

THE CULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF THE RELATION OF COMFORT FOOD TO GENDER, AGE, EMOTIONAL EATING AND BMI DURING THE PANDEMIC PERIOD

PANDEMİ DÖNEMİNDE RAHAT YİYECEKLERİN (COMFORT FOODS) CİNSİYET, YAŞ, DUYGUSAL YEME VE VKİ İLE İLİŞKİSİNİN KÜLTÜREL OLARAK DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

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ABSTRACT

Declared as a "public health emergency" by the World Health Organization in January 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic led to lockdowns in many parts of the world. Changes occurred in some daily habits like social interactions, the ability to cook, and eating habits. In this study, we aimed to assess the effects of Covid-19 induced confinement policies on comfort food consumption of a group of internet users in Turkey using a questionnaire. This questionnaire and Emotional Eater Questionnaire (EEQ) were answered by 602 participants. Comfort food consumption and different factors like gender, age differences, emotional status, and BMI were assessed anthropologically according to the local eating culture. As a result, we found that people consumed high-calorie comfort foods of local cuisine to cope with the difficult conditions of the pandemics, but the preferences changed according to gender, age, and emotional status, and this comfort food consumption generally caused weight gain.

Keywords: Comfort food; Emotional eating; Local foods

ÖZET

Ocak 2020'de Dünya Sağlık Örgütü tarafından "halk sağlığı acil durumu" olarak ilan edilen Covid-19 pandemisi, dünyanın birçok yerinde sokağa çıkma yasağına yol açtı. Sosyal etkileşimler, yemek yapma becerisi ve yeme alışkanlıkları gibi bazı günlük alışkanlıklarda değişiklikler meydana geldi. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'de bir grup internet kullanıcısının rahat gıda (comfort food) tüketimine Covid-19 kaynaklı karantina uygulamalarının etkilerini anket yöntemiyle değerlendirmeyi amaçladık. Anket ve Duygusal Yeme Ölçeği katılımcı olan 602 kişi tarafından yanıtlandı. Rahat yiyecek tüketimi ve cinsiyet, yaş farklılıkları, duygusal durum ve VKİ gibi farklı faktörler yerel yeme kültürüne göre antropolojik olarak değerlendirildi. Sonuç olarak, insanların pandeminin zorlu koşullarıyla baş edebilmek için yöresel mutfağın yüksek kalorili rahat yemeklerini (comfort foods) tükettiklerini ancak tercihlerinin cinsiyet, yaş ve duygusal duruma göre değiştiğini ve bu rahat yemek tüketiminin genel olarak kilo artışına neden olduğunu tespit ettik.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rahat yiyecek, Duygusal yeme, Yerel yiyecekler

1. INTRODUCTION

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic and preventive measures (lockdown, quarantine, social distancing, self-isolation), daily life of many people changed in the world. During the lockdown period, people felt stressed and widely stocked food uncontrollably. Maybe shopping for food was one of the foremost daily habits in this period. As households stocked up foods, they appeared to be purchasing highly processed, calorie-dense foods. Our own experiences in supermarkets showed that along with the shelves that held flour, shelves with yeast, rice, cereals, and legumes were quite empty. Stocking up these food items was clearly a necessity for preparedness. Consequently, it was estimated that many people might experience higher-calorie diets during the pandemic.

In this study, depending on different factors like gender, age differences, emotional status, and BMI, comfort food consumption were assessed anthropologically. In this evaluation, effects of local eating culture was taken into account during pandemics period.

2. LITERATURE

Quarantines and pandemics can be stressful. This stress may push people toward overeating, and looking for "comfort foods", which is a multidimensional concept including emotional, behavioral, physiological and

anthropological processes. The term ‘Comfort food’ is used to define foods which provide a feeling of emotional well-being. They offer a kind of emotional comfort. It is generally thought that comfort foods have high calorie content and are likely associated with childhood and/or home cooking. Comfort foods are largely prepared in a simple or traditional style and may have a nostalgic value. They may remind people of their home, family, and/or friends (Spence, 2017).

The consumption of comfort foods is psychologically comfortable and pleasurable for a person. It generally involves a social affective context. Research about comfort food shows that younger people tend to prefer snack related food as comfort food compared to older people who prefer meal related foods (Wansink et al., 2003). According to the results of another study made in France, men's comfort food consumption was motivated by positive emotions whereas women's consumption was triggered by negative effects. Consumption of comfort foods alleviated women's negative emotions but also produced guilt. Positive affect was a particularly powerful trigger of comfort food consumption for older participants. Younger participants reported more intense negative emotions prior to consuming comfort foods. Foods high in sugar and fat content were more efficient in alleviating negative effects whereas low-calorie foods were more efficient in increasing positive emotions (Dubé et al., 2005)

In Scarmozzino and Visioli's study (2020), during the pandemic in Italy, an increase in “comfort food” consumption, notably chocolate, ice-cream, and desserts (42.5%) and salty snacks (23.5%) was reported. There is evident decrease in alcohol consumption and increase in fresh fruit and vegetables consumption. Besides these, ready-made meals were reduced by nearly 50% (Scarmozzino & Visioli, 2020). In a study made in France to see the possible differences of food choice before and during the lockdown, it was determined that the nutritional quality of diet was lower during the lockdown compared to before. Food choice motives significantly changed and an increase in the importance of mood was associated with decreased nutritional quality (Marty et al., 2021). In a study made with adolescents in Poland, it was concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic changed the food choice determinants. For this group, it increased the importance of health and weight control, but reduced the role of mood and sensory appeal (Głąbska et al., 2020).

In this study, emotional eating was also researched beside comfort food. For this research, some food names were given to the participants. For example, one of them was meat, and there are many studies related with meat and gender. In a study made with 1208 men and women, it was found that gender has the largest impact on sensory response and food preferences and that women liked meat and high-fat products less than men (Spinelli et al., 2020). Another food type was sweets. In a study made with Japanese older than 18, younger respondents had more positive feelings for sweetness and reported consuming more sweet foods than respondents from the other groups (Katou et al., 2005). A study by Wansink et al. (2003) on “chocolate addiction” showed that 92% of the self-selected “addicts” were women, and a second study discovered that 70 of 72 self-identified “chocolate addicts” were women

Previous studies show that people consume comfort food for emotion regulation, escape from negative emotions, and consume more when they have stressful periods. Comfort food is also defined as food that reduces discomfort and provides a sense of physiological or psychological comfort when consumed (Spence, 2017). According to Fiorillo and Gorwood (2020), Covid-19 is a new form of stressor that will lead to increased loneliness and reduced social interaction. Excessive worry, fear, stress, and anxiety, changing habits of eating and sleeping are among other possible mental outcomes of the pandemic (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020). These expected mental consequences of the pandemic especially rising depressive symptoms has concurrent elements with the emotional eating mechanism. Van Strien et al. (2007) describe emotional eating as a tendency to overeat when negative emotions are present. Close (2013) lists those negative emotions which trigger emotional eating behavior as sadness, stress, loneliness, fatigue, shame, or life events with negative emotions. These seem very close to the mental outcomes of the pandemic. Therefore, binding the effects of the pandemic to emotional eating could be possible since emotional eaters are driven by how they had just felt while deciding what to eat (Christensen & Brooks, 2006).

Quarantine and isolation are thought to cause a change in people's lifestyle, especially eating habits (Romeo-Arroyo et al., 2020) because the isolation process has effects on both energy intake and energy expenditure (Bhutani & Cooper, 2020). For example, food scarcity concerns may drive people to buy packaged, long shelf life, and energy-dense foods that contain high amounts of salt, sugar, and trans-fat (Callaghan et al., 2007). As a result, consuming excessive amounts of these foods with high energy density is easily associated with weight gain (Bhutani & Cooper, 2020). In a study investigating the effect of quarantine on behaviors associated with weight gain, increased snacking after dinner, lack of dietary restrictions, increased eating due

to stress, and decreased physical activity were identified as risk factors in weight gain (Zachary et al., 2020). In addition, prolonged staying at home and closing of gyms cause weight gain along with decreased physical activity (Scarmozzino & Visioli, 2020). In a study conducted with obese children and adolescents in Italy, it was found that participants spent less time on exercise during the quarantine and increased their consumption of junk food (Pietrobelli et al., 2020).

During the quarantine, news about the epidemic can also become a source to increase stress. Under this stress, people tend to overeat, especially "comfort food" (Muscogiuri et al., 2020). Comfort foods that are rich in simple carbohydrates can reduce stress by increasing the production of serotonin and having a positive effect on mood (Renzo et al., 2020). Carbohydrate craving encourages serotonin production that in turn has a positive effect on mood. This unhealthy nutritional habit could increase the risk of developing obesity that beyond being a chronic state of inflammation, it is often complicated by heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease that have been demonstrated to increase the risk for more serious complications of Covid-19 (Muscogiuri et al., 2020). With the increase in the duration of staying at home, making bread, pizza, and dessert at home has increased as an alternative way to avoid boredom and spend time (Bracale & Vaccaro, 2020). These factors are associated with overeating and excessive energy intake and may increase the risk of developing obesity in the future (Bracale & Vaccaro, 2020)(Renzo et al., 2020).

In this study, we examined if people consume comfort food because of a lockdown during the pandemic period, and the relationship of this consumption with body mass index (BMI), gender, age differences, and emotional eating.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

For this study, an information form was prepared to understand the relation of Covid-19 and comfort food consumption. This form was prepared with the combination of different studies found in the literature which were related to the concept. Besides this, the Turkish version of the Emotional Eater Questionnaire (EEQ) was used. Arslantas (2019) did EEQ's reliability and validity studies of the Turkish version, and it was translated to Turkish. The cut point of EEQ was taken as 20 point out of 30 as Arslantaş (2019) advised for the Turkish population (Arslantaş et al., 2019).

Both of them, the information form and the questionnaire were administered online together for one week in September 2020. All participants were volunteer internet users. An informed consent form was given to the volunteers at the beginning of the information form. 135 men and 467 women aged 15–74 years participated in the survey. In this study, there were 90 baby boomers (1964–1945), 151 from the X generation (1965–1979), 329 from the Y generation (1980–2000), and 31 from the Z generation (2000 - ...). 1 participant at the age of 77 was excluded from the analysis related with the generations. These generation intervals were taken from our previously published study (Durukan & Gül, 2019). The raw data in connection with the paper for editorial review was stored.

For the analysis of the findings, IBM SPSS Statistics 22 for statistical analysis (SPSS IBM, Turkey) program was used. Significance was evaluated as $p < 0.05$.

4. RESULTS

Online forms of 602 participants were analyzed. 467 of the participants were women (77.6%) and 135 of the participants were men (22.4%). Ages of the participants ranged from 15 to 77, the average age was 38.47. In terms of generations, 31 of the participants were from Generation Z, 329 from Generation Y, 151 from Generation X and 90 were baby boomers. The average BMI of participants was 23,94 as seen in Table - 1.

Table 1: Generations by number of participants, Average Age, Average BMI

n	All Participants	Generation			
		Z	Y	X	Baby Boomers
	602	31	329	151	90
Age (Min-Max)	15-77	15-20	21-41	42-55	56-74
Average BMI	23,94	20,91	22,93	25,4	26,22

Source: *Ordulu*

4.1. Comfort Food Preferences

Among 12 subcategories of food, Meat was the most preferred group (N=287) where Toast/Sandwich was the least preferred group (N=101) by participants as seen in Figure - 1.

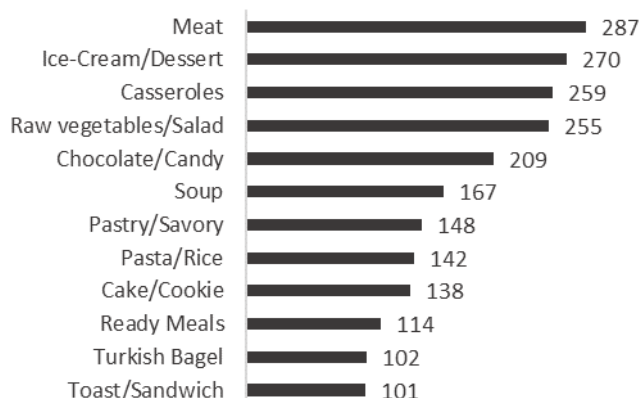


Figure – 1: Distribution of comfort food preferences

Source: Ordulu

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender and food preferences. Women were more likely to choose Chocolate/Candy and Raw vegetables/Salad where men were more likely to choose Meat.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between food preferences and being an emotional eater (Table - 2). Emotional eaters were more likely to choose Ice-Cream/Desserts during Covid-19. Similarly, the relation between choosing Chocolate/Candy, Cake/Cookie, Pastry/Savory, Toast/Sandwich and being emotional eater was significant. Emotional eaters were also more likely to choose Pasta/Rice and Ready Meals as comfort food. On the other hand, emotional eaters were less likely to choose Soup and Casseroles as comfort food. There was no significant relation between Turkish bagel, Meat, Raw vegetables/Salad groups and being an emotional eater as seen in Table - 2.

Table 2: Comfort Food Preferences and Emotional Eating

		n (100%)	Emotional Eater		Pearson Chi-Square	Chi- <i>p</i>
			No	Yes		
Ice-Cream/Dessert	No	332	324 (97.6%)	8 (2.4%)	4,01	0,045
	Yes	270	255 (94.4%)	15 (5.6%)		
Chocolate/Candy	No	393	384 (97.7%)	9 (2.3%)	7,216	0,007
	Yes	209	195 (93.3%)	14 (6.7%)		
Turkish Bagel	No	500	484 (96.8%)	16 (3.2%)	3,093	0,079
	Yes	102	95 (93.1%)	7 (6.9%)		
Cake/Cookie	No	464	454 (97.8%)	10 (2.2%)	15,278	0
	Yes	138	125 (90.6%)	13 (9.4%)		
Pastry/Savory	No	454	442 (97.4%)	12 (2.6%)	6,967	0,008
	Yes	148	137 (92.6%)	11 (7.4%)		
Toast/Sandwich	No	501	487 (97.2%)	14 (2.8%)	8,558	0,003
	Yes	101	92 (91.1%)	9 (8.9%)		
Soup	No	435	414 (95.2%)	21 (4.8%)	4,327	0,038
	Yes	167	165 (98.8%)	2 (1.2%)		
Pasta/Rice	No	460	448 (97.4%)	12 (2.6%)	7,794	0,005
	Yes	142	131 (92.3%)	11 (7.7%)		
Meat	No	315	303 (96.2%)	12 (3.8%)	0	0,988
	Yes	287	276 (96.2%)	11 (3.8%)		
Casseroles	No	343	325 (94.8%)	18 (5.2%)	4,419	0,036
	Yes	259	254 (98.1%)	5 (1.9%)		
Raw vegetables/Salad	No	347	330 (95.1%)	17 (4.9%)	2,593	0,107
	Yes	255	249 (97.6%)	6 (2.4%)		
Ready Meals	No	488	479 (98.2%)	9 (1.8%)	27,392	0
	Yes	114	100 (87.7%)	14 (12.3%)		

Source: Ordulu

A Chi – square test was calculated in order to assess the relation between generations and comfort food preferences during Covid-19. There were significant differences between generation groups as seen in Table - 3. Post hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction showed that Generation Z was more likely to choose Ice Cream/Desserts, Chocolate/Candy and Ready Meals. Generation Y was more likely to consume Toast/Sandwich, Pasta/Rice and Ready Meals. Generation X was more likely to choose Turkish bagel and they were less likely to choose Pasta/Rice. Baby boomers were less likely to choose Meat and Ready Meals as comfort food. There were no significant differences between generation groups for Cake/Cookie, Pastry/Savory, Casseroles, Raw vegetables/Salad.

Table 3: Comfort food preferences among generations, chi-square test with post hoc analysis

	Between generations (Z, Y, X, BB)					
	Pearson Chi-Square	<i>p</i>	Z	Y	X	BB
Ice-Cream/Dessert	21,98	0	0	2,053	0,61	2,72
Chocolate/Candy	11,48	0,009	0,031	1,551	0,558	1,225
Turkish Bagel	15,43	0,001	1,602	0,059	0,001	4,179
Cake/Cookie	1,94	0,585				
Pastry/Savory	4,64	0,201				
Toast/Sandwich	12,68	0,005	0,225	0,008	1,628	0,369
Soup	2,3	0,512				
Pasta/Rice	20,94	0	0,658	0,001	0,003	0,307
Meat	11,84	0,008	3,873	0,068	3,535	0,009
Casseroles	7,84	0,05	0,273	1,182	1,551	0,57
Raw vegetables/Salad	5,23	0,156				
Ready Meals	35,72	0	0,005	0,003	0,231	0

Source: Ordulu

A Mann Whitney U test was conducted to investigate the relation between comfort food preference and BMI. The Mann Whitney U Test indicated that the BMI of participants who prefer Raw vegetables/Salad was less than those who did not prefer Raw vegetables/Salad as comfort food. The BMI of participants who choose Pastry/Savory as comfort food was greater than those who did not choose Pastry/Savory as comfort food. No significant result was found with other sub-categories of comfort food.

4.2. Emotional Eating

23 of the participants were emotional eaters, which was 3.8% of all participants. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between BMI and emotional eating score. There was significant correlation between them $r_s=.16$, $p < .001$, $N = 602$. It was also found that emotional eaters were more likely to state they gained weight during Covid-19 and they were more likely to state they ate more during Covid-19.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to assess the relation between gender and being an emotional eater. No significant relation was found. The result of the chi-square test showed there was a significant relation between generations and being an emotional eater. Post hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction showed that emotional eaters were more likely to be from Generation Z.

There was no significant difference between emotional eaters and non-emotional eaters in terms of water and alcohol consumption. Emotional eaters were more likely to consume Tea/Coffee and Beverage.

When they compared their feelings before and during the pandemic, most of the participants stated they felt more stress (79.1%) and anxiety (78.1%) during the pandemic. More than half of the participants stated they felt more sadness (63.9%) and boredom (63.3%) since the pandemic began. Nearly half of the participants felt more loneliness (53.6%) and anger (47.3%) when they compared it with the pre-pandemic period.

Weight gain of participants and their feelings were analyzed via chi-square test of independence. We found that those who stated they gained weight were more likely to be among participants who felt sadness, anxiety, stress, anger and boredom. No significant relation was found with feelings of loneliness.

A Mann Whitney U test was conducted to investigate the emotional eating scores of participants with their feelings and the results are given in Table - 4. The Mann Whitney U test indicated those who felt more sadness, anxiety, stress, anger and boredom during the pandemic had significantly higher emotional eating scores. No significant relation was found with feelings of loneliness.

Table 4: Mann Whitney U Test results, feelings during pandemic and emotional eating scores

		N	Mean Rank	M	U	p
Loneliness	Yes	244	233.21	10.22	24470.5	.362
	No	211	221.97	9.50		
Sadness	Yes	281	231.33	10.44	19295.5	.017
	No	159	201.36	9.23		
Anxiety	Yes	470	312.68	9.83	25763.5	.003
	No	132	261.68	8.21		
Stress	Yes	401	263.55	10.21	17423.5	.004
	No	106	217.87	8.32		
Anger	Yes	190	223.57	11.14	15946	.000
	No	212	181.72	9.15		
Boredom	Yes	381	341.52	9.97	37140.5	.016
	No	221	279.06	8.58		

Source: Ordulu

Another Mann Whitney U test was conducted for participants' feeling of losing control during pandemic, their sleep difficulties and emotional eating scores. It was seen that emotional eating scores of participants who reported sleep difficulties were greater than those who did not report sleep difficulties. The Emotional eating score of participants who stated they felt they lost control over their life was greater than those who did not report feeling of loss of control.

5. DISCUSSION

Comfort foods are foods that contain high amounts of carbohydrates and sugar and are defined as foods which offer psychological and emotional comfort (Troisi et al., 2015). Weight gain is associated with increased consumption of comfort foods (Shen et al., 2020).

In our study, it was determined that men prefer meat as a comfort food and women prefer Chocolate/candy and Raw vegetables/salad. Şimşek and Yalım Kaya (2018) examined comfort food consumption by gender and reported that generally sweets for women and protein and carbohydrate-based foods for men were consumed as comfort food (Şimşek & Yalım Kaya, 2018). Wansink et al. (2003) also examined comfort food preferences according to gender and found that men prefer hot, satisfying, meal-related foods such as steak, stew, and soup, and women prefer sweet snacks such as chocolate and ice cream. Likewise, Camilleri et al. (2014) determined that men prefer foods such as pizza, fast food, quiche, and women prefer sweet snacks. In a study by Heiman and Lowengart (2014), women's food choices were compared to men's and it was found that women attribute greater importance to health and physical appearance, and therefore consume low calorie foods like vegetables and salad. The consumption of meat is a symbolically rich act and has been historically linked to status and power (Adams, 2000). Our results seem consistent with the studies in the literature.

When comfort food consumption was examined by age groups, we found that generation Z preferred Ice cream/dessert, Chocolate/candy and Ready meals as comfort food. Generation Y preferred Toast/sandwich, Pasta/rice and Ready meals. Generation X preferred Turkish bagel as comfort food but Pasta/rice less as comfort food. In another study, the younger age group preferred snacks such as chips, hamburgers and chocolate as comfort food, while the elderly group preferred more casseroles, soup and fruit/vegetables as comfort food (Şimşek & Yalım Kaya, 2018). It can be said that sweet food consumption decreases with age due to health reasons.

According to our study, it was seen that there are significant differences between generations in comfort food preferences. Emotional eaters were more likely to be from Generation Z. This can be relatable with the features of generation Z who are born after 2000. They grow with very different technological possibilities and have different demands compared to previous generations. They are also named 'deeply emotional'. They are an alien and lonely generation, and they decide the best for themselves. To ignore them may cause frustration among peers, reduces productivity, and lower morale (Durukan & Gül, 2019). Quarantine, self-

isolation, and uncertainty about the progress of the pandemic may have endangered some of the basic needs which may have taken granted prior to the pandemic such as shelter, food, economic stability, physical and mental health. Lack of basic need satisfaction may also lead to more stress and anxiety (Timmerman & Acton, 2001). By threatening physical health, safety, and security, the pandemic may have triggered emotional eating behavior for the free-spirit generation Z.

Generation Y have high adaptability and are open to change and new approaches (Durukan & Gül, 2019). Therefore, their comfort food preferences were more carefree and ordinary. The very traditional generation, generation X preferred Turkish bagel that made them feel safe and good.

In this study, food preferences of emotional eaters were examined, the products that emotional eaters prefer were Ice cream/dessert, Chocolate/candy, Cake/cookie, Pastry/savory, Toast/sandwich, Pasta/rice and Ready meals. In a study by Wagner et.al. (2014), it was stated that chocolate (26%), ice cream (18%), cookies (11%) and cake (8%) were the most commonly used comfort foods. In another study, it was emphasized that chocolate is the most preferred food in case of stress (Şimşek & Yalım Kaya, 2018). It was reported in a study that the consumption of comfort foods such as chocolate, dessert and ice cream increased during quarantine period. Besides comfort foods, decreased physical activity, sports, and exercise due to quarantines have also been associated with weight gain (Scarmozzino & Visioli, 2020). In a study by Camilleri and friends, it was observed that emotional eaters tend to eat more sweet and fatty foods such as cake/ biscuit/ pastries, chocolate, ice cream/ candy and breakfast cereals. (G. M. Camilleri et al., 2014). These studies are consistent with our results. Also, an increase observed in the consumption of tea, coffee and soft drinks among emotional eaters was similar to other study that mentions an increase in tea, coffee and herbal tea consumption in the pandemic period (Scarmozzino & Visioli, 2020).

For this study, 3.8% of the participants were emotional eaters. Arslantaş et al (2019) indicated that approximately 10% of the Turkish sample were emotional eaters. Difference may be due to pandemic conditions. Since the scale was not prepared for the quarantine period, some items of scale may not be as well-directed as before. Also, health concerns in the time of pandemic may lead participants to perceive their emotional eating behaviors as less annoying. In that case participants can get lower scores than they would get without a pandemic.

People who felt negative emotions more had significantly higher emotional eating scores. Participants who reported the loss of control, weight gain, sadness, anxiety, stress, and boredom had significantly higher emotional eating scores. These results support Timmerman and Acton's (2001) findings which state when basic needs (physiological, safety, social needs) satisfaction is low, people tend to respond with emotional eating behavior. But, even if participants are not emotional eaters within a given classification method of the survey, emotional eating scores were significantly different between groups.

Self-reports show people felt more stress, anxiety, sadness and boredom during the pandemic whereas this could not be said for anger and loneliness. Those who reported they gained weight felt significantly more stress, anxiety, sadness and boredom than participants who did not report weight gain. Participants who felt more of these emotions had also significantly higher emotional eating scores than those who did not. Dube et al. (2005) state when people feel negative emotions, they tend to consume comfort food more. It is also known that emotional eating behavior has soothing effect by reducing perceived levels of stress at least at the time of eating (Finch & Tomiyama, 2015). In a study, which aimed to examine the relationship between eating habits and mental and emotional mood during quarantine, nearly half of the participants stated that they felt anxious, they turned to comfort foods and increased their food intake to feel better (Renzo et al., 2020). Taking the mental consequences of Covid-19 pandemic and mechanism of emotional eating into consideration, for people who had difficulties to deal with negative emotions throughout the pandemic, comfort eating can function as coping mechanism to regulate consistent negative feelings. Evers et al. (2010) state that one of the reasons of comfort food consumption is regulation of negative emotions.

Emotional eating scores of participants who stated they felt they lost control of their lives and had sleeping problems were significantly higher than those did not report loss of control and sleeping problems. Comfort food consumption may function as adaptive response to feeling of loss of control. Most people could not continue to live their daily routines because of the pandemic. To tolerate loss of control, comfort eating may have helped them to move towards negative feelings to positive feelings (Wansink et al., 2003). From a psychological perspective, since the outside world is out of control and this is very disturbing, one can try to have sense of control over his/her own feelings by regulating them. Comfort food consumption may serve to balance loss of control by replacing negative feeling with relatively positive one.

At the beginning of the study, it was intended to see how Turkey is culturally different on comfort food from the world during the pandemic period. The anthropology of food traditionally examines the social, economic, and cultural differences that explain inequalities in access to food, and the problems derived from these differences. Different results were obtained according to cultural differences in anthropology studies. However, it has been observed that the findings obtained from this study on comfort foods are not very different from the findings of studies conducted in other countries during the pandemic period which the whole world is experiencing. It was understood that in Turkey, during this period, like elsewhere in the world, people prefer comfort foods that make them feel good, but they also encounter weight problems.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to see the effects of pandemic periods and quarantine times on comfort food preferences and factors that may be associated with these preferences such as BMI, emotional eating, and age differences. For this purpose, one information form was created according to the general eating habits of Turkish people and the Turkish version of EEQ was used. In the end, it was seen that gender, age groups, and emotional status are effective on the comfort food preferences of people as seen in other studies made in the world. It can be said that comfort food preferences of different cultures have become identical after Covid 19. However, it is thought that much more specific and different results can be obtained with in-depth interviews that can be made face-to-face after Covid19. Our study focused on one country a future study could look at data of these different generations from another westernized country or region

The study was written entirely original, and the used work of others are appropriately cited. There is no potential conflict of interest between authors.

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