evaluations regarding the Effect of COVID-19 on their Opinion on Marriage

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Example Items |
|---|---|--|
| Positive Effects on their Opinion on Marriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warming up to the idea of marriage/relationship (e.g., thinking about the good sides of marriage, wishing to be married) (5, 25%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I sent this message to my girlfriend: "I wish we were married before corona and live together now." (P11) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advantages of marriage (e.g., having fun, getting through quarantine more easily, satisfying tactile needs, spending more time together, sharing, and not being alone) (7, 35%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I were married now, I would have fun at least, there would be someone in the house, it is even very difficult to cook on her/his own. (P10) |
| Negative Effects on their Opinion on Marriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The difficulty of worrying about a spouse, a child and other family members (1, 5%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm glad I'm not married right now. Because then, you have one more person to think/worry about. (P17) |
| No Effect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change in my opinions (13, 65%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even if we were having this conversation at a very different time, I wouldn't say anything different about marriage. (P19) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preconditions (e.g., living with own parents, respecting each other's spaces for cohabitant partners) (2, 10%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I was staying alone, maybe I could wish that there was someone; but in a crowded environment, in the family, honestly, I didn't have such a thought. (P7) |
| Conditions for the Effect of COVID-19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I were with the ideal (utopic) partner, I would have enjoyed it. (1, 5%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I mean, it would be nice if my ideal partner exists somewhere, if she/he could be real, of course, it would be nice. (P19) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not ideal when the person lives with his/her parents (e.g., worrying about the family members). (2, 10%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (My partner) lives with her/his family at the moment. I can feel a bit of increase in trouble and stress among her/his family. Of course, if we didn't have such a situation, these periods would be happier. We are going through a bit of trouble right now. (P12) |

Married individuals were asked the same questions regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people's opinions of marriage in general and their own views regarding the effects on themselves. As can be seen in Table 3 representing the married individuals' views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people's opinion of marriage in general, in addition to the existing themes of "positive effects," "negative effects," and "no effect" themes, three new themes emerged: "gender," "violence," and "child(ren) at home."

Table 3. Married Individuals' Evaluations regarding the Effect of COVID-19 on People's Opinion of Marriage in General

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Example Items |
|---|---|---|
| Positive Effects on People's Opinion of Marriage in General | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting each other in difficult times (1, 9%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It has a positive effect in the sense that you support each other; when one feels down, the other makes him/her feel good. (P3) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is better to stay with your partner (1, 9%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having a girl/boyfriend in times of coronavirus is something everyone wants. People are in the mood of spending time at home with their girl/boyfriend instead of being alone at home. (P5) |
| Negative Effects on People's Opinion of Marriage in General | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in divorce rates (5, 45%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We saw the news in China reporting an increase in the number of divorce cases. (P4) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty of sharing the living space (3, 27%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think even a normal relationship (means not only marriages) would be negatively affected by being close. (P8) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty of spending too much time together (1, 9%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spouses spend more time with each other than they ever do, which in my opinion does not affect a relationship in a good way. (P7) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological/emotional difficulties (e.g., inability to ignore minor issues) (6, 55%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Things that were not considered as trouble before seem like trouble now. (P9) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many marriages disintegrate (1, 9%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since I have personally heard from my friends, I know very well that many marriages are worn out deeply in this process. (P3) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting to know each other truly (e.g., the negative sides of people's personalities begin to emerge in times of crisis) (1, 9%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People show their ugly faces. (P8) |
| No Effect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preconditions (e.g., already being in a dysfunctional marriage, the degree of occupation for either partner with housework, job, etc.) (5, 45%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It can be difficult for relationships in which partners do not have their own hobbies or do not give each other a fair crack of the whip. (P10) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not affect (1, 9%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no example that I know; so I don't think it will affect much. (P11) |
| Gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problems arising due to division of labor (e.g., fathers who wish not to get involved with childcare at home in any way) (3, 27%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it affects people's lives more through gender equality. (P1) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in violence and child abuse (2, 18%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It had not even occurred to me that people could have problems at home, women could be subjected to violence, children could be abused, staying at home could be a problem. (P4) |
| Child(ren) at Home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty going through the pandemic and lockdowns with a child at home (2, 18%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may not be a very good experience, at least for families with children at home. (P7) |

Finally, as can be seen in Table 4 representing the married individuals' views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on their own opinions of marriage, in addition to the existing themes of "positive effects," "negative effects," and "no effect" themes, two additional themes emerged: "gender," and "child(ren) at home."

Table 4. Married Individuals' Evaluations regarding the Effect of COVID-19 on their Opinion on Marriage

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Example Items |
|---|--|--|
| Positive Effects on their Opinion on Marriage | • Leave the pandemic behind together (2, 18%) | • I really feel lucky because at least we are struggling with this together. (P10) |
| | • Increase in sharing and joint activities (2, 18%) | • We even shared more, like watching TV series together, etc.; so, this may even have had a positive effect to some extent. (P9) |
| Negative Effects on their Opinion on Marriage | • Difficulty of sharing the living space (1, 9%) | • We are stuck inside the house. I can say that it affects us very negatively. (P2) |
| | • Psychological/emotional difficulties (e.g., low tolerance, behaving rather illogically in the face of the difficulties related to the pandemic) (4, 36%) | • When a person stays at home against her will, this changes the mood of the person. (P7) |
| | • Difficulty of spending too much time together (2, 18%) | • Spending that much time together or whatever. It was a situation where everything, all the external factors, are disappeared, and people became naked (emotionally). So yes, I feel like we broke a bit. (P1) |
| No Effect | • Not affect/not too radical a change (4, 36%) | • It did not affect me. Everything is the same; not much has changed. (P11) |
| | • Preconditions (e.g., continue to have personal independence despite being married, not projecting troubles onto each other) (2, 18%) | • I can't say that we were negatively affected by this process because, as I said, we are independent individuals; we tried to lead independent lives in the same house. (P3) |
| Gender | • (In)equality in the division of labor (3, 27%) | • Since there is a slightly more egalitarian sharing in the division of labor now (...), he does all tasks without any need to say (...). In a very good direction... I mean, it has changed in a good way. (P4) |
| Child(ren) at Home | • Difficulty going through the pandemic and lockdowns with a child at home (4, 36%) | • If I didn't have children, just married instead, I might not feel that much pressure and stress. (P6) |

When examining the four sets of findings represented in the tables in relation to participants' marital status, several noteworthy similarities and differences emerge:

1. The theme of "violence" appears in both single and married individuals' views regarding the impact of COVID-19 on people's opinions of marriage in general (See Table 1 and Table 3). However, it does not emerge in their own opinions on marriage (See Table 2).
2. In contrast to single individuals, married participants consistently mention gender-related issues, particularly equality or inequality in the division of labor (See Table 3 and Table 4).
3. Unlike married individuals, single participants discuss themes such as "marriage/birth rates," "loneliness," and "instinct" in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on people's opinions of marriage in general (See Table 1). Married individuals, on the other hand, mention "child(ren) at home" when discussing both the impact on people's opinions of marriage in general and their own opinions (See Table 3 and Table 4). Single individuals only mention the "child(ren) at home" theme in relation to people's opinions of marriage in general, and they focus on "conditions for the effect of COVID-19" when discussing their own opinions on marriage (See Table 1 and Table 2).

When delving into the sub-themes, certain patterns emerge:

1. Single individuals' views on the "positive effects" of COVID-19 on marriage are similar in both their perspectives on people's opinions of marriage in general and their own opinions (e.g., mentioning that couples spend more time together as a positive aspect of the pandemic's effect).
2. In contrast, the sub-themes under the "negative effects" theme differ significantly between single individuals' views regarding the impact of COVID-19 on people's opinions of marriage in general and their own opinions. There are more negative effects reported in single individuals' opinions about others' views on marriage in general, and the content of these negative effects varies (See Table 1 and Table 2).
3. In the case of married individuals, there is a higher number of sub-themes related to the negative effects of COVID-19 compared to positive ones. Both in their views on the impact of COVID-19 on people's opinions of marriage in general and their own opinions on marriage, similarities exist in terms of both the number (e.g., more negative effects are reported compared to positive ones) and the content (e.g., challenges related to sharing living space, spending excessive time together, and experiencing psychological and emotional difficulties) (See Table 3 and Table 4).

These observations provide valuable insights into how marital status influences individuals' perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on marriage.

4. STUDY 2

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

In the second study, the entries on a frequently used online social platform in Turkey, called Ekşi Sözlük, were examined. Related headings regarding the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on marriage and divorce in this platform were reviewed. A total of 298 entries were examined and subjected to in-depth analysis. Since individuals use nicknames while sharing their opinions in such platforms, participants were anonymous in their identities and any demographic information, which was benefitted in terms of compensating social desirability drawback of the first study.

4.1.2. Instruments and procedure

All the entries found under the headings related to the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on marriage and divorce were carefully examined to determine their inclusion in the analyses. A total of 212 entries were identified under the title “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of *marriage*”, of which 4 were excluded due to ambiguity and 6 were excluded due to being general comments and irrelevant to the effects of COVID-19. Consequently, 202 entries were included in the analyses. In addition, a total of 121 entries were identified under the title of “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of *divorce*”, of which 9 were excluded due to the ambiguity of comments and 16 were excluded due to being general comments and irrelevant to the effects of COVID-19. This resulted in a total of 96 entries included in the analyses. Thus, a grand total of 298 entries were analyzed in the scope of the second study. As in the first study, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to the data.

5. RESULTS

Thematic analyses were conducted to examine the entries in Ekşi Sözlük written under the related titles regarding the effects of COVID-19 on marriage and divorce (i.e., 202 entries under the title of “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage” and 96 entries under the title of “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce”). In total, 298 entries were analyzed. All the themes, the sub-themes, frequencies of the sub-themes, and example items for each of them are presented in the tables.

Specifically, as can be seen in Table 5 showing the effects of COVID-19 on the representations of marriages, the effect on singles was divided into two as advantages and disadvantages of being single. Similarly, the effect on marriage was divided into two as positive and negative effects as well. Another important line of entries includes attitudes towards marriage in which both positive and negative effects showed up as sub-themes. There was also a group of people who think that there could be no effect of COVID-19 on marriage (See Table 5). Additionally, a group of entries mentioned “COVID-19 is changing the relationship status of individuals”, for instance, single people are thinking about getting married, and married people are thinking about getting divorced; and the other theme “marriage/birth rates” emphasized an increase in marriage/birth rates. “Sexuality” theme showed up only in the second study (on the representations of both marriage and divorce), in which data was obtained from anonymous participants. This was unlike the findings of the first study, in which one-by-one interviews were held. Additionally, “loneliness” (in two senses: leading people to think of marriage, and not leading them to do so) and “instinct” (for reproduction and blood-line survival due to fear of death) themes showed up in the effect of the pandemic on marriage. These two were only common with the single individuals’ views regarding the effect of the pandemic on people’s opinions of marriage in general. Finally, the themes of “violence” (specifically, including an increase in violence against women) and “child(ren) at home” commonly appeared in the views of both single and married individuals regarding the effect of the pandemic on people’s opinions of marriage.

Table 5. The Effects of COVID-19 on the Representations of Marriages

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Example Items |
|--|--|--|
| Views on Positive and Negative Effects on Single Individuals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantages | |
| | ○ freedom | ○ My greatest pleasure is that I have the pleasure of doing what I want to do when I want it. |
| | ○ exemption from responsibility/worrying about/ tolerating someone else | ○ In a possible survival condition, I'll just take care of myself. I don't have to think/worry about anyone. |
| | ○ having personal space/time | ○ The feeling of having a home of one's own (...) is very nice. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disadvantages | |
| | ○ deterioration of psychological state (e.g., talking to pets, plants, and walls) | ○ We work from home; I'm about to talk to myself. |
| | ○ slow passage of time | ○ Netflix, PS-PC games, etc., just then once I looked, time never passed. |
| Views on Positive and Negative Effects on Marriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive effects | |
| | ○ more inclination towards marriage | ○ I've been thinking about this for days; it's really true. |
| | ○ more inclination towards having a child | ○ That's not even a thing; people are thinking of having a child, too. |
| | ○ appreciating the importance of the relationship's/partner's qualities | ○ I think quarantine days can be passed smoothly with a very funny, sensitive lover. Otherwise, it would overwhelm and suffocate; this period would turn into torture. |
| | ○ advantages of marriage (e.g., sharing household chores, economy, spending time together, psychological/social support such as overcoming problems together) | ○ When people go through tough times, they really look for support. The idea of the existence of someone else, having overcome troubles together, has been flooding all my cells lately. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative effects | |
| | ○ married individuals thinking of singlehood/divorce | ○ Married individuals want to divorce in these quarantine days. |
| | ○ thinking about marriage is a temporary, ridiculous, selfish, and unreasonable desire while there is a pandemic | ○ If you're getting married to avoid getting bored at home, it means that you're idiots. |
| | ○ alternatives to getting married such as buying a PlayStation, Pornhub membership, and having strong friendships | ○ Not getting married, but I realized that I should get the PS5 immediately. |
| | ○ disadvantages of marriage (e.g., the difficulty of taking responsibility/housework, worrying about someone else such as a spouse and/or a child; tarnish individuals' peace of mind) | ○ My panic level is far above normal these days. If I had a child or something, I think I would go crazy. |
| | ○ not getting along with spouse (e.g., the difficulty of being in quarantine with someone especially if you do not love/get along, constantly arguing, not wanting the partner at home/not wanting to go home) | ○ Imagine that you are in quarantine in the same house with someone you don't like and don't get along with. Oh my god, even the worst disease in the world looks like a slight runny nose compared to this. |
| No Effect on Attitudes Towards Marriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not questioning/thinking about it | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It didn't have that type of effect on me (...) I didn't have time to think about it. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associating COVID-19 with marriage is nonsense | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who makes up these (ideas)? Do not concoct silly things! |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a positive view of marriage as before the COVID-19 pandemic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, I was thinking before, too. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content with singlehood, not thinking about marriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As I never thought of marriage, when I look at the state of my married friends, I thank thousand times that I'm single, fortunately. |
| Changing the Relationship Status | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of not marriage but cohabitation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just live together; the desire of marriage is meaningless. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single individuals will marry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As soon as the epidemic is over, I will marry the first-person fits. |
| Marriage/Birth Rates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in cases of divorce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in divorce cases in China is an example of this. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the rates of marriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increasing number of marriages in crisis |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in birth rate/population | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A population explosion may occur during this period. |
| Sexuality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It makes people think of getting married | |
| | ○ free-of-charge and easy sex | ○ I actually thought about it; it would be nice to lock ourselves in the house and have sex 24/7. |
| | ○ increase in sexual activity/libido | ○ Especially the libido of men has increased excessively due to the time spent in the family home. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has nothing to do with marriage | |
| | ○ singles can also have sex | ○ Single people may also have the opportunity to have sex. As if only married people have sex |
| | ○ individuals should not get married just because of sex | ○ Anyone who wants to have sex should go to a brothel. |
| | ○ single individuals assume that married ones are sexually very active | ○ As if married couples are having sex right now (!) |
| Loneliness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It makes people think of getting married | |
| | ○ it is only applicable for single individuals living alone | ○ It should be for those who are single and live alone. As I'm a single individual living with my parents, I personally still don't think of it. |
| | ○ the challenges of being lonely (e.g., loneliness is tough in difficult times such as illness) | ○ Quarantine is hard alone. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has nothing to do with marriage | |
| | ○ getting used/love to live alone | ○ So much the better; I love loneliness. |
| | ○ one can do what they wish by themselves, being self-sufficient | ○ Those who can't manage to stay on their own may want to get married. |
| | ○ keeping company does not necessarily save one from loneliness | ○ You (married people) are very crowded, but I think you are too lonely in that crowd. |
| | ○ not putting up with a person in order not to be alone | ○ Even if I'm alone, I can't take someone's whims just because s/he takes care of me. |
| Instinct | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instinct of reproduction and blood-line survival (due to fear of death) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In chaotic environments, such as epidemics, wars, etc., we've learned that reproduction, which is one of the most basic instincts, is getting whipped. |
| Violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in violence against women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence against women increased excessively after corona. |
| Child(ren) at Home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spare more time to children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I see that people are spending time with their spouses and children somehow. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty going through the pandemic and lockdowns with a child at home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially if there are children in the house, puff life is a lie. |

Finally, as can be seen in Table 6 presenting the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the representations of divorce, anonymous participants consistently mentioned “causes of increase in divorces” such as the challenge of spending too much time together, becoming aware of the wishes that have been delayed/suppressed due to marriage, psychological/emotional difficulties, and they mentioned “relationship preconditions suggesting divorces.” A group of people again claimed that the pandemic has “no effects of on divorces,” and some anonymous participants discussed the “preconditions for not getting a divorce.” In addition, although the heading on Ekşi Sözlük is “The COVID-19 pandemic’s making people think of divorce”, a group of people mentioned its “positive effects on married individuals,” such as strengthening the marriage/relationship. Also, “changing the relationship status” of COVID-19 (e.g., ‘singles will get married’ and ‘increases in cases of divorce’), “marriage/birth rates,” “sexuality,” “instinct,” “violence,” and “child(ren) at home” are common themes associated with the effects of COVID-19 on the representations of marriage. Marriage/birth rates and instinct were also mentioned by the single individuals in the first study while discussing the effects of the pandemic on people’s opinion of marriage in general. The theme of “gender”, more specifically (in) equality in division of labor, emerged as a theme similar to married individuals’ views regarding the effect of the pandemic on people’s opinions of marriage in general and on their own view on marriage. Additionally, in line with this theme, “making people question their current relationships” is added as a representation of divorce (See Table 6).

Table 6. The Effects of COVID-19 on the Representations of Divorce

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Example Items | |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Causes of Increase in Divorces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenge of being together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ getting to know each other truly such as confronting the negative sides and deficiencies of the partner ○ difficulty of spending too much time together ○ difficulty of sharing the living space/being too close ○ increase in arguments/existing problems become more profound | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sometimes, spending too much time together makes people pull away from each other. This results in divorce. ○ Familiarity breeds contempt. ○ It doesn’t bode well for couples to stay together for a long time. ○ Shouting like “enough, enough!” are all around. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming aware of the wishes that have been delayed/suppressed due to marriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All kinds of situations and events such as repressed hobbies, places to be seen, dreams built with zero hope for years, suppressed desire and curiosity for other bodies, which are postponed under the pretext of marriage, spouse, etc., will burst. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological/emotional difficulties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ increase in intolerance due to decrease in freedom (e.g., restrictions in social life) ○ psychological pressure/tension ○ uncertainty/stress stemming from income, health, or other problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I suppose that when individuals were away from work and social life, they could not discharge anywhere and, with this tension at home, started to push their spouses around. ○ We are at the point of breaking up with my girl/boyfriend; we’ve been insane, everyone has been insane. ○ The economy is broken, there is a significant health problem that is uncertain where to go and when it will end. As a result of these, couples push their closest ones around. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship preconditions suggesting divorce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ partners not matching/loving each other ○ not having anything to talk about/share ○ inability to get along with/tolerate each other ○ not knowing each other (e.g., getting married within a short time, being in a distant relationship) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Let them divorce. These couples have never loved each other anyway. ○ A boring person is boring everywhere; life does not pass with someone with anything to share, quarantine, or so forth will be an excuse. ○ If they can’t even tolerate looking at each other’s face, if being in the same environment for a long time creates tension, let them divorce anyway. ○ I think that especially couples in their first years of marriage are in the risk group. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No actual increase in divorce rates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ not affect ○ misperceptions concerning the statistics because of the absence of registered divorce cases due to lockdown periods, and the sudden emergence of registered cases due to such accumulation ○ marriages are not as tightly bond as they used to be in the past between partners, and they spend more time on their personal phones/computers as opposed to with partners ○ no colorful social life, no distractor making individuals thinking divorce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The situation was the same before the quarantine, and it will continue to be like this after the quarantine. ○ Isn’t the size of the (divorce) numbers stem from the accumulation? Puff what if you don’t force yourself to find such tragic and dramatic reasons for everything? ○ A nonsense proposition. Don’t think that marriages are the same as before; the world has changed, realize this now. Everyone has a phone, a computer, houses are huge. Everyone hangs out on their own. ○ I console most of my friends; when you go out for a bit, and the work starts, you will be distracted and relaxed. | |
| | No Effect on Divorces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preconditions for not getting a divorce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ spending time on their own/giving each other space ○ balancing between spending time apart and together ○ matching partners/marriages built on solid foundations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If everyone spends time in their own space and doesn’t move around the house like they are glued to each other, this event (divorce) won’t happen. ○ We can spend time both together and separately, even if we are in the same house. The important thing is to keep the balance in between. It is necessary to be neither very close to nor like two strangers. ○ Those who will overcome this situation will be people who are mature, have made a logical decision in choosing a spouse, and have built their family on solid foundations. |

Table 6. The Effects of COVID-19 on the Representations of Divorce-*Cont.*

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Example Items |
|---|--|--|
| Positive Effect on Married Individuals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the marriage/relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think this quarantine environment may have really helped to get to know the spouses. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> opportunity to get to know each other more | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My parents, who have arguments every night, are getting along pretty well now, and they are very happy. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> getting along better than before the pandemic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (I realized that) our problem was a miscommunication, not getting to the roots of the problems. So, discuss, don't be afraid of discussing. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enabling discussion of problems by reducing miscommunication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the quarantine is over, and they rethink, there is even a possibility that they will attach more, as both sides overcame a difficult situation together by collaborating. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> this process/overcoming challenges together will be much more unifying/enjoyable for couples (especially with the right match/common passions) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This mandatory quarantine is a medicine for the soul for those couples who can't spend enough time at home. |
| Making Individual Questions their Current Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questioning of marriage/relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now I look at the issue as a period in which not only as a husband-wife relationship but also all relationships are questioned in general. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thinking about divorce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Married individuals consider divorce. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to think about the relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maybe we should take this opportunity to think about some issues. Like why am I unhappy at home? Why can't I get along with my wife/husband? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abandoning the idea of divorce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our experience is the opposite. We've decided to reconcile with my spouse, with whom we had separated our homes 11 months ago. |
| Changing the Relationship Status | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singles will/want to get married (and likely have children) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those who are single may aspire to be married more than ever. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be more potential mates for single individuals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For us, namely singles, it means an increase in the portfolio and new hopes. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in cases of divorce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is true for couples going through the epidemic process together. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marriages either become stronger or come to an end | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As far as I understand, marriages in this challenging process are either getting stronger or coming to the breakaway point. |
| Marriage/. Birth Rates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the rates of remarriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the following part of the news that I read (regarding an increase in cases of divorce); it was also written remarriage after divorces. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease in the rates of marriages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marriage rates also decrease. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in pregnancy/birth rate/population | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be a noticeable increase in the population. |
| Sexuality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in sexual drive/libido and sexual activity/ejaculation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I were married, I would have sex 24/7 with my spouse with no regard for the pandemic. People attempt to get divorced. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreases in divorces due to having sex (and likely have children) in quarantine | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Couples, who have no choice but to have sex due to quarantine, will give up divorce for the sake of babies to be born. |
| Violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in domestic violence and murder of women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I bet that when Turkey is under quarantine, the country will be shaken by murder cases. |
| Instinct | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The instinct of being together under threat | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scientifically, threats bring people closer to each other. |
| Gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (In)equality in division of labor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the housework is done by the woman all the time, and the man only plays games and watches TV series, nobody, even a dog you tied, would stay in such an environment. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spare more time to children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I had been spending so little time with my children (...) it is just what the doctor ordered. |
| Child(ren) at Home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty going through the pandemic and lockdowns with a child at home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most beautiful thing in the world is a child, yes. But if there is no discipline and no rules (in such a process), you can see the marriage as the coffin and the child as the nail. |

6. GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the present research, we conducted two studies to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the experience and representation of relationships (more specifically on marriage and divorce); so that, it would be possible to understand protective and risk factors for relationships during such global stressors. In the first study, we aimed to explore how the pandemic influenced the views of both single and married individuals regarding people's opinions of marriage in general and on their own opinions of marriage through semi-structured one-to-one interviews. In the second study, considering social desirability as a shortcoming of the interview methodology, we analyzed the entries under the titles regarding the impact of COVID-19 on marriages and divorces on the most commonly used anonymous online social platform in Turkey (i.e., Ekşi Sözlük) to understand the communicated and shared beliefs in society regarding the effect of COVID-19 on marriage and divorce. To identify thematic and sub-thematic units, we employed the thematic analysis method, and determined common patterns. The findings revealed both common (e.g., loneliness, violence, etc.) and distinct (e.g., sexuality, causes of the increase in divorces, etc.) thematic units between the two studies.

Specifically, in both studies, the results mainly pointed to the participants' opinions being both positive and negative as to the effects of the pandemic on the opinions on and representations of marriage; whereas a small group of participants claimed that there are no links between the pandemic and opinions or representations of marriage. The findings of the first study revealed that in all four groups of results (i.e., single individuals' views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people's opinion of marriage in general and

their own opinion on marriage; and married individuals' views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people's opinion of marriage in general and their own opinion on marriage), there were three common themes: "positive effects," "negative effects," and "no effect." Similarly, in the second study, there were themes and sub-themes indicating positive effects (e.g., positive effect on married individuals), adverse effects (e.g., causes of increase in divorces), and no effect (e.g., no effect on attitudes toward marriage) of the pandemic on relationships. There are different theoretical perspectives to help us interpreting these findings. To illustrate, while stress research (e.g., Norris & Kaniasty, 1996) suggests the negative influence of disasters on relationships, Attachment Theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1969) and TMT (e.g., Pyszczynski et al. 1999) point to a positive effect in this respect, such as a decline in divorce rates and increase in commitment in relationships (Cohan et al., 2009). Thus, it can be stated that the themes in the current study indicating the adverse effects of the pandemic on relationships are parallel with the stress research, and those related to the positive effects of the pandemic are in line with TMT and Attachment Theory.

More specifically, considering the positive effects of the pandemic, in the first study, as support for Attachment Theory and TMT, participants mentioned the protective sides and benefits of relationships. However, it is important to note that there were some differences in the opinions of single and married individuals regarding the positive effects of the pandemic. Single participants, in contrast to their married counterparts, indicated that the pandemic made individuals warm up to the idea of marriage, and spending time together and getting to know each other are the benefits of the pandemic on relationships. Married participants, unlike the single ones, emphasized the importance of mutual support and the ability to cope with and face challenges together during difficult times. These sub-themes were not found in the singles group, who instead mentioned more often the positive sides of the marriage in general (not specific to pandemic circumstances), such as spending time together, satisfying tactile needs, and having fun together. This result implies that while single individuals focus on the "fun" part of the relationships, married individuals evaluate marriages/relationships as a "support mechanism." In parallel, the literature on coping with stress also emphasizes marriage's role in dealing with stressful conditions (e.g., Waite & Lehrer, 2003).

In the second study, under the title "The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage", the theme of "views on positive and negative effects on marriage" emerged. In this theme, rather than relationships in general, the emphasis is on marriages. Similar to the first study's findings, in parallel with TMT, more inclination toward marriage and having a child was mentioned. Besides, as support for Attachment Theory, advantages of marriages such as spending time together and psychological/social support were mentioned. Moreover, in the second study, there is a sub-theme, namely appreciating the relationship's and partner's qualities which suggests positive effects depend on the relationship's and partner's positive characteristics. Additionally, under the title "The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce", a number of entries under the "positive effect on married individuals" theme mentioned the strengthening effect of the pandemic on the marriage/relationship with sub-themes, which support Attachment Theory, such as enabling discussion of problems by reducing miscommunication and overcoming challenges together. These entries are in parallel with the findings from the surveys (e.g., Wilcox & Stone, 2020), showing that marriages have become stronger during the pandemic with increased commitment and appreciation for the partners.

Unlike Attachment Theory and TMT, as mentioned, stress research suggests a negative effect of the pandemic on relationships. Considering the adverse effects of COVID-19 on relationships, in the first study, under the theme of negative effects of the pandemic, both single and married participants mentioned the increase in divorce rates by referring to the news reporting an increase in divorce rates in China. Similarly, in the second study, under the title of "The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce", the themes "causes of increase in divorces" and "no effect on divorce" emerged. Still, there was no mention of a decline in divorces. Although statistics do not indicate an immediate increase, indeed a decrease, in divorces concerning the COVID-19 pandemic (Benson & McKay, 2020; TÜİK, 2021), people expect an increase in divorces because of news in the media. In the current research, there was especially a reference to news regarding increase in divorce rates in China, which implies the power of the media. In the literature, there are also studies indicating a possible decline in divorce rates after stressful life events (e.g., Cohan et al., 2009; Nakonezny et al., 2004); indeed, people may not consider making significant life changes when stress and uncertainty are extreme. Also, as might be an indication of the expectation of an increase in divorce rates, in the first study, both the single and married individuals' views regarding the effect of the pandemic on people's opinion of marriage in general, the number of sub-themes under "negative effects" far exceeded that of those under "positive effects." This finding implies that the perception of people regarding the effect of the pandemic on relationships is more parallel with the stress

research rather than Attachment Theory and TMT. However, we should note that there is a discrepancy in the evaluation of participants while commenting on others and themselves. That is, the number of sub-themes indicating the negative effects of the pandemic on people's opinion of marriage in general is highly greater than the sub-themes indicating positive effects; however, while evaluating the effect of the pandemic on their own opinion, especially single individuals mostly mentioned positive – rather than negative – effect of the pandemic. This observation suggests that while participants' assessments of general opinions align with stress research, the impact of the pandemic on their personal views supports Attachment Theory and TMT.

In the second study, under the title “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage”, the theme “the views on positive and negative effects of marriage” indicates that people commonly consider disadvantages of marriage, and they assume that married individuals think about singlehood and divorce during this process. The sub-themes in this context also point out that marriage during the pandemic is not a good decision, and alternatives to getting married, such as purchasing a PlayStation, were suggested. Besides, under the title “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce”, the number and content of themes and sub-themes regarding the negative effects of the pandemic on relationships are much more various than that of positive ones (e.g., “the challenge of being together” theme with sub-themes such as the difficulty of spending too much time together and being too close and “psychological/emotional difficulties” theme with sub-themes such as uncertainty/stress stemming from income, health, or other problems). Considering the drop in divorce statistics during the pandemic and the married individuals' reports in the literature indicating the positive influence of the pandemic on their marriages (Benson & McKay, 2020), this finding might be evaluated as an inconsistency. In this respect, the attribution literature (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973) might be helpful in interpreting the results. If the negative experiences such as “difficulty of sharing the living space” are attributed to the pandemic conditions rather than the partner, it might not lead to divorce or negative views towards partners (Neff et al., 2022). Thus, whether the relationships are affected from the pandemic in a negative way or not seems related with individuals' different attributions regarding liability of stressors and negative experiences associated with it.

As outlined earlier, in the current research, regarding the negative effects of the pandemic, participants mentioned some factors specific to the quarantines during COVID-19, such as the difficulty of sharing the living space or the difficulty of spending too much time together in addition to the factors that might apply to other disasters such as psychological/emotional difficulties, worrying about a spouse, a child, and other family members. It is crucial to acknowledge that the nature of a stressor might matter in terms of interpreting the findings from different theoretical perspectives; because, for example, although Attachment Theory suggests the importance of being close to significant others in adverse situations, being close to other people might be a stress factor in itself due to infectious nature of coronavirus. In the first study, in parallel with stress research, approximately half of the participants among both single and married individuals mentioned psychological/emotional difficulties, indicating how the pandemic has been a difficult process. In the second study, psychological/emotional difficulties also emerged as a theme. This finding is consistent with the literature showing the decreases in the mental health of individuals during the pandemic (e.g., Pieh, 2021). Besides, both married and single participants mentioned the preconditions for the negative effect on people's view of marriage in general, such as if only they are not respecting each other's space or already being in a dysfunctional marriage. These results might be considered for COVID-19 interventions; for example, support mechanisms can be provided for conflictual relationships, and the importance of giving space to the other might be emphasized during the interventions.

When considering the sub-themes that occurred in the first study, it was interesting to see that ‘getting to know each other’ related to the effect of COVID-19 showed up under the theme of “positive effects” for single individuals. In contrast, it showed up under the theme of “negative effects” for married individuals. Additionally, in the second study, there was a sub-theme ‘getting to know each other truly, such as confronting the negative sides and deficiencies of the partner’ that indicates the pandemic's negative impact in this sense. As mentioned by the growth perspective (Holahan & Moos, 1990), stressors might act as opportunities to either enhance relationships or to get out of dysfunctional and abusive ones. For single individuals, there might be a possibility to improve their relationships by knowing the other person better. However, married individuals are already in committed relationships; thus, for them, there might be a higher possibility of questioning the dysfunctional parts of the relationship.

In the same vein, in the second study, under the title “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage”, there were themes, namely “views on positive and negative effects on single individuals” and “views on positive and negative effects on marriage” indicating that individuals consider the varying

positive and negative aspects of being single and married during the pandemic. According to entries in Ekşi Sözlük, while there are certain disadvantages of being single (e.g., deterioration of psychological state) and being married (e.g., worrying about spouse or child), there are also advantages of being single (e.g., having personal space/time) and being married (e.g., psychological/social support). Similar to the first study, while the themes regarding positive effects on marriage support Attachment Theory and TMT, the themes emphasizing the adverse effects of the pandemic on marriage and the advantages of singlehood provide support for the stress research. This set of findings is in line with a recent study (Brown et al., 2021), indicating that a theme regarding time and space during quarantine periods exists on a continuum with positive and negative relational experiences. Besides, these findings provide a perspective to understand risk factors for single and married individuals' relationships and to develop interventions for these groups for the effect of the pandemic and such global stressors.

Moreover, in the first study, some participants indicated that the pandemic had no effect on their view on marriage. It should be noted that there is a self-other discrepancy for this insignificant effect of the pandemic: "No effect" was reported more for the effect of the pandemic on their own view on marriage rather than the view of marriage in general. Like the preconditions for the negative effect, participants also talked about the preconditions for no effect, such as respecting each other's spaces and having personal independence despite being married. As mentioned above, these preconditions can be considered as a suggestion or an intervention technique for couples having conflict during such adverse circumstances. Along the lines of the first study, in the second study, there are findings indicating no effect of the pandemic on relationships: Under the title "The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage," there were entries indicating "no effect on attitudes toward marriage", and under the title of "The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce," the theme "no effect on divorce" emerged. In this context, while some people mentioned associating COVID-19 with marriage is nonsense or they did not question this association, there are many entries indicating feeling content with singlehood, not thinking about marriage. Under the theme of "no effect on divorce," in the same vein, while some people assert that there is no actual increase in divorce rates, in parallel with the findings of the first study, there is also a sub-theme focusing on preconditions for not getting divorced, such as spending time on their own, giving each other space, and building marriages on solid foundations. The findings of both studies demonstrated that people understand the importance of giving some space to each other for healthy relationships. They also commonly realize that partners who do not match or are in dysfunctional relationships are open to the adverse effects of the pandemic.

Further, in the first study, the theme of "loneliness" showed up in the single individuals' views regarding the effect of COVID-19 on people's opinion of marriage in general, mainly in the framework of the difficulty of being lonely. Similarly, in the second study, the "loneliness" theme appeared under the title "The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage" and there were entries on the challenges of being lonely. Unlike other events such as hurricanes and terror bombings, during the pandemic, people experience physical and social isolation because of social distancing. Although married individuals are generally together with their partners and children, and they commit more to their marriage under the circumstances (Wilcox & Stone 2020), single individuals are perhaps more likely to be alone, especially during lockdown periods. According to the current findings from the first study, single individuals emphasized the difficulty of being lonely and indicated that loneliness makes people think about marriage. Accordingly, loneliness experienced by single individuals during the pandemic seems an important concept that should be focused on by researchers. Further consolidating this point is the finding that the Google search trends in Europe and the USA also showed a rise in the search intensity under the keyword "loneliness" (Brodeur et al., 2021). However, different from the first study, in the second study, there is also an emphasis on the positive sides of loneliness, such as getting used to living alone and doing what they wish by themselves, and people asserted that being married should not be directly associated with not being alone.

In the current research, we reached findings that indicate changes in the dynamics of relationships during the pandemic. To illustrate, in the first study, the themes emphasizing an increase in "marriage/birth rates" and "instinct" referring to fear of death showed up in the single individuals' group. These themes support the TMT literature, mainly by implying that when death becomes salient, people would be willing to maintain close relationships because these relationships make them feel that life is going on (Mikulincer et al. 2003; 2004). Similarly, in the second study, 'fear of death' was also seen as a reason for the change in marital status in both marriages (under the theme of "instinct," including that of reproduction and blood-line survival) and divorce (under the theme of "increase in divorce" including becoming aware of the wishes that have been delayed or suppressed due to marriage). Besides, the "marriage/birth rates" theme

was a shared theme that appeared under the titles “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage” and “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce”.

Additionally, in the second study “changing the relationship status” theme, which is associated with changes in the dynamics of relationships as well, showed up with comments such as “Singles will want to get married, and married ones will divorce” and “Marriages will either get stronger or come to an end.” Furthermore, the theme “making people question their current relationships” theme showed up with sub-themes referring to questions on all relationships, including marriage and divorce, and another theme “causes of an increase in divorces” emerged with sub-themes, namely ‘the challenge of being together,’ and ‘becoming aware of the wishes that have been delayed/suppressed due to marriage’ emerged. These themes and sub-themes indicating changes in the dynamics of relationships during the pandemic are in line with the growth perspective (Holahan & Moos, 1990), rather than TMT, in which stressors might act as opportunities to enhance relationships and get out of dysfunctional/abusive relationships. The growth perspective states that stressors in daily life lead people to inquire about other life priorities and question existing relationships, and this questioning, on the one hand, might end up in the desire to commit to a relationship for single individuals. On the other hand, married individuals who are already in committed relationships might end up with an awareness of functional or dysfunctional parts of their relationship as a result of questioning, which ultimately may lead to some sort of the change in relationships. These findings might imply a different perspective regarding divorce because divorce is evaluated as a positive consequence of the pandemic. Considering the long-term adverse effects of being in a dysfunctional relationship (as well as increasing domestic violence reported), a decision about divorce or an increase in cases of divorce might be interpreted as one of the sanative sides of the pandemic at least for the psychological health of the individuals.

The “violence” and “gender” themes showed up both in the first and the second study. The “violence” theme indicated the increase in violence during the pandemic, and “gender” theme regarding the effect of the pandemic was mostly mentioned in the framework of (in)equality in the division of labor. During the COVID-19 pandemic, violence and gender equality, in particular, received widespread media coverage, and even though people may not experience domestic violence personally, there is a serious public concern about this issue (UN Women, 2020). Indeed, there has been an increase in cases of domestic violence during the pandemic (UN Women, 2022). In the same way as violence, gender equality is another important issue that has been discussed in public and on the news (UN Turkey, 2020). When support from other institutions (e.g., kindergarten or school) and people (e.g., caregiver or grandparents) is limited because of pandemic restrictions and health-related concerns, the gender-based division of labor might become more salient. Statistics showed that considering the time spent on housework, the gap between women and men became larger during the pandemic (UN Turkey, 2020). In the first study, the theme “gender”, particularly gender (in)equality in the division of labor, was only mentioned by married individuals, but not single ones. Accordingly, gender-based power inequality between spouses is valid for the issue of working from home in which an unequal negotiation of space and time in the home ends up with men’s prioritized work whereas women’s fragmented workspace and time into work and domestic chore (Waismel-Manor et al., 2021).

“Child(ren) at home” appeared as another common theme of the first and second studies. In the first study, this theme was mentioned mostly by married individuals, indicating the difficulty of going through the pandemic and lockdowns with a child at home. Similarly, under the titles of both “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage” and “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce” on Ekşi Sözlük, people mentioned the difficulty of going through the pandemic and lockdowns with a child at home. There is only one entry that mentioned pandemic might be beneficial for sparing more time for children. To provide some background, in most countries, schools and kindergartens were temporarily closed during the pandemic, while most parents continued with their daily jobs. This situation called for a number of extraordinary arrangements (e.g., finding a caregiver or working part-time or remote), especially during the lockdown periods. Besides, in Turkey, many alternatives and continuously changing measures were adopted by the government related to restrictions at educational establishments often with very short notice, which made it more difficult to plan arrangements in advance. This turned into a major concern for married couples with children as they gradually found it more difficult to satisfy their children’s demands and find new activities to maintain the quality of time high with their children with unexpectedly increased quantity of time together. This finding indicates that during the pandemic, people with a child might experience more difficulties, and accordingly, support mechanisms should be implemented for them during such adverse circumstances.

“Sexuality”, which is a theme that occurred only in the second study, confirmed that this methodology of anonymous data collection via open sources on the Internet is quite advantageous, especially in terms of topics that are prone to be perceived as highly sensitive to talk about, such as sexuality. This theme was specifically designed in view of a sub-theme as ‘sexuality makes people think of marriage’ on Ekşi Sözlük. For example, one of the comments under the heading “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of marriage” reads as ‘free-of-charge and easy sex.’ Similarly, under the heading “The COVID-19 pandemic makes people think of divorce”, there were two main comments as sub-themes reading as follows: ‘increase in sexual drive/libido and sexual activity/ejaculation,’ and ‘decrease in divorces due to having sex (and likely have children) in quarantine.’ Although these findings imply an increase in sexuality during the pandemic, consistent with the stress perspective, there are also studies indicating that the quality of sexual life is affected negatively (i.e., decrease in pleasure, satisfaction, desire, and arousal) during this period (Panzeri et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in view of other studies on sensitive topics such as sexuality, one can find conflicting results. For example, when asked directly, married individuals responded that they did not perceive any differences in their sexual life (Panzeri et al., 2020), which was the case for the first part of the current study. Additionally, another line of research indicated a decrease in frequency of sexual behavior among romantic partners who have an increased degree of conflict due to the spread of COVID-19 and its related restrictions compared to those not experiencing any such conflict (Luetke et al., 2020). Besides, the sub-theme of “sexuality” theme namely ‘it has nothing to do with marriage’ emphasized that associating sexuality with marriage is not meaningful because singles can also have sex, and people should not get married just because of sex.

Several limitations should be considered in the context of this study. First, the sample of the first study is restricted in number, involved highly educated participants, and the age range of them was small. Thus, it might not be generalized to the wider populations in terms of different socioeconomic statuses. Second, there were only two interview questions: the participants’ opinions regarding the effects of COVID-19 on other people’s perspectives of marriage, and the participants’ opinions of the same subject regarding themselves. Although Hennink and Kaiser (2022) who analyzed the saturation in qualitative research showed the adequacy of a narrow range of interviews (9-17) for studies that have relatively homogenous study populations and narrowly defined objectives, detailed views (e.g., opinions on long-term effects of the pandemic on marriage) might have been neglected in the current study. Future studies are suggested to examine these issues by means of longitudinal research designs and by utilizing more elaborate assessments with mixed models. Finally, the responses of the Turkish participants were analyzed by Turkish coders and subsequently translated into English. While efforts were made to ensure accurate and objective translations, subtle semantic differences might still exist.

Despite these limitations, this study sheds light on how the COVID-19 pandemic affects single and married individuals’ opinions and representations of marriage and divorce. In detail, the first study has an important strength in the sense of its design based on one-to-one in-depth interviews. As for the second study, its main strength lies in the issue of anonymity and so being exempt from social desirability bias. In essence, the present study not only contributed to filling a gap in the literature regarding the effect of the pandemic on the views concerning marriage and divorce but also contributed to determining how different groups of individuals are affected by it (e.g., single versus married individuals, married couples with children.) Additionally, preconditions regarding relationships’ or individuals’ characteristics in terms of understanding the nature of the impact of the pandemic provide information about protective and risk factors for the effect of not only the pandemic but also related global stressors. Thus, future attempts might utilize the thematic units highlighted by the present work and use them to develop interventions toward possible relationship-based problems as a result of such adverse circumstances, in turn contributing to the general well-being of individuals and society as a whole in the long run.

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