

A Pandemic-Defying Phenomenon: Gender Issue During the COVID-19 Outbreak in Turkey

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This paper aims to analyse the gender-biased consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey through the views of working women and men who have experienced changes in their routines during the outbreak. Within this context, in-depth interviews were conducted with 216 participants, and they were asked to reply to the Masculine and Feminine Gender Role Stress Scale. As a result, gender-based discrimination has reinforced during the pandemic and inequalities have deepened. It is thought that the social impact of the pandemic was felt both by women and men, but more in women, and that these women lost some of the gains they had until the pandemic in the context of gender equality.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, gender role attitudes, women, men, sociology of COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Since early 2020, the world has been dealing with a global threat, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), having unprecedented impacts worldwide. These impacts can be seen both during the downturn and the subsequent recovery period. Swift and dramatic changes and transformations of the outbreak have led to some impacts in biological, psychological and social aspects, and have had influences upon every facet of life. Taken together, these ensuing consequences of the pandemic have affected women more severely than men (Reichelt et al. 2020; Kristal, Yaish 2020), which means that gender inequality has still been a continuing phenomenon during this ongoing gendered outbreak.

Specifically, Turkey, where the first case was seen in March 2020, took various actions, such as weekend lockdowns and age or region-specific restrictions. People under the age of 20 and over 65 were ordered to stay home during certain hours. Cafes, restaurants, schools, kindergartens and some other businesses were closed. Everyone was obliged to wear masks (Damon, Tuysuz 2020). Among the other measures of the pandemic emerged as a force majeure, 'short-term working practice' has been one of the leading methods to support workers (Yurekli 2020). Blundell et al. (2020) also emphasised that the pandemic had

consequences on inequalities such as socio-economic status, education, age, gender, ethnicity and geography, and added that the pandemic has brought existing inequalities into a sharper focus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent literature has documented that gender inequality is one of the profound sociological and social consequences of coronavirus. Matthewman and Huppertz (2020) and Wenham et al. (2020) underlined that the disease killed more men than women, but more socially affected women than men, as women constitute 70% of paid care workers – both health and social, that are ‘key workers’, and 75% of unpaid ones.

Taking the issue as domestic sphere, since schools, nurseries and some other childcare centers were closed, parents had to take responsibility for their child(ren)’s care and education instead of these facilities. Mothers still spent more time doing housework and caring for their children than fathers. But fathers also spent time on childcare (Andrew et al. 2020).

As for the status of women in the public sphere, the quarantine has had some gendered impacts such as different needs of sanitary, security, biology and culture of wo/men. During the outbreak, women have not been involved in decision making fields, they have had a weak representation in the policy spaces of the pandemic and their needs given above were unmet (Wenham et al. 2020). In addition to this, Feng and Savani (2020) found that in the ongoing lockdown, women reported a lower work productivity and job satisfaction than men.

An unequal division of childcare and household tasks is the other implications to be seen during the ongoing pandemic. Alon et al. (2020) say that the household shares the housework and childcare more equally which will make the gender roles and social norms change. As a result, the crisis in the labour market stemming from the outbreak would potentially decrease gender inequality in the longer term. The ‘care economy’, the reproduction of everyday life, such as cooking, caring for children, etc., make up this burden, with an increase in maternal expectations due to gender stereotypes (Zeybekoğlu-Akbaş, Dursun 2020). With this emotional distress stemming from both the pandemic itself and some changes and shifts in the gender role norms, working women and men have experienced some post-traumatic stress disorder because of the change in their domestic and public sphere routines. These feminine and masculine gender roles are the assumptions and norms that society imposes on both genders to be a typical wo/man, and these socially-prescribed roles, responsibilities and duties cause psychological stress on how to behave like a typical woman or man according to the gender schema (Prentice, Carranza 2002; Rudman, Glick 2008).

Taking all these consequences into consideration, it will not be wrong to state that the pandemic has had an effect upon the gender role attitudes of women and men as a whole. Despite United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, Target 5.4, the gender inequality issue has still been a pandemic-defying phenomenon for both women and men in all aspects: *‘recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate’*.

In line with these data and the findings of the current COVID-19 literature, the aim of this paper is to reveal the gender-biased consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey through the views of working wo/men who have experienced changes in their routines during the outbreak.

Within this context, the research questions that this study seeks to answer are the following:

RQ1. How has COVID-19 pandemic had negative effects on the private and public status of working women and men in Turkey in terms of gender equality perspective?

RQ2. Has the gender role stress of working women and men in Turkey showed differences according to their marital status and educational backgrounds?

RQ3. Which of the participants have experienced higher levels of gender role stress? Women or men?

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methodology was considered to be the most appropriate method to address the aims and research questions of this study.

As to the qualitative research paradigm, the answer for RQ1, it was chosen to utilise grounded theory strategy for two reasons: firstly, the aim was to reveal the intended meaning of the participants' statements during the interviews and to explore the in-depth experiences of the participants. In other words, this study was marked as a 'grounded theory' as its purpose was to deduce the social processes that are grounded in the data (Crooks 2001; Creswell 2012). Secondly, the theory derived from these data would reflect the reality of women's experiences (but also those of men), which also addresses the epistemological grounds of this research.

Regarding the quantitative data to answer RQ2 and RQ3, a quantitative research paradigm was employed via a correlational survey model as it provides the analysis of numerical data that will be collected through scales (Gay et al. 2009; Creswell 2005) in order to measure the gender role stress of the participants.

In terms of epistemology, this study leans on the feminist standpoint approach that enables the works to be critically examined. This approach claims that the source of knowledge is the experiences and practices in women's lives. It also advocates social change by rejecting patriarchy (Ecevit 2011: 48; Oakley 1998).

Participants of the Study

The participants of the research are 216 working individuals: 51.9% ($n = 112$) women and 48.1% ($n = 104$) men. The ages of men were between 18 and 76, while those of women were between 19 and 73. The participants were from the Samsun province of Turkey, and they were chosen via extreme or deviant case sampling, one of the purposeful sampling strategies of Patton (1990), meaning that the research focuses on cases which are rich in information because they are unusual or special in some way.

More specifically, Samsun was chosen because it was one of the provinces of Turkey in which the current COVID-19 cases were mostly seen according to the 'Province Based COVID-19 Table' gathered from the official Twitter accounts of the Turkish Ministry of Health and Minister of Health, in 01.03–21.07.2021, in the time period when this research was conducted. Furthermore, these official accounts have also demonstrated that in some periods such as 6–12 March and 27 March – 2 April Samsun has been the province where the highest number of the cases was seen, which constitutes the main reason for the selection of Samsun as the unusual or special case of this research (Turkish Ministry of Health. 01.03–21.07.2021; Dr. Fahrettin Koca. 01.03–21.07.2021 [official Twitter accounts]).

Data Collection and Procedure

Together with the survey, the in-depth interviews were used as data collection techniques, as they are regarded as the most appropriate data collection technique for eliciting depth of information (Creswell, Miller 2000).

Because of the social distance regulations stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants were reached via email and an online data-based survey between 30 January and 28 February 2021. Each interview lasted 35–45 min, was done, recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher herself. She made a different coding each time and re-read the data at three different times. She also used a *constant comparative method* to make the analysis be away from too many repetitions.

On generating the semi-structured interview form which consists of demographic and open-ended questions, the questions were compiled and selected from the previous studies of Reichelt et al. 2020 and Güngörer 2020.

The socio-demographic questions that the participants were asked were their gender, age and educational status.

The open-ended questions for the participants were the following:

1. How were your domestic/household tasks affected during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How was your family life affected during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How was your working life and employment status affected during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The surveys to measure the gender role stresses of the participants were as follows:

The Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale (MGRSS), which was developed and adapted to Turkish culture by Bayar et al. (2018) from the Eisler and Skidmore's (1987) scale, was used to measure the gender role stresses of the male participants. The scale has an internal reliability of (Alpha = ,90) Cronbach Alfa. It is a 5 Likert-type scale including 27 items, seven factors and no diverse item. The results will be interpreted from the average points gotten from the analyses.

The Feminine Gender Role Stress Scale (FGRSS), which was developed by Koç et al. (2017), was used to measure the gender role stresses of the female participants. It is a 5 Likert-type scale including 20 items and no diverse item. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis has shown that there are 4 factors ($\chi^2/df = 3.18$, RMSEA = ,08, SRMR = ,04, GFI = ,87, AGFI = ,83, CFI = ,98 and NNFI = ,98). The scale has an internal reliability of (Alpha = ,93) Cronbach Alfa.

Ethical Issues

Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Ondokuz Mayıs University Ethical Committee of Social and Humanities Sciences on 29.01.2021 with the number of 2021/12. Before the research, each participant was asked to give consent. All of the participants of the study were identified with a code such as WP1, WP2, etc. (for the women) and MP1, MP2, etc. (for the men), not with any of their names or other features. The names of the participants (if any) were stored on computer protected with a password.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data was put to the three-step analysis model of Miles and Huberman (2015: 12–15). The Figure demonstrates the steps of the qualitative data analysis of this research:

First step: Data Condensation	After collecting the data through interviews, recording and transcribing a large amount of the data, the researcher categorises these raw data into themes: the findings show that the negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the private and public status of working women can be divided into 11 themes, and the negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the private and public status of working men can be divided into 5 themes.
Second Step: Data Display	The researcher transforms these findings into a visual narrative (Tables 1 and 2) for a better understanding.
Third Step: Conclusion Drawing and Verification	The data, that were coded, condensed and transformed into visual materials, will be used to reach findings and results. These findings and results will be discussed with some examples from the literature and some comments and conclusions were derived.

Figure. The three steps of qualitative data analysis applied in this research

As for the quantitative data, the null hypotheses for the second and the third research questions are that the gender role stress of working women and men would show no difference according to their marital status but would show difference according to their educational backgrounds. Thirdly, women would have experienced higher levels of gender role stress during the COVID-19 pandemic process.

The analysis of the quantitative data was conducted through SPSS 22.0, IBM (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, median, minimum, maximum, frequency, percentage) were used to evaluate the data. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test (when df is more than 50) and the Shapiro–Wilk test (when df is less than 50) were used to approximate the normality of quantitative data. The Kruskal–Wallis test for intergroup comparisons and the Mann–Whitney U test for two-group comparisons were used for non-normally distributed continuous variables. A P of less than 0.05 was considered significant.

Methodological Assumptions

Because of the number of the participants involved in this study, the generalisability of the samples may be questioned. The evidence and reply for these questions may be the situation of the Samsun province during the pandemic: During the study, it was assumed that the Samsun province, being selected through extreme case sampling, represents the population of Turkey. The reason for this assumption, as explained before, is the statements by official authorities underlining and supporting the fact that Samsun has been one of the provinces of Turkey in which the current COVID-19 cases have been mostly seen, and on some dates, has been the province where the highest number of the cases was seen (Turkish Ministry of Health. 01.03–21.07.2021; Dr. Fahrettin Koca. 01.03–21.07.2021 [official Twitter accounts]). Therefore, it was assumed that Samsun has the value of representing the population.

To have evidence for the validity and trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was utilised to reach many and different sources of data and ensuring the strength and sustainability of this study (Creswell, Miller 2000).

Moreover, in order to increase the reliability of the study, the researcher herself made a different coding each time and re-read the data at three different times.

The data collection and data analysis of the study were carried out simultaneously to support the work cycle on existing data and the production of new and better data acquisition

strategies and to prepare the early analysis of interim reports, such as the way Miles and Huberman (1984) stated. In short, this synchronicity made the study to be a *constant comparative method* as helping the analysis be appropriate for improvement.

RESULTS

In this part of the research, the answer for RQ1 (qualitative data) and RQ2-3 (quantitative data) will be given, respectively.

As an answer to RQ1 regarding women, the in-depth interviews demonstrated that, as seen in Table 1, the negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the private and public status of working women can be divided into 11 themes.

As an answer to RQ1 regarding men, Table 2 demonstrates that the negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the private and public status of working men can be divided into 5 themes.

Table 1. The negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the private and public status of working women

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Increase in domestic work and unpaid care	41	36.6
Have difficulty in adapting to telecommuting	18	16
Inability to help child(ren) with distance education	11	9.8
Increase in psychological problems	11	9.8
Rise in economic burden	7	6.3
Increase in work–family conflict	7	6.3
Increase in domestic violence	6	5.3
Increase in gender-based discrimination at work	5	4.5
Decrease in social activities	3	2.7
Increase in the number of divorce cases	2	1.8
Increase in the number of early marriages	1	0.9
Total	112	100

Table 2. The negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the private and public status of working men

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Rise in economic burden	47	45.2
Have difficulty in adapting telecommuting	23	22.1
Decrease in outdoor activities	20	19.3
Increase in domestic workload responsibilities	7	6.7
Inability to help child(ren) with distance education	7	6.7
Total	104	100

As shown in Table 3, to answer RQ2, as a result of the Mann–Whitney U test, no statistically significant differences were found between the stress levels of the married and single women ($P(,131) > .05$). In other words, both married and single women experience the same level of gender role stress, with a median (min–max) of 82 (32–100) for married women and 83.5 (73–94) for single women.

As for the men, the Mann–Whitney U test shows that no statistically significant differences were found between the stress levels of the married and single men ($P(,059) > .05$). In other words, both married and single men experience the same level of gender role stress, with a median (min–max) of 78 (50–109) for married men and 67 (50–110) for single men.

The result of the Kruskal–Wallis test demonstrates that there was a statistically significant difference according to the educational backgrounds of the women ($P(,02) < .05$). These data show that women who finished only elementary school – with a median (min–max) of 52.5 (46–86) – experience a low level of gender role stress whereas the medians of all other educational levels are close to each other, between 82 and 87.

Table 3. The gender role stress levels of working women and men in Turkey according to their marital status and educational backgrounds

	Median (min–max)	Statistics	<i>p</i>
Marital Status of Women			
Married (<i>n</i> = 94)	82 (32–100)		
Single (<i>n</i> = 18)	83.5 (73–94)	656.000	0.131*
Marital Status of Men			
Married (<i>n</i> = 81)	78 (50–109)		
Single (<i>n</i> = 23)	67 (50–110)	863.500	0.59*
Educational Backgrounds of Women			
Illiterate (<i>n</i> = 7)	84 (42–89)		
Literate (<i>n</i> = 8)	85 (47–91)		
Elementary School (<i>n</i> = 14)	52.5 (46–86)		
Secondary School (<i>n</i> = 30)	82 (32–94)		
High School (<i>n</i> = 42)	82.5 (32–100)		
University (<i>n</i> = 11)	87 (67–91)	19.473	0.02**
Educational Backgrounds of Men			
Illiterate (<i>n</i> = 0)			
Literate (<i>n</i> = 3)	64 (64–87)		
Elementary School (<i>n</i> = 7)	64 (64–85)		
Secondary School (<i>n</i> = 17)	64 (63–108)		
High School (<i>n</i> = 38)	81.5 (50–110)		
University (<i>n</i> = 34)	88.5 (51–108)		
Postgraduate (<i>n</i> = 5)	108 (50–108)	16.535	0.005**

* Mann–Whitney U Test, ** Kruskal–Wallis Test.

Regarding men, as a result of the Kruskal–Wallis test, a statistically significant difference according to the educational backgrounds of men was found ($P(,005) <,05$). These data show that men who graduated from elementary and secondary schools and are literate experienced a lower gender role stress than those who attended high school or university. However, with a median (min–max) of 108 (50–108), postgraduate men experience the highest level of gender stress.

As an answer to RQ3, Table 4 shows the data gained from the descriptive statistics, which demonstrates that women experience a higher gender role stress than men (an overall mean \pm standard deviation of 80.81 ± 18.690 for women; 76.32 ± 16.089 for men).

Table 4. The overall levels of gender role stress of the participants according to their gender

Gender	Mean \pm standard deviation
Women ($n = 112$)	80.81 ± 18.690
Men ($n = 104$)	76.32 ± 16.089

DISCUSSION

The results from the analysis of the interviews suggested that, from a psychological and emotional point of view, women were effected more negatively than men during the pandemic (UN 2020; UNFPA 2020). Other consequences of the research are broadly supported by the literature in the ways that the work–family conflict (Feng, Savani 2020), domestic violence (Imga, Ayhan 2020; UNFPA 2020; Altun 2016: 187), the number of divorce cases and early marriages increased (Bradbury-Jones, Isham 2020) during the pandemic.

Compared to the previous year, in March 2020, physical violence increased by a rate of 80%, psychological violence and the demand for shelters increased by 93 and 78%, respectively (ABB 2020). This passage is important to exemplify that literature confirms what women participants have stated:

'We have been married for 26 years. My husband was never violent to me; that is, since May. <...> I had double stress, even triple; as a nurse, as a woman and as a wife exposed to psychological violence' (WP16, 53, married).

The women also stated that they experienced many problems from a gender perspective during the pandemic at their professional life. Just as the literature has revealed (Zeybekoğlu-Akbaş, Dursun 2020; Alon et al. 2020), the women participants also underlined that employers chose women to discharge more than men; women earn less than men and are closer to poverty. Moreover, telecommuting or working remotely were the new transformations that most of the women came through. Their productivity and job satisfaction got worsen (Blundell et al. 2020; Feng, Savani 2020). However, it must be considered that as men are regarded as the mainstay of the economy of the families, when a parent needs to leave work in order to take care of their child(ren), it is not men, but women have to leave work (Robbins 2020).

'My boss, the employer of the company I had been working for 16 years chose me instead of the new male engineer of 8 months, to dismiss. Why? Because I was the victim for the reason that I am a woman and must be at home. Fortunately, I found a new job but my hope and productivity have gone away. I cannot trust anyone at work' (WP7, 46, married).

The new working system and the quarantine measures have also led wo/men to be away from social and outdoor activities (UN 2020).

'What I want to do on the first day after the pandemic is going out with my high school mates for a girl's night out! I hadn't recognized the value of those days I long for now, I haven't been alone in my life like these days; it turns out how social we were!' (WP12, 43, single).

'Before the pandemic, every week, we were organizing football matches with our colleagues. These matches were very enjoying for us. Now, we cannot even see each other' (MP83, 37, single).

Not only do the results of this research, but also current COVID-19 literature agree that with quarantine and lockdowns, women's and men's workload at home got worsen. With the closure of the schools and childcare centers and also a passage to a new working system – telecommuting, women had to work from home and hold all the domestic facilities as it is impossible to take domestic help (Blundell et al. 2020; Yasenov 2020, UNESCO 2020). However, men were also at home and there has been some gender role shifts as they had to divide the responsibilities with their views such as childcare and household tasks (Reichelt et al. 2020). In parallel with this literature, the participants have stated that their workload at home increased. However, the rate of the women saying that their domestic workload increased during the pandemic (36.6%) was more than those of men (6.7%).

'At first, every day is the same, even every hour, ever moment. If I do not have to go to the court, I cook, wash the dishes, clean, sleep. With the normalization process, I was very happy to get rid of the heavy housework; however, everything turned to be the same when I came back home. I got really bored and am waiting for the pandemic to finish tomorrow, if possible' (WP36, 50, married).

'I had to be on the computer at 9 o'clock during the telecommuting working program. My son also had to be on his computer at 9.10. Everything was new for us, even the word "pandemic" I never heard before' (MP72, 47, married).

The participants also indicated that the pandemic period had a negative effect on the economy influencing the global economy as a whole (UN 2020; Women & Health Initiative 2020). The participants drew attention to this factor:

'I'm a housekeeper. My husband is disabled and we have three children. I am the only one who earns the living of our house. Unfortunately, the pandemic seemed like apocalypse to us; I lost my job, my children had to start distance learning but we didn't have enough technology to meet their educational expenses (She cried)' (WP93, 45, married).

As for RQ2, resembling the COVID-19 literature, regardless of the marital status, the pandemic has effects on the stress levels of women and men (Feng, Savani 2020; Yasenov 2020; Andrew et al. 2020; Lewis 2020). On the other hand, taking the educational backgrounds of the participants into consideration, married and single wo/men with a higher education level both faced social inequalities, oppression and poverty within the framework of traditional gender roles that society assumes from women and men, and this situation has reinforced gender-based discrimination.

However, elementary school women and men who graduated from elementary and secondary schools and are literate experience a lower gender role stress than those who attended high school or university. This finding is not the same compared with the literature (Tian et al. 2020) highlighting that during the pandemic, individuals with a lower education level, divorced or widowed individuals, agricultural workers, and those in minority positions were more obsessive in this process and showed compulsive symptoms, interpersonal sensitivity, phobic anxiety and psychotic symptoms. This can be evidence for that people with

a low level of gender role stress may not be aware of the gender inequality notion whereas the highly educated women and men can be aware that the society assigns roles for both genders differently.

By a virus that people cannot see properly, the people are exposed to life threats, it triggers a sense of uncertainty, fear of the unknown and anxieties about security (Carleton 2016). Atar et al. (2020) have also used the same variables and found similar results. As an answer to RQ3, it is certain that especially the disadvantaged groups, including women, have been more affected by the adverse effects of the pandemic, and they feel more deeply about the phenomena such as coping with stress and adapting to the new normal (Taştan 2020).

All these empirical results document that during the pandemic, gender-based discrimination has reinforced and inequalities have deepened. It is thought that the social impact of the pandemic was felt both by women and men, but more in women, and that these women lost some of the limited gains (such as the fields of health, education, political and economic systems, etc.) they had until the pandemic in the context of gender equality. It is thought that the social impact of the pandemic was felt both by women and men, but more in women in the context of gender equality. All these data summarise that the gender inequality issue can be identified with a metaphoric expression such as ‘a pandemic-defying phenomenon’, as it acts against the pandemic by threatening the society with many aspects just as the virus itself.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research is to reveal the gender-biased consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey through the views of working wo/men. The Tables (see 1, 2 and 3) demonstrate the key research results.

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the private and public status of working women can be divided into 11 themes.
- The negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the private and public status of working men can be divided into 5 themes.
- The first null hypothesis was not rejected as the gender role stress of women and men showed no difference according to their marital status.
- The second null hypotheses were also not rejected as the gender role stress of working women and men would show difference according to their educational backgrounds.
- As for the third null hypothesis, it was also not rejected as women have experienced higher levels of gender role stress during the COVID-19 pandemic process.

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SEDEM GÜRKAN

Pandemijos nepaisantis reiškinys: lyčių klausimas COVID-19 protrūkio Turkijoje metu

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamas COVID-19 pandemijos Turkijoje pasekmės, šališkos lyties atžvilgiu ir grindžiamos dirbančių moterų ir vyrų, protrūkio metu susidūrusių su įprasto gyvenimo pokyčiais, nuomonėmis. Šiame kontekste taikant giluminius interviu tyrime dalyvavo 216 informantų, kurie taip pat atsakinėjo į klausimus, remiantis Vyrų ir moterų lyčių vaidmenų streso skale (*Masculine and Feminine Gender Role Stress Scale*). Tyrimas rodo, kad diskriminacija dėl lyties pandemijos laikotarpiu sustiprėjo, o lyčių nelygybė išryškėjo. Manytina, kad socialinį pandemijos poveikį pajuto tiek moterys, tiek vyrai, tačiau moterys – labiau. Taip pat atskleista, kad moterys prarado dalį iki pandemijos pasiektų laimėjimų lyčių lygybės srityje.

Raktažodžiai: COVID-19 pandemija, požiūris į lyčių vaidmenį, moterys, vyrai, COVID-19 sociologija