The Mental Effects of Turkey's Headscarf Ban in Schools: Stressors and Coping

Fatma Tuba Aydin

Psychotherapy Science, Sigmund Freud Private University, 1020, Vienna, Austria
Telephone: +90 555 686 60 60, E-mail: ftaydin@gmail.com

ABSTRACT This qualitative study aimed to investigate the mental effects of the headscarf ban on students in Turkey. Verbatim transcripts of semi-structured interviews with eighteen female students, subjected to the ban and two key informants, cognitive behavioral therapists, provided data. A grounded theory analysis yielded three main categories, that is, stressors that emerge in the lives of students are anticipation of the ban, high stake decision-making, financial difficulties and social pressure, maturation, increase in self-esteem and learning new coping strategies are positive, psychosomatic symptoms, identity crises, and negative self-image are the adverse consequences of stressors, students employ problem-solving, emotion-focused, religious and social coping strategies to reduce the level of stress. The perception of the headscarf ban as a challenge and employment of emotional, social and religious coping strategies are more reliable predictors of successful coping rather than problem-focused strategies of removing the headscarf or leaving school.

INTRODUCTION

Diverse female garments based on beliefs, climate, and culture exist in the Islamic world. This study restricts itself to the wearing of headscarves in Turkey that cover the hair, neck and shoulders, leaving the face visible.

Throughout history, the garments of Muslim women have been objects of inquiry in post-colonial, modernization and minority discourses. Headscarves became symbols of traditional cultural values, piety, anticolonial resistance, refusal of integration, rejection of modernity, defiance, political Islam and backwardness (Barras 2014; Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014; Pak 2006). Various countries such as Turkey, Germany and France passed headscarf bans in education and working sectors (Akoglu 2015; Mahlmann 2015). Headscarf bans occurred in postcolonial and ethnic minority women contexts in European countries (Murray 2016). Turkey however, with ninety-nine percent of Muslim population inflicted the ban in a modernism versus conservatism discourse (Çarkoglu and Toprak 2007). Women with their so-called modern dresses became a symbol of modernization. Like France,

Address for correspondence:
Fatma Tuba Aydin
Sigmund Freud University Psychotherapy Science,
Vienna, 1020 Austria
Telephone: +90 0555 686 60 60
E-mail: ftaydin@gmail.com

Turkey justified its ban on the headscarf "as protecting and fostering secularism" (Barras 2014: 2).

Founded in 1923, the Turkish Republic started to implement restrictions on dress, adopting a more Western style. The republican reforms of 1934 discouraged veils and forbade headscarves in primary and secondary schools (Bleiberg 2005). Independent universities could make institutional bans up until the establishment of the Higher Education Council in 1981, following the military coup of 1980. Vague regulations often interpreted politically lead to oscillations between severe and harsh enforcement of the ban till the quasi-military coup of 1997 that imposed severe restrictions. In 2013, wearing a headscarf became officially legal for students (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014).

A considerable amount of literature around the globe investigated legal aspects of headscarf bans based on concepts such as human rights, democracy, public sphere, personal freedom, discrimination and tolerance (Fournier 2013; Hashmi 2013; Joyce 2013; Osman 2014). Lazaridis (2015) analyzed headscarf bans in Europe within the context of the feminization of migration. She criticized the researchers, who focus on men and neglect the experiences of migrant women stereotyped as maids, nannies and nurses. Likewise, Murray (2016) in her analysis of a French case draws attention to the 'dual disadvantage' of Muslim women in political rep-

resentation based on their ethnicity and gender. Lorasdagý and Ince (2010) examined headscarf controversy in Germany in the light of feminist and cultural debates. They argue that some of the European feminists support headscarf bans because they believe Muslim women do not voluntarily adopt it.

Previous research in Turkey focused mainly on legal (Uluç 2015; Vural 2014), sociopolitical (Tajali 2014; Tekin 2011; Gurbuz 2009) and demographical dimensions (Çarkoglu and Toprak 2007; KONDA 2007; Metropoll 2008). A survey identified the motives for wearing Islamic headscarves. It showed that the request of a husband equated to 2.7 percent of the people surveyed, 2.9 percent related to elderly people and religious motives made up seventy-three percent of participants' motivation to wear Islamic headscarves (KONDA 2007). According to a study conducted during the headscarf ban, seventy percent of the general public and sixteen percent of university-educated women wore headscarves (Metropoll 2008). Another survey, with 1500 participants, indicated a decrease in the wearing of headscarves from 69.1 percent in 1999 to 60.2 percent in 2007, following the ban in 1997 (Çarkoglu and Toprak 2007).

A number of studies reported the discourses that the public adopted concerning the headscarf ban. A qualitative inquiry conducted in five different universities asked undergraduate students about their perception of secularism (Mabokela and Seggie 2008). The research revealed the complexity of the situation with conflicting arguments of students regarding the protection of secularity on the one hand and freedom of students with headscarves on the other hand. Likewise, a recent study that involved perspectives of civil society organizations reported division among pro and contra arguments towards the headscarf ban (Akboga 2014). Another recent study made ethnographic and discursive analysis among ladies, who face headscarf ban at school and working settings. The analysis showed that headscarf bans created alternative religious discourses that participants employ to fit their situation (Akbulut 2015).

There is a limited but growing body of literature that provides insights concerning the psychological wellbeing of the women, who experienced the headscarf ban in Turkey. Guveneli (2011) surveyed the social and economic impact of the ban on 1,206 women. Besides difficulties at the workplace, interviewees in her study reported a loss of self-esteem, social withdrawal, feelings of shame, guilt and anger. Seggie (2010, 2011) analyzed the identity development of students, who adopted a wig to cope with the ban. The author reports anxiety, fear, guilt and social isolation. In a recent study Seggie (2015) analyzed the academic and cultural experiences of university students with headscarves after Turkey lifted the headscarf ban. She claims that an informal ban continues with a negative attitude towards these students and causes isolation, tension, and feelings of insecurity. Based on analysis of fieldwork observations and interviews, Cindoglu (2011) pointed to the discriminations at a workplace and challenges in the family dynamics. Lastly, in a social anthropological project investigating the religious, political and consumerist dimensions of the ban, participants describe their wig carrying experience as painful, insulting and socially isolating (Kejanlioglu and Tas 2009).

Objectives of the Study

It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the application of headscarf bans in various countries, which influence the lives of many Muslim women. Previous research focused on sociopolitical, religious, demographical and legal aspects, thus only slightly touching on the impact of the ban on individuals' wellbeing. This study aims to investigate the mental effects of a headscarf ban in Turkey's educational sector. It focuses on stressors in the lives of affected students and their coping strategies. A better understanding of the stressors and coping strategies of students might help clinicians in assisting students in Turkey and in different parts of the world that suffer from headscarf bans.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Semi-structured interviews provided data for this grounded therapy approach, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss. Through purposeful maximum variation sampling, the study looked at female students, who wore headscarves at high schools or universities and met the ban with diverse experiences. Through personal contact and snowball sampling, the study reached par-

ticipants, who reside in the Turkish cities of Istanbul and Bursa and Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where some of the students study to overcome the headscarf ban. The data saturation is reached with 18 participants. Table 1 presents the demographical and background information of participants. For confidentiality reasons, the study employs a numbering code to identify the students. Most of the participants began wearing a headscarf when they start to attend secondary school. It is apparent from Table 1 that the biggest motivator for adopting headscarves was the personal faith of the student. Two Cognitive Behavioral Therapists, other than the author of the study, who had clients carrying the emotional burden of the ban, contributed to the study as key informants.

Procedure

A pre-interview was conducted with one student to test the appropriateness and effectiveness and of the method. Based on the pre-interview, the questions reached their final form. Interviews ranged from thirty to one hundred minutes, all in Turkish language took place in subjects' homes. The interview protocol prepared in advance included three main categories, that is, a) When and how they began to wear a headscarf, b) When and how they met the headscarf ban, and c) Experiences during and after the headscarf ban. Participants were encouraged to make

additional comments. Audio recordings of the interview were made with a digital voice recorder. The researcher conducted, encrypted, translated and analyzed all the interviews. The Qualitative Data Analysis and Research Software Atlas.ti facilitated the grounded theory analysis. As outlined by Glaser and Straus, the analysis included three stages, namely, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The author's supervisor checked the accuracy of the codes. Data analysis started immediately after the first session, with a total of eighteen students being interviewed.

FINDINGS

The grounded theory inquiry yielded three main categories, that is, stressors that emerged in the lives of students, because of the headscarf ban, positive and negative effects of these stressors, and coping strategies of students with negative influences.

Stressors

Emotional, physical and social stressors accompany the students with a headscarf ban. As Table 2 shows, stressors emerge in the lives of participants at four consecutive periods. The first stage (anticipatory) occurs before the introduction of the headscarf ban. At this phase, students receive negative news and worry that

Table 1: Demographic information, experience with headscarf ban for study participants

Participants	Age	Motivation for HS	Began HS age	Encounter HSB city	Encounter HSB grade	Encounter HSB year
Student 1	48	Faith	15	Bursa	Uni. Senior	1980
Student 2	40	Faith	12	Trabzon	Uni. Freshman	1987
Student 3	33	Faith	12	Istanbul	Uni. Junior year	1998
Student 4	30	Faith	12	Bursa	Uni. Freshman	1998
Student 5	31	Family	12	Istanbul	H Senior	1998
Student 6	28	Faith	15	Bursa	H Sophomore	1998
Student 7	28	Family	12	Balikesir	H Sophomore	1998
Student 8	27	Faith	15	Istanbul	H Sophomore	1998
Student 9	26	Faith	12	Istanbul	H Freshman	2002
Student 10	26	Faith	12	Istanbul	H Sophomore	1998
Student 11	26	Faith	12	Istanbul	H Sophomore	2002
Student 12	25	Faith	12	Istanbul	H Freshman	2002
Student 13	25	Faith	12	Istanbul	H Freshman	2002
Student 14	25	Faith	12	Istanbul	H Freshman	2002
Student 15	25	Faith	12	Istanbul	H Sophomore	2002
Student 16	25	Faith	12	Iskenderun	H Freshman	1998
Student 17	25	Faith	12	Istanbul	H Sophomore	2002
Student 18	23	Faith	12	Bursa	H Freshman	2000

HS = headscarf, HSB = headscarf ban, H=high school

their institution might also ask them to remove their headscarves. Two students resist until their teachers ask them to leave the classroom. Due to their initial denial, they experience a high level of anxiety. This stage lasts longer for some of the students as institutions applied the ban in different periods. Although delay increases stress, they also gain readiness.

Table 2: Identified stressors that students exposed to headscarf ban faced

Stage	Stressors
Anticipatory Stage	Anticipation that headscarf ban might reach their institution
	Negative media coverage, rumours
Confusion Stage	Inconsistent application of the ban
	Demonstrations: Exposure to harsh weather, conflicts with security forces
Decision-making	High stake decision-making,
Action Stage	Pressure of family, society on decision-making
	Seeing beloved ones sad and disappointed
	Separation from friends
	Insults and humiliations of colleagues and instructors in schools
	Social isolation

"We were waiting with fear that it will also come to our city", said **Student 11** in **anticipation of** the **ban**.

"When the headscarf ban reached my University, I said it would not happen in my faculty. When it began in my faculty, I said it would not happen in my department. When it happened in my department, I said it would not happen in my class. When the professor threw me from the class, I said he would accept tomorrow", said **Student 1** in **anticipation** and **denial**.

The second stage (confusion) occurs when schools apply the ban inconsistently. In this phase, students receive lots of negative information from media and friends. It creates unpredictability and hinders sound decision-making. During this period, many students react by participating in demonstrations. Though they get social support during protests, they also get involved into conflict with security forces. At the end of this period, participants get a clearer picture of the headscarf ban and come closer to a decision. In retrospect, most of the participants feel regret for participating in demonstrations as it does not bring any solution and exposes them to danger. However, demonstrations also give a sense of belonging and hope.

"One day they would accept our entrance to the school, the other day not", said **Student 8** in response to the **inconsistent application of the ban**.

"I had a fear that they will also forbid the wig as they did in some Universities", said **Student 11** on the **inconsistent application of the ban**.

"We were only 16 years old and chased by the police. It was a nightmare.", said **Student 6** in response to **demonstrations** and **conflicts with security forces**.

In the third phase (decision-making), they choose their path, either to leave university or continue. They also consider possibilities of shaving their head or wearing a wig. The impact of families and society during this period impact the level of their stress. For those who continue school, stressors diminish through habituation, and mostly disappear after graduation. Those who leave school, overcome social isolation with time. However, secondary stressors, such as economic difficulties, persist for a longer period. It is seen that the problems faced in the action stage lead several students to reconsider their decision of leaving school. Especially financial difficulties, the pressure of the family and society play a significant role in turning back to school.

"I could not decide which path to take. I did not know, how to continue a life without a school or a headscarf", said **Student 9** about the **high stake decision-making.**

"My mother said that my father will divorce her, and she will throw herself from the building if I leave the school", said **Student 5** in response to the **family pressure on decision-making**.The first key informant acknowledges the enormous stress "of deciding between remaining covered or leaving school." She finds those who prefer to wear a headscarf "principled" and those who remove it "pragmatists and adaptive to the environment." The second key informant, however, believes "it is not for Allah that they do not uncover. A narcissist defense" hinders their "ego" from removing their headscarves. The contradictory viewpoints of the therapists may be reflecting the diverse discourses in the public. Those who support and reject the headscarf ban employ different pro and contra arguments.

"For so many years, not one person or two, three, five, ten, but hundreds of people came

and told me to go back to school with a wig", said **Student 6** about the **pressure of the society**.

Lastly, after making a decision at the fourth stage (action), students face stressors due to the consequences of their choice. Interviewees, who opt to leave school, encounter criticism from society and secondary stressors of economic difficulties and family conflicts. Students, who decide to continue school face stressors in wearing a wig, shaving their head or revealing their hair during their studies. In their lives, reactions of lecturers, friends and those in the campus play a vital role. Having a classmate with a similar background or more understanding lecturers ease their transition.

"I was wearing a wig over the headscarf, bonnet upon it, and hat at the top. It was normal that people made fun of me, I was looking like a monster", said **Student 15** about the **insults and humiliations of colleagues**.

"I saw my father weeping. It made me sadder", said **Student 6** on **seeing beloved ones sad and disappointed**.

"All my friends continued school. I was alone", said **Student 8** on **social isolation**.

The first key informant also observes feelings of betrayal in her clients from "their Islamic brotherhoods, organizations, political parties and nationalists." She believes this also contributed to their social isolation.

"Conservative owned companies used me. For the same job, I got a half salary. They knew I could not find a job with a headscarf and an interrupted formal education", said **Student 16** on **secondary stressor**s and **economic difficulty**.

Consequences of Stressors

Adverse Effects of Stressors

Adverse effects of stressors are psychosomatic consequences, negative self-image, loss of self-esteem, identity crises, feeling exhausted and the fear of security forces. The most prevalent adverse effects are psychosomatic problems that begin during that period. It can be seen from the data in Table 3 that out of eight students with psychosomatic problems, five of them go to a physician and receive a diagnosis of their condition. Two students with a diagnosis of anorexia nervosa might have tried to control their body image when the headscarf ban exerted power over their appearance. Likewise, the lack of concentration might also be due to concern with appearance while carrying a wig. It is important to recognize that several students feel a high level of distress, but do not receive psychological help. It is families, who worry about the children's condition and bring them to therapy.

Students also suffer from losing a part of their identity as a student or a woman, who wears a headscarf. Furthermore, those who pursue school, lead a double life. The first key informant acknowledges the hardship of removing the headscarf in school and wearing it outside of the school. None of the participants resolve this by not wearing their headscarf outside of the school. On the other hand, students who leave school also suffer from the loss of their student identity.

"Who was I? Was I a house girl? I was looking at house girls around me. They did not like the books I read, movies I watched. I also did not have the interests they had", said **Student 6** on **identity crises**.

"I attended multiple courses in parallel, but it was hard to introduce myself to new people. Without formal school, I was a paragraph without a title", said **Student 16** on **identity crises**.

"When my schoolmates saw me with a headscarf outside the school, they could not recognize me. I did not know what to say", said **Student 18** on her **identity crises**.

Furthermore, students report exhaustion and failure at school due to the emotional burden of the ban and the fear of security forces.

Table 3: Psychosomatic complaints reported by participant students

Participant	Psychosomatic complaints	Diagnostician	Diagnosis
Student 1	Headaches over 23 years	Neurologist	Depression
Student 2	Lack of concentration	-	-
Student 5	Breathing difficulty		
Student 8	Memory difficulties	Memory	Depression
Student 10	Memory difficulties	-	-
Student 11	Headaches	Neurologist	Depression
Student 16	Numbness	Psychiatrist	Anorexia Nervosa
Student 18	Loss of weight	General practitioner	Anorexia Nervosa

"The ban and studying abroad tired me a lot. It made me vulnerable to other problems", said **Student 7** in response to **exhaustion**.

"I thought my classmates even my roommates might be from intelligence police", said **Student 2** about her **fear of security forces**.

Some students lose their self-esteem and have a negative self-image for several reasons, including feeling guilty for removing their headscarf, looking ugly with a wig, not having a diploma, and for not being able to make an independent choice. Some become introverts and sit at the back of the classroom to take away attention from themselves with their hair/wig/shaven head. As both key informants point out, with wigs and shaven heads, having relationships can be quite challenging.

"I feel like a sheep that follows orders", said **Student 3** about her **negative self-image**.

Another factor that influences the consequences of stressors for participants is their conceptualization of the headscarf ban. These include the state oppression towards its citizens (n=12), oppression by men on women (n=2), and test/punishment of God (n=4). Participants, who believe that the wearing of a headscarf is the result of state or male oppression, tend to feel like a victim and suffer psychosomatically. Those who conceptualize it as a test of God, believe they have to make a choice between their faith and society. However, when they cannot welcome God's test with patience, they feel guilty. The key informants find them to be perfectionists, and they try to normalize sadness in their situation.

"I tell them, it is okay to be sad, to face ego", said the second key informant about a negative self-image.

Positive Effects of Stressors

Participants reported several positive consequences of stressors. These are maturation, learning new coping strategies, gaining new perspectives, showing more acceptance to other rejected groups in society and increased *self-esteem.*

"I gained more tolerance towards other marginalized groups like gays. Before the ban, I was against them", said **Student 8** on **acceptance and** tolerance.

"I came over this problem. What are these small issues now? Nothing", said **Student 14** on **increased self-esteem** and **learning new coping strategies**.

Coping with Adverse Effects of Stressors

Participants engage in problems, and emotional, religious and social coping strategies. Table 4 outlines the main coping styles and specific coping strategies of students. Problem-focused strategies at the confusion stage include changing the school or city and attending demonstrations, hoping to alter their situation. A change of school postpones but does not overcome the problem. Though most of the interviewees participate in demonstrations as a reaction, only four of them believe it might change the situation.

Table 4: Coping strategies of participants to reduce stress

Type of coping strategies	Specific coping strategies
Problem-focused Coping	Changing school/city/country
	Negative media coverage, rumours
	Demonstrations/legal applications
	Adopting wig/uncovering hair/ shaving head
	Leaving school: attending training/ work/marriage/study abroad
Emotion-focused Coping	Attention deployment
	Humour
	Desensitization
	Shifting locus of control
	Concentration on positive outcomes
Religious Coping Strategies Social Coping Strategies	Hope, praying, repenting, role models
	Support of friends /family

Commenting on the structural functionalists' anthropological point of view that people follow the rules of the society, Bailey commented that individuals do not abide the rules of the society strictly. Instead "they bend, twist and ignore these rules" to fit their situation (Barrett 2009: 102). In parallel with this view, the participants also sought to cope with the headscarf ban by using a wig or shaving the head instead of revealing the hair as the rules required. They also did not abandon the practice of a headscarf outside the school and adopt so-called modern lifestyle as the advocators of the headscarf ban hoped.

At the decision stage, they either leave school or continue by possibly wearing a wig or shaving their head. Some alter their resolution, but one strategy usually becomes dominant in their lives. None of the students, who make decisions independently, feel regret afterwards. Ten

participants, who initially leave school, either return to studies or go abroad, when they gain the opportunity. The shaving head strategy, adopted by two participants in anger, fails and both students give up this strategy very quickly.

"Shaving my head was like revenge. I was not how they wanted me to be. But I felt discomfort. My ear and neck were exposed. Also, this damn thing grows, it does not stay bald", said **Student 12** on **shaving a head**.

After making a decision of remaining in or leaving the school, students try to preserve their identities. If they continue school, wearing a wig preserves the students' identity in two ways. Firstly, others recognize them as girls, who cannot wear a headscarf. Secondly, as first key informant points, they try to externalize their wig. Participants wear their wig over their headscarves. Although their headscarves become invisible, they still feel its existence and identify with it. Likewise, participants, who leave the school, try to preserve their identity of a student by looking for other education and training possibilities like attending language courses. However, some students recognize these strategies as self-deception and avoid them.

"Wig is a self-cheating. That is why I simply uncovered", said **Student 18** on **uncovering**.

"I was feeling like a student in language and computer courses. I was carrying a bag, I had books, I was studying, and I had friends", said **Student 14** on **leaving school** and **attending training**.

Students, who come from conservative families, did not consider going abroad and leaving the family behind as an option, for both moral and financial reasons. With the introduction of the ban, students tend to welcome this possibility more readily than their families. They opt for Bosnia and Herzegovina for lack of visa requirements and financial ease. However, many of their friends went back to Turkey, as they could not cope with financial and logistic difficulties. Those who remain, preserve their identity of a student with a headscarf. Consequently, they experience an alleviation of their psychosomatic symptoms. Emotion-focused, religious and social coping strategies occur at all stages, with different functions. Four participants, who apply an attention deployment technique to concentrate on their studies, successfully finish their education with their wigs. Likewise, two students employ humor, by making fun of their look without a headscarf. Two students, who actively try to concentrate on the positive outcomes of the headscarf ban, like maturation, improve their wellbeing. Although some students suffer from negative comments from people for a long period, others desensitize with time. The second key informant offers another possible explanation. She believes that classmates also habituate seeing their friends with wigs at university and stop staring at them. Thus, they experience relief.

"After leaving the school, I had more time for my family, my private readings and I could pray more", said **Student 4**, **concentration on positive outcomes**.

"People were making fun of my wig, and I was also laughing", said **Student 12** with good **humor**.

All participants engage in religious coping strategies. Given the conservative background of the students, observing high prevalence of religious coping is not surprising. Spirituality gives participants hope that the headscarf ban can be lifted or life can offer them new possibilities after leaving school. Through engaging in religious rituals and praying, students with limited social support gain strength.

"I remember the lives of many prophets, who suffered in life and at the end they reached peace", said **Student 16** on **role models** and **hope**.

"I was wearing a wig. To compensate for my sin, I prayed more and repented", said **Student 9** on **repenting** and **praying**.

Students engage in various social coping strategies at different stages. During the anticipatory stage, they receive information from each other regarding the application of the ban at different institutions. During the confusion stage, demonstrations enable students to gather together and gain strength from each other. What students need most during the decision-making period is the respect of their parents. A few school leavers remain in contact to help each other in the action stage. Through these connections, they receive information about education possibilities abroad. Students, who continue school with a wig, feel shy talking about it with their family, but among friends, they can be more open.

"Although I had left the school my mother bought stationery items for me together with my siblings", said **Student 14** regarding **support of the family**.

"I heard about the education in Bosnia through my friends", said **Student 12** about **support of friends**.

Interestingly, apart from one student, none of the students engage in active career altering options, such as working or doing an apprenticeship. This can be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, the unpredictability of the ban in Turkish history creates anticipation for the lifting of the ban in the future. Secondly, they find it hard to give up their dreams and be content with blue-collar jobs. Thirdly, students find it hard to access well established vocational training institutions, due to distance or financial difficulties.

DISCUSSION

The current findings add to a growing body of literature on headscarf bans by revealing how they might influence the psychological wellbeing of a person in a school setting, the stressors it creates and the coping strategies students employ to reduce adverse effects. The results of this study provide insights into effective and ineffective coping strategies that students apply to cope with stressors created by the headscarf ban. For students who continue school, adopting a wig, employing attention deployment strategies to focus on lessons, combined with religious coping strategies of increasing good deeds and repentance are adaptive. Concerning school leavers, who appraise the ban as a test of God, hope for new opportunities from life through goal modifications, go abroad and see life with a half-finished formal education as a challenge, and these are all predictors of successful coping.

Predictors of ineffective coping for a student who remain at schools include shaving the head, avoidance, and interpretation of the ban as a test of God. For school leavers, the absence of goal modifications in the career, the passive expectation of God's aid, feeling bitter towards religion are maladaptive coping responses. Some of the stressors such as financial difficulties and unresolved conflict with family persist for a long time, whereas social isolation diminishes with time. Thus, rather than problem-solving strategies of leaving or remaining at the school, the perception of the ban and accompanying emotional, social and religious coping strategies are more reliable predictors of successful coping.

These findings are consistent with those of other investigations conducted on the headscarf ban in Turkey. Several works pointed out that putting on a wig is easier than taking off the headscarves (Gole 2003; Kejanlioglu and Tas 2009; Seggie 2010, 2011, 2015). Further, like participants in other studies, in this investigation the students experience social discomfort and isolation when they continue school by adopting certain coping strategies of shaving hair and putting on a wig (Akbulut 2015; Guveneli 2011; Kejanlioglu and Tas 2009; Seggie 2010, 2011, 2015). This study also confirms the high stake decision-making involved in headscarf bans and alternations in choices with time for better adaptation and due to alternations in legislations (Akbulut 2015; Akoglu 2015; Kejanlioglu and Tas 2009).

However, the findings of the current study are not in agreement with the previous inquiries that reveal sympathy of the students, who do not employ a headscarf towards the participants (Mabokela and Seggie 2008). It may be that the participants were not aware of the sympathy of the other students at schools due to their cognitive biases. Another possible explanation for this might be the silence of sympathizers in a tense situation in the society.

In reviewing the literature, no data was found on the conceptualization of the headscarf ban by students as a test or punishment of God, and the influence of this apprehension on mental health. Previous works emphasized freedom of rights and feminist arguments of male oppression, which is only adopted by two participants in this study (Akboga 2014; Akbulut 2015; Akoglu 2015; Çarkoglu and Toprak 2007; Cindoglu 2011; Kejanlioglu and Tas 2009; Seggie 2010, 2015). A possible explanation for this might be the difference between the public discourse that advocates lifting headscarf ban on human and women's rights perspectives and the private beliefs of the students. There are, however, other possible explanations. Early literature gave voice mainly to students who continued school and live in big cities. This research reveals that students who left the school and live in small cities tend to adopt religious arguments.

Previous research findings reported the financial, social, physiological and mental discomfort that a headscarf ban caused in the lives of women (Cindoglu 2011; Gurbuz 2009; Kejanlioglu and Tas 2009; Seggie 2010, 2011, 2015). These earlier studies represented women with headscarves as victims of the headscarf ban. This paper is unique in pointing towards coping strat-

egies and positive effects going through this challenging life event produced in the lives of students like maturation, increased self-esteem, and toleration. It seems possible that these results are due to specifically asking participants about their coping mechanisms. Gaining and realization of these positive outcomes might also come with time that was not available in earlier investigations.

This investigation produced findings, which support literature on stress and coping. Firstly, in line with Lazarus' (2006) theories on coping mechanisms, problem-focused coping occurs in the beginning. Students seek to alter their situation by changing institutions or attending demonstrations. When students realize that they cannot change the status, they try to lessen negative emotions with emotion-focused strategies of humor, attention deployment and so on. Secondly, in parallel to the conclusions of Pargament (1997), participants seek the preservation of identity in the presence of life stressors. Although a wig exposes students to insults, they help students in the preservation of their identity by serving as a symbol of their inability to wear headscarves. Likewise, to maintain their student identity, those who leave school apply to various language and computer courses. Pargament (1997) further emphasizes that when the conservation of the identity is not possible, religion aids people to adjust their goals and to build a new purpose in life. Some of the participants concentrate on the positive side of being able to allocate more time to religion after leaving school. Students, who remove their headscarves, try to gain God's contentment through preserving other religious observances, helping other students, and repenting every day.

CONCLUSION

To date, various sociopolitical studies have investigated the headscarf ban in Turkey. Given that the issue is highly political, the present qualitative grounded theory study sought to minimize any such suggested hypothesis at the onset. The findings of this study, given the increased occurrence of headscarf bans throughout the world, have significant implications for understanding the influence of a headscarf ban on mental health. Through identifying the effective problem, emotion, social and religious cop-

ing mechanisms, this study argued that individuals try to overcome stressors and preserve their identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research in this area could advance with more focus on significant outcomes, such as the identity crisis that emerges from leading a double life, namely adopting headscarf outside school setting and revealing hair inside the school, and influence of the ban on family dynamics.

While each country experiences headscarf bans in diverse contexts with different severities, headscarf bans remain in place in many parts of the world. Based on the conclusions drawn from the findings, to reduce the stress level of students, clinicians are recommended to explore different problem-solving strategies and coping mechanisms with their clients, explore identity issues, and mediate between students and their families to increase social support in their lives.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

However, this paper is limited in several ways. As a case study of Turkey, the findings might not be transferable to the Western world, where controversies over the wearing of headscarves present themselves in a minority context. Furthermore, some participants of the research experienced a headscarf ban twenty years ago, whereas some three years ago in a different historical context. Lastly, given the limited number of participants in the investigation, the results cannot be generalized.

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