

Perception of Quality of Work Life in Employees in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Aim: In this study, it was aimed to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of working life.

Methods: Within the scope of the study, questionnaire was applied to 510 people working in the public and private sectors in Turkey. The survey form consists of sections on employee's demographic information, and quality of working life scale. The research was conducted through an online survey between April 2020 and July 2020 and delivered to a wide audience through the researchers' social networks. This data, collected by convenience sampling method. Descriptive statistics and t-test were used to analyze the study data.

Results: It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the participants' way of working at home or remotely during the pandemic period ($t = 3.625$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$) and their gender and the mean total score of QWL ($t = -3.005$, $p\text{-value} = 0.003$).

Conclusion: The study results show that the COVID 19 pandemic has negative effects on the quality of working life. In addition, both public and private sector employees have experienced serious changes in their working life in this process, and in this case, it is seen that their working life quality is adversely affected.

Keywords: COVID-19, Quality of Life, Quality of Work-life, Working Conditions

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, affected many countries in the world in a very short time, causing approximately 84 million people to be infected and millions of people to die as of January¹. The COVID-19 infection, which led to a global epidemic, resulted in the lack of specific preventive or therapeutic medical interventions, rapid transmission rate, and significantly high transmission numbers, leading to the scientific recommendation that individuals should stay at home to prevent the spread of the disease by avoiding social interactions².

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused great devastation in terms of both health and socio-economic conditions all over the world. Therefore, the pandemic has deeply affected social and economic life as well as public health and caused significant changes. The changes experienced in this context also covered the working life and affected the employees as some of the changes were permanent and some of them were temporary. With the COVID-19 epidemic, working hours, types, wages, work and private life balance, distances have changed with different dimensions, new measures and epidemic-specific measures have quickly entered the working life.

In particular, the high rate of transmission of the virus has caused various measures to be taken rapidly. Among these measures, quarantine and social isolation stand out as the most preferred priority methods. As a result of this, it has emerged that education and some work-lines of business should be carried out from home as much as technology allows³.

Businesses and public institutions have been at the forefront as structures that primarily consider the health of their employees (with their physical and mental dimensions) rather than their structures that only offer economic benefits, development and career opportunities to their employees⁴. Although the changes in work styles

and working hours all over the world seem to have been made for the employee, negative aspects of this have been encountered from time to time. Globally, for example, the decline in hours worked in 2020 translated into both job losses and reductions in hours worked for those remaining in employment, with significant differences between regions^{5,6}. This situation has caused companies to start implementing some strategies to improve the quality of working life in order to increase employee happiness and productivity.

Quality of working life (QWL), which explains the behavior patterns and thoughts of employees against a wide variety of system phenomena such as wages, physical working conditions, organizational culture, leadership, cooperation environment, communication, recognition, appreciation, problem solving, participation in decisions, and thus creates a more productive environment. It is a concept that describes the creation of a working environment^{13,14,8}.

The concept of quality of working life includes more than one component. These; safe and healthy working conditions, opportunities to use and develop skills, the social dimension of working life and the fair wage system, opportunities for continuous improvement and development, labor laws, working and private living space, structure and organization of work, technology used at work, participation in decisions, employment security job satisfaction and motivation, social security, demographic structure and continuous education¹².

In general, the factors that make up the quality of working life; Physical working conditions such as lighting, temperature, cleanliness, nature of the job, organizational communication, wage satisfaction, management style (such as autocratic, participatory, democratic), psychosocial factors such as job stress, technological structure, ergonomics. In this context, it is clearly seen that the quality of working life emphasizes the "human dimension"¹⁶.

As the quality of work life becomes more and more important, employers have redesigned related jobs to improve working conditions, reduce work stress, improve communication, motivate employees, and develop effective human resources^{7, 8, 9, 11, 15}. In this process, employees had to turn to new working methods and adapt to the changing conditions in their personal lives¹⁰.

The aim of this study is to examine the perception of employees' quality of work life during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, it has been tried to find an answer to the question of whether the measures taken due to the pandemic in Turkey have caused changes in the quality of working life.

METHODOLOGY

Participants: The sample of this study is 510 people working in different workplaces in the public and private sectors. Approximately 900 people answered the survey. After removing the missing or incorrectly answered questionnaires, 510 questionnaires were evaluated. The research was conducted online between April 2021 and July 2021. The survey questions were sent to the researchers via social networks such as LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. These data, collected by convenience sampling, do not claim to represent the general population. By nature, the data collected mainly represents the urban and educated classes. After obtaining the necessary permission from the Uludag University Ethics Commission to conduct the research, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was obtained before filling out the online questionnaire. 56.8% of the participants are women. 62% of them work in the public sector. When the education level is examined, it is understood that 70% of them are university graduates. In terms of age groups, it is seen that 56% of them are between the ages of 26-35.

Data Collection Tools: Questionnaire technique was used in this study. In the first part of the questionnaire, gender, age, education, working style during the pandemic period, etc. In the second part of the study, the Quality of Working Life Scale "The work-related Questionnaire" was developed by Daren Van Laar (2007) to measure the quality of work life, its Turkish adaptation was made by Duyan (2009)²⁶, and its validity reliability was made by Duyan et al., (2013)²⁵ Quality of Work Life Scale (WRQoL) was used. The scale is in 5-point Likert type. The Cronbach Alpha value of the scale is 0.89. Overall Quality of Work Life Scale (QWL) mean 2.52 and standard deviation is 0.55. Consisting of 24 items, the scale has six sub-factors. These sub-factors are:

The General Well-Being dimension (GWE), which consists of six items and aims to measure happiness and life satisfaction (C. Alpha=0.74).

Work-Family Relationship dimension (HWI), which consists of three items and measures work-family reconciliation (C. Alpha= 0.86)

Job and Career Satisfaction (JCS) (Cronbach Alpha 0.81), which consists of six items and measures the level of career satisfaction,

Work Control (CAW) (Cronbach Alpha 0.86), which consists of three items and measures employee participation in decisions,

Working Conditions (WCS) measuring Working Conditions and consisting of three items (Cronbach Alpha 0.86) and

Job stress (SAW) dimensions (Cronbach Alpha 0.78), which consists of three items and measures the job stress of employees.

This study was approved with number 2020/07-3 by the Scientific Research Commission of Uludag University, Bursa, Turkey.

Data analysis: In this study, descriptive statistical analysis and t-test analysis were used by using the SPSS 23 package program.

RESULTS

Table 1: The Way of Working During the Pandemic Process

| Options | N | % |
|--------------------------|-----|-------|
| Remote work | 89 | 17.4 |
| Working in the workplace | 214 | 41.8 |
| Both ways of working | 209 | 40.8 |
| Total | 512 | 100.0 |

According to Table 1, approximately 42% of the employees continued to work at the workplace during the pandemic process, and approximately 41% continued their work as both working methods, both remotely and at the workplace. This can be explained by the fact that more than half of the participants (62.5%) are public employees. During the pandemic process, especially the public sector in Turkey did not completely switch to the remote working model but preferred the way of conducting business with flexible working models and both working models. Only 17.4% of the participants switched to remote work.

In this process, it was stated that with the transition to the closure period in the world, more remote working models were applied, and many problems were encountered in this working model. For example, Rahadjo et al. (2020) concluded that internal and external factors may have different effects on the quality of life felt by remote-home workers due to the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁷.

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the answers given by the employees to the situations they experienced during the pandemic process. The pandemic has affected everyone at many different points. However, the data obtained show that the problems are mostly related to the way and duration of the work. 57% of the employees stated that the risk of psychological discomfort due to the pandemic process (stress, anxiety disorder, low perceived emotional-self-efficacy, etc.) increased, 53% experienced an increase in their workload during the pandemic process, and 43% encountered communication problems in the workplace during the pandemic process. It is seen that 56% of the employees stated that the negativities they experienced in their working life during the pandemic period negatively affected their quality of life, and 59% of the employees stated that there was a decrease in the quality of working life during the pandemic period when compared to the pre-pandemic period.

60% of the employees stated that the physical conditions (ventilation, cleaning, working environment suitable for social distance rules, etc.) in the business they worked during the pandemic process were generally sufficient and 81% of them stated that there were no

problems with the payment of their monthly wages during the pandemic process.

Table 2: Work-Related Situations Experienced by Employees During the Pandemic Process

| Questions | Answers | N | % |
|--|-----------|-----|------|
| Has your risk of psychological discomfort increased due to the pandemic process (stress, anxiety disorder, low perceived emotional-self-efficacy, etc.) in your work? | No | 135 | 25.5 |
| | Partially | 77 | 15.0 |
| | Yes | 298 | 59.5 |
| Has there been an increase in weekly working hours during the pandemic process? | No | 122 | 23.9 |
| | Partially | 74 | 14.6 |
| | Yes | 314 | 61.5 |
| Have there been any changes in the start and end of your working hours during the pandemic process? | No | 147 | 28.9 |
| | Partially | 70 | 13.7 |
| | Yes | 293 | 57.4 |
| Has there been an increase in weekly working hours during the pandemic process? | No | 335 | 65.7 |
| | Partially | 41 | 8.0 |
| | Yes | 134 | 26.3 |
| Did your break times decrease during the pandemic process? | No | 173 | 33.8 |
| | Partially | 11 | 2.4 |
| | Yes | 326 | 63.9 |
| Did your break times decrease during the pandemic process? | No | 341 | 66.8 |
| | Partially | 32 | 6.3 |
| | Yes | 137 | 26.9 |
| Has the use of technological tools and equipment (computer, internet, telephone, digital work, etc.) increased in the working environment during the pandemic process? | No | 97 | 19.1 |
| | Partially | 36 | 7.0 |
| | Yes | 377 | 73.9 |
| Has your workload increased during the pandemic process? | No | 177 | 34.8 |
| | Partially | 64 | 12.5 |
| | Yes | 269 | 52.7 |
| Did you have any problems with the payment of your wages during the pandemic process? | No | 415 | 81.0 |
| | Partially | 19 | 3.9 |
| | Yes | 66 | 15.1 |
| Has there been a communication problem in the workplace during the pandemic process? | No | 196 | 38.5 |
| | Partially | 93 | 18.2 |
| | Yes | 221 | 43.3 |
| Has your working life negatively affected your Quality of Life during the pandemic? | No | 146 | 28.6 |
| | Partially | 77 | 15.1 |
| | Yes | 287 | 56.3 |
| Do you believe that your Quality of Working Life has decreased during the pandemic period? | No | 117 | 22.9 |
| | Partially | 91 | 17.8 |
| | Yes | 302 | 59.3 |

According to the latest analysis of the International Labor Organization on the effects of the global epidemic on the working life, the devastating losses in working time caused by the COVID-19 global epidemic have shown that it has caused a huge decrease in labor incomes in every corner of the world¹⁸. However, according to the data obtained at the end of this research, it is extremely important that such a problem does not occur. Although there is no decrease in the wages of public employees in

Turkey as the reason for this situation, it can be said that private sector employees are affected by this situation and the majority of the participants are working in the public sector.

The comparison of the relationship between the participants' gender, working way, the sector they work in, and the total score of the QWL scale is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Exposure to QWL and t-Test Results (N:510)

| Variables | | N | Mean | S.D | F | t | df | p |
|----------------|---------|-----|--------|--------|-------|--------|---------|-------|
| Gender | Woman | 290 | 3.1114 | .60276 | 1.854 | -3.005 | 488.756 | 0.003 |
| | Man | 220 | 3.3370 | .56301 | | | | |
| Way of Working | Online | 189 | 3.3945 | .50299 | 7.414 | 3.625 | 201.140 | 0.000 |
| | At work | 214 | 3.1476 | .61992 | | | | |
| Working Sector | Private | 192 | 3.2215 | .59269 | 0.228 | -0.803 | 400.490 | 0.422 |
| | Public | 320 | 3.2648 | .58941 | | | | |

(P <0.05), S.D: Standard Deviation

As a result of the statistical evaluation, a statistically significant difference was found between the way of working of the participants during the pandemic period (t =

3.625, p-value = 0.000) and their gender and the mean total score of QWL (t = -3.005, p-value = 0.003).

However, no statistically significant difference was found between the sector employed and the QWL total score average ($p>0.05$).

The pandemic seems to affect those whose jobs are not suitable for working online, those who work in the private sector or self-employed, the poor with low income, low education, and women more negatively than others. In this context, the majority of respondents, regardless of gender, state that the negativities in working life negatively affect their quality of life. However, when we make a comparison by gender, the decline in the quality of life of women is much higher than that of men. The quarantine brought by the pandemic has eliminated the possibility of outsourcing services for cleaning, childcare and food for women working online. This has greatly increased the burden of working women. Along with the increasing workload of women, their quality of working life has also been affected. At the same time, the high rate of anxiety of women about employment security for the future during the pandemic process is also effective on the quality of working life.

Especially among women working online in the private sector, the rate of those who say that they are constantly tired and burnt out compared to those who work in the public sector and those who do their own business is increasing day by day.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The world entered 2021 with an unprecedented crisis and high uncertainty in employment. Increasing stress and anxiety also negatively affected the mental health of the society.

Although the pandemic threatens all people regardless of class, not everyone has been affected by this epidemic at the same rate. In this process, the poor, the unemployed, the low-educated, women and disadvantaged groups were more severely affected by the epidemic and its adverse conditions^{19,20}. This situation had a negative impact on the employees' perception of working life quality. Looking at the studies on this subject, Bulguroğlu et al. (2021), in their study on 322 university students, concluded that the low physical activity levels of the students during the pandemic period negatively affected their quality of life²⁷.

In the research conducted by Tokmak (2021) on 158 public employees in the Karacabey district of Bursa, it was determined that there is a moderate and positive relationship between the quality of working life and job performance²⁸. In the study conducted by Ayyıldız et al. (2021) with a total of 292 white-collar personnel, it was stated that there was a negative relationship between working from home and the intention to leave work during the pandemic process, and it was stated that the perceived working life quality of the employees fully mediated this relationship²⁹.

The digitalization of employees' jobs leads to a decline in serious economic concerns. Although online work is a lifeline during the pandemic, it has caused a significant part of the society to become more anxious and depressed with the epidemic. In the study conducted by Demir et al. (2021), with 377 pre-service teachers, it was concluded that there was a positive and moderate

relationship between quality of life and life satisfaction, and a positive and moderate relationship between quality of life and psychological well-being³³. In the study, it was revealed that the variables of life satisfaction and psychological well-being were in a significant relationship with the quality of life. In the study conducted by Maqsood et al. (2021), it was concluded that the quality of working life of the health personnel working in the intensive care and emergency services during the Covid-19 epidemic was low³⁰. In a study conducted by Nikeghbal et al. (2021) on 200 health personnel, it was concluded that the negative working conditions of nurses affect the quality of their working lives³¹. It has been revealed that the mental and physical fatigue caused by being in the same working environment for a long time, especially due to working hours, emphasize the increased workload and low quality of working life. In a study conducted by Bozkurt and Aytac (2021), on 2515 people online, it was determined that life satisfaction decreased especially in women during the pandemic period³².

Similar findings were found in studies conducted in different countries, and it was observed that people's life satisfaction and working life quality decreased^{21, 22, 23, 24}. As a result of the statistical analysis, Despite the increase in health and safety measures in the workplace during the pandemic process, the uncertainty in the working environment, career anxiety, excess workload, and increasing stress have led to low perceptions of employees' quality of life and working life.

Since it is not yet clear how long the epidemic will last, it is extremely important to take measures and create action plans to increase the quality of working life. It is extremely necessary for the quality of working life to take precautions regarding the problems that may arise in working life due to the epidemic, to produce regulatory and protective policies for the problems that may be caused by new working styles, to create suitable conditions for each work area, to establish legal regulations and to take the necessary precautions.

The findings in this study mainly represent highly educated working classes that use digital technologies intensively, as the research is conducted through social media. It does not claim to represent the public. For this reason, it is possible to express this situation as the limitations of the research.

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