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MUSLIM MINORITY WOMEN IN GREEK THRACE: FROM HOUSE-COCOONS TO E-LEARNING-BUTTERFLIES

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ABSTRACT

Information communication technologies (ICT) and the Internet influence many people have a global geographical coverage and are dynamic in terms of access to education, knowledge, information. They facilitate access to new processing technologies, new ways of learning, new ways of transferring knowledge, new ways of communication and understanding. This paper focuses on the efforts of Muslim minority women in Thrace, residing in the North-Eastern Greek province. There is much evidence of an increase in participation of female students in public and minority schools in Greece during the past years, their success in graduating from Greek universities and the adaptation of Muslim minority women to the information age. This paper is grounded in qualitative research that examined the views of Muslim women regarding their access to education and e-learning. It also presents data from interviews with Muslim minority women who have continued their studies through e-learning lessons in Turkish universities, in order to receive degrees for higher levels of education beyond primary school levels. Included also is a quantitative analysis of the factors that influence their

Use of new technologies, based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

Key words: Muslim minority women, e-learning, Greek Thrace

INTRODUCTION

This study will focus on the aspirations and experiences of use of ICTs and e-learning education of Muslim minority women residing in Thrace, a North-Eastern Greek province, bordering Bulgaria to the North, Turkey to the East, and with its southern shores on the North Aegean. Thrace consists of three prefectures: Xanthi, Rodopi and Evros with their main cities Xanthi, Komotini and Alexandroupolis respectively.

The Muslim minority exists in Greek Thrace since 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922 and the Lausanne Peace Treaty signed in 1923 which had as a result a population exchange among the Muslims (356.000) living by that time in Greece, and Christian populations from the area of Minor Asia and the area of Pontus in the Black Sea region (1.5 million surviving Anatolian Greeks or Pontic Greeks and Caucasus Greeks) with the

exception of the Muslim populations in Greek Thrace of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin and the Orthodox populations of Greek origin living mainly in Istanbul. According to Aarbakke (2000) the life of Muslim minority people was much influenced by the relations among the states of Greece and Turkey during the turbulent 20th century. Through the years of the past century people of the minority mostly resided in villages, a big part of them were uneducated and unacquainted with the Greek language. For the reader of this paper in order to figure better the situation of people's lives in this part of Greece, statistics from the General Secretariat of Adult Education at the end of 1990s can be indicative. According to these statistics, the highest rate of illiteracy among all regions of Greece by that time was observed in Thrace (15.13%). The rate of under-educated people in Thrace was 72%, 15 points above the national average of 57% .

Another challenging aspect affecting women's rights in Thrace is the negative stereotype that has been infused by the society and accumulated throughout the years of cultural misconception and false information in mainstream media. Unfortunately, this misconception positions women as oppressed, uneducated, and weak, confining their roles merely as housewives and caring mothers (Bullock & Jafri, 2000). Consequently, this deprived these women from joining the local labor market, as they mainly worked in the fields. In particular, Muslim minority families in Thrace were reluctant to send their daughters to school. This is due to their fear of having their daughters being discriminated in schools as being a minority group, having insufficient knowledge of the Greek language to represent themselves, or because of the male status quo that some people mistakenly believe in (Georgiadou 2017,

Kanakidou, 1994, Tressou, 1997; Askouni, 2002; Imam & Tsakiridi, 2004).

The year of 1990 was a milestone for the minority as the policy of the Greek state changed towards them due to continuing pressure from European organizations, particularly the Council of Europe. A law on intercultural education was voted in 1995 which gave privileged admission to higher education, to the high school graduate members of the minority, with additional posts of 0.5% of those admitted to Greek universities (the measure had a strong effect on speeding up social mobility as young Muslims could obtain tertiary education and live in other parts of Greece). A five-thousandth (5‰) rate was set for the exceptional recruitment of minority members to Pan-Hellenic competitions in the Greek public sector. Finally an educational program (1997-2013) funded by E.U. for children of the Muslim minority in Thrace was implemented by the University of Athens with multiple results (Georgiadou, 2017).

The Muslim population in Thrace is composed approximately of 100.000-120.000 people, half of them female with almost 25.000-30.000 of them adult women. Members of the minority are considered to be 60% of Turkish origin, 33.6% of Pomak origin and 16.4% of Roma origin. The main part of the population resides in the prefecture of Rodopi and Xanthi and a very small part in the prefecture of Evros, mainly of Roma origin (Mavrommatis, 2005). According to Eurostat for the year 2017, the unemployment rate in East Macedonia and Thrace, rose to 19.5%, while the European average is 7.6%, and is considered as one of the three highest rates of unemployment in the prefectures of Greece. The unemployment rate for the people under the age of 25 who live in the area of East Macedonia and Thrace is 43.6%.

The ICTs, especially the Internet which according to Turkle (1995) is the material expression of the philosophy of

postmodernism, are the gates to the information society as they hold great potential for economic, political and social empowerment of women, and promotion of gender equality (Hafkin & Huyer, 2006). Bhatnagar (2006) presents the ways ICTs can offer new options in education: e-learning, distance learning, learner-centeredness, peer to peer exchanges, etc. Oblinger & Hawkins (2005), Dublin (2003), as well as Holmes and Gardner (2006) agree that there isn't a commonly accepted definition of e-learning, but each definition reflects the viewpoints of the academics that each time write papers on that domain. As Arkorful & Abaidoo (2015) mention e-learning refers to the facilitation of learning through the utilization of digital technologies. Thus, the term can encompass distant, fully or hybrid online courses that are realized through the use of the Internet (Gotschall, 2000; Maltz et al, 2005) or learning through the use of information and communication technologies as a complement to traditional, online or hybrid learning (OECD, 2005). Despite the type of definition that each one accepts, the important element of e-learning is that it enhanced the interaction of students with their teachers and peers and it enabled the differentiation of learning, through which students can address their individualized needs (Tao et al, 2006; Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). This characteristic of e-learning is the one that corresponds to our study population, the Muslim minority of women in Greece.

E-learning enables those who have access to the equipment to obtain global culture and education by overcoming the separation between educators and learners. ICTs can function as portals for life-long learning, providing chances to obtain new skills and new possibilities of work. As individuals have more freedom and greater possibilities for self-realization, it paves the way for their empowerment. Nath (2001) believes that

distance education through internet and television broadcasts opens up avenues for women to continue with their education at their own pace and from the confines of their homes even after having discontinued it due to family or social responsibilities.

Taking in consideration all the above and the results of previous findings we tried to understand better the efforts of Muslim minority women for their social and economic integration. This study is grounded in previous outreach interventions involving the use of new technology in the education of Muslim minority women in Greece (Georgiadou, 2006, 2017). Our paper presents a follow up to that work, exploring the factors influencing the enrolment of women in Open Distance Education programs at the Anadolu University - Turkey. While collecting statistics on education of minority women we found an increasing interest from the side of Muslim minority women to enroll in different levels of education in Greece and Turkey and we were informed that a big number (more than 200) of these women had enrolled in Open Distance Education programs at the Anadolu University in Turkey, with the support of ICTs.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the factors influencing the enrolment of women in Open Distance Education programs at the Anadolu University in Turkey. The research sought to answer the following questions: What socio-economic factors, political factors, personal factors and cultural factors influence women's enrolment in Open Distance Education programs at the Anadolu University in Turkey; Given the complexity of the task and prevailing prejudices against these women, a variety of sources are used to understand their plight. The paper focuses on the lives of Muslim minority women in Thrace who participated in a range of online education programs as they want to seek paid work

outside of their home. It is written for these women but also for those men and women-policy makers, business leaders, civil society leaders, who are interested not only in the lives of these women but in general in the economic prosperity and societal stability of Thrace.

METHODOLOGY

This data that will be presented in this paper consists of three parts:

- I. Information on Muslim minority women's education;
- ii. Statistics from 137 questionnaires that describe the psychological factors that influenced these women to use ICTs;
- iii. Interviews from 28 Muslim minority women who explain different factors that influenced them to enroll in distance learning programs.

In the first part, information about minority women's participation in education in Thrace will be presented by using descriptive statistical information from a variety of sources. This information collection process was used to provide the reader with a more clear and defined image of the educational level of Muslim minority women nowadays in Greek Thrace and compare it to the past experiences described above. Thus, their aspirations and their intentions to continue their studies whatever age they are will be figured. In the second part, our study is grounded in previous outreach interventions involving the use of new technology in the education of Muslim minority women in Greece (Georgiadou, 2017). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which has been widely used in technology adoption studies, was employed to provide the theoretical foundation to study the behavior of Muslim minority women in Greek Thrace towards computer use. Our questionnaire items, comprising the constructs of Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of

Use, Computer Self-Efficacy, Subjective Norm and Behavioral Intention to use technology, were developed based on the existing, well-established questionnaire used at the Umrani's research (2003) with standardized tests on a 5-point Likert-type scale and data was collected from 137 Muslim minority women. TAM's constituents in this survey were as follows: Behavioral Intention to Use Technology: in terms of TAM, behavioral intention can be used to directly predict behavioral achievement or actual behavior- Perceived Usefulness refers to a person's belief that the use of the computer will result in the achievement of personally relevant goals- Perceived Ease of Use refers to a person's belief that using computers will be free of cognitive effort -Computer Self-Efficacy refers to the individual's subjective evaluation of efficacious ability in dealing with computers -Subjective Norm refers to an individual's estimation of how others feel about one's use of computers and motivation to comply with their feelings (Umrani and Ghadially, 2003).

In the third part, the views gathered from 28 interviews and conversations with Muslim minority women, and the socio-economic, political, personal, and cultural factors that influence Muslim minority women's enrolment in Open Distance Education programs at the Anadolu University in Turkey will be presented. Collecting information concerning the Muslim minority in Greek Thrace and especially minority women is not an easy task. This can be explained by the fact that the Greek bureaucracy in the public sphere sometimes instead of providing data to a researcher blocks him/her from expanding the research. Huyer and Mitter (2003) explain that most government statistics agencies do not provide a breakdown by gender; so globally comparable and consistent data are not yet available. Much like the digital divide, a statistical divide exists where the need is greatest; that is in developing nations (Huyer et al., 2005).

Muslim minority women in Thrace live in their own neighborhoods and are not usually connected to Christian population thus they are reluctant to speak about themselves to Christians. The use of a mediator - who was familiar to them and supported them to speak in the Turkish language-, was required. This made them feel comfortable as our meetings were held in their local association in Komotini.

The interview questions were a set of 22 questions used in a previous research of Magoma (2012) that was planned to investigate the factors influencing the enrolment of women in Distance Education programs at the University of Nairobi from Masaba North District. The questionnaire included 17 structured questions of multiple choices, yes/no answers, and five no structured questions. All questions were translated into Turkish. Snowball sampling method was used to gather the structured interviews from 28 Muslim minority women who all possessed the characteristic of having enrolled in the Anadolu University-Turkey at the Open Distance Education Program. The interviewees were approached by the mediator who happens to be the representative of this program in Thrace.

The semi-structured interview was chosen as this protocol ensured that the questions of the interviews would not provoke any inconvenience to the participants. Interviewees were assured of the use of pseudonyms for protecting their identity while presenting the selected exemplar views from the interviews. According to Holloway and Jefferson (2005) confidentiality can be one of the least problematic of the ethical issues. If information is treated and used in such a way as to be secure and to ensure the anonymity of participants, the ethical responsibility usually ends there.

DATA ANALYSIS

Education experience of Muslim minority women

According to Georgiadou (2017) at the end of the 1980s, a tendency towards urbanization was observed in the minority populations of Greece as many of its members moved from their residence in the mountains to urban areas. In the 1990s, as mentioned above, the rapid changes inside Greek society resulted in a policy change which favored minorities, and was based on equality before the law and state and the equality of rights. The changes in the policy for the minority made by the Greek state had their impact on the status of the minority. Ascouni (2006) in her book about minority education in Thrace claimed that in the past one out of five minority women had not received primary education and only 1.6% of the minority women had entered secondary education.

In the area of Thrace there are 129 primary minority schools (school that offers a wide-ranging curriculum in Turkish), 2 bilingual secondary schools located in Xanthi and Komotini and 2 religious schools (Madrese). Furthermore, for secondary education they can attend either the minority schools mentioned above or the monolingual Greek schools (Tsitsou, 2017).

At minority primary schools for the school year 2017-2018 there were 5061 students, 2464 of them were girls and 2597 of them were boys. At the two minority secondary schools (high school and lyceum) there were 1788 students, 910 of whom were girls and 878 boys and 268 students (girls and boys) at the two minority religious schools (data received from the Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Thrace).

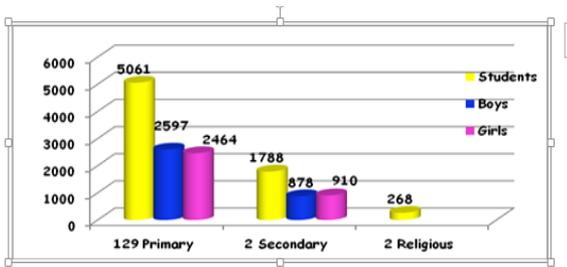


Figure 1-Students at minority schools in Thrace, (2017-2018)

As mentioned above in 1995, the Ministry of Education instituted a law, giving minority students the opportunity to enroll firstly in the secondary schools without the lottery system in place as in the past, and secondly in Greek

universities with a quota system (0.5% of the total number of students entering the Greek universities each year). Due to the quota system, in order to gain a place in tertiary education, Muslim students participated in pan-Hellenic exams as a separate group competing among themselves. After the establishment of the quota system, an increase each year has been observed in the number of Muslim minority pupils gaining a place in Greek universities. Not all of these students who gained places attended lessons in Greek universities as many of them enrolled in Turkish universities (Georgiadou, 2017).

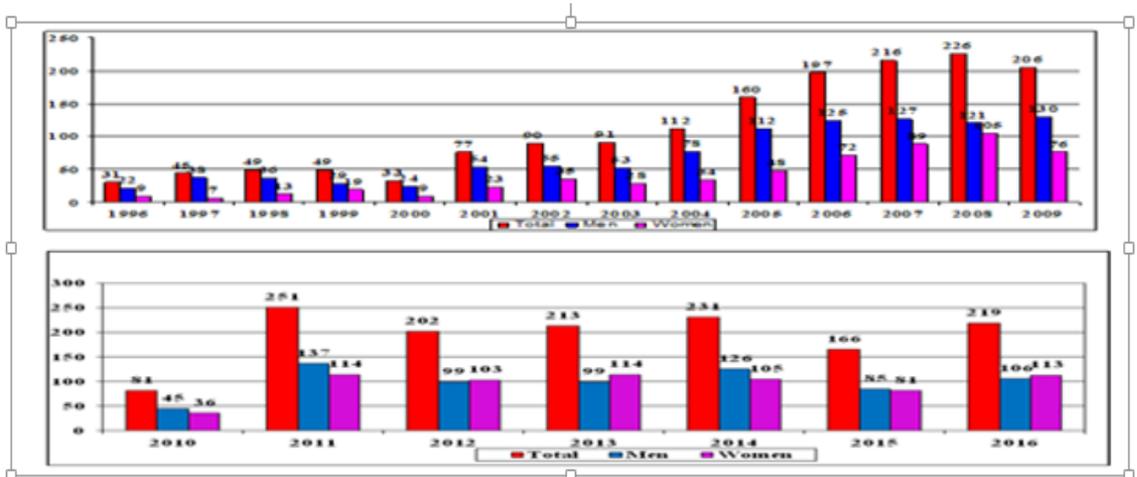


Figure 2-Results of quota (0.5%) system for Muslim minority (1996-2016) at Rodopi Prefecture

For the year 2017-2018 there is an estimation of 2.484 students, of Greek citizenship, in Turkish universities (data provided by the secretary of the Muslim Association in Komotini). This means that although Greek State provides to the students of the Muslim minority a place in a Greek university, with very low marks compared to the levels needed from the students who don't belong to the Muslim

minority, many of these students finally enroll to Turkish universities.

It should be noted that the continuing increase of the number of Muslim female students in public and minority schools during the past 25 years, their success in graduating from Greek universities and the adaptation of Muslim minority women to the information age by using ICTs, as confirmed by one of our previous studies (Georgiadou, 2006, 2017), suggest an

increasing trend towards the socio-professional integration of these women.

Technology Acceptance Model

For the TAM questionnaire, as we read in Georgiadou (2017), the internal consistency reliabilities were found higher than 0.7, thus considered satisfying, except from the TAM's constituent of Behavioral Intention, considered to be of medium standard, but for research purposes, an internal consistency reliability of 0.56 was acceptable.

A. The mean score on the Behavioral Intention scale was high: (mean= 8.57, possible range 5-10) implying that women strongly intended to use computers in the future. Women trainees appraised computers to be moderately easy to use (mean=26.07, possible range 14-35). The checklist assessing magnitude of perceived usefulness indicated that overall women appraised computers to be very useful (mean=77.63; possible range 45-100). The subjects perceived themselves to be highly Self Efficacious using the computers: (mean=16.46; possible range 4-20), where they revealed a positive view of their cognitive capacities in dealing with computers. They appraised the Subjective Norm to be quite important (mean=7.43; possible range 2-10), indicating a motivation to comply with the expectations of others significant to learn computers;

B. A Pearson's correlation analysis was computed in order to detect the relationships among the variables and to stress the differences or similarities among the Muslim minority women as shown below. During the statistical analysis of the data collected, a positive relationship was found between Perceived Ease of Use and a significant positive relationship between Perceived Usefulness to Behavioral Intention ($r=0.36$ and 0.50

respectively, $p<0.01$). In other words, when women think of computers as being easy to use and useful they adopt the use of this technology.

A significant positive relationship between Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness ($r=0.47$, $p<0.01$) was also examined. Subjective Norm was found to be significantly associated with Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness ($r=0.30$, $r=0.41$, $p<0.01$ respectively). On the other hand, Subjective Norm was not highly correlated with Behavioral Intention ($r=0.25$, $p<0.05$).

Computer Self-Efficacy was significantly related to a positive Behavioral Intention ($r=0.33$, $p<0.05$) and to Perceived Ease of Use ($r=0.33$, $p<0.01$). This indicated that the more efficacious the women perceive themselves to be, the stronger their intention is to use computers and think that are easy to use. Computer Self-Efficacy and Perceived Usefulness were not correlated in a high level ($r=0.23$, $p<0.01$).

Hence, a positive relationship between Computer Self-Efficacy and Behavioral Intention, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Subjective Norm towards using computers was partially accepted. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients calculated show that most variables are strongly interconnected.

C. Reliability results and correlation results provided a favorable condition to test the Technical Acceptance Model with regression analyses. Thus, in order to detect the causal linkages between the psychological variables and Behavioral Intention to use computers, a regression analysis was conducted.

Perceived Usefulness and Computer Self-Efficacy had a direct effect on Behavioral Intention and emerged significant ($\beta=0.39$, and $\beta=0.20$ respectively, $p<0.05$). Perceived Ease of Use and Subjective Norm had no direct

effect on Behavioral Intention ($\beta = 0.10$, and $\beta = 0.04$, respectively).

All the variables taken together explained a 28 percent variance in Behavioral intention, the indicator of technology acceptance (Figure 3).

Significant causal linkages were found for two sets of variables:

a) Computer Self-Efficacy was a significant determinant of Perceived Ease

of Use ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$), implying that when a woman sees herself as competent, she views computers easy to handle;

b) Subjective Norm was a significant determinant of Perceived Usefulness ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$), that is, when women feel that important people in their lives expect them to learn computers, they assess the technology in question as useful.

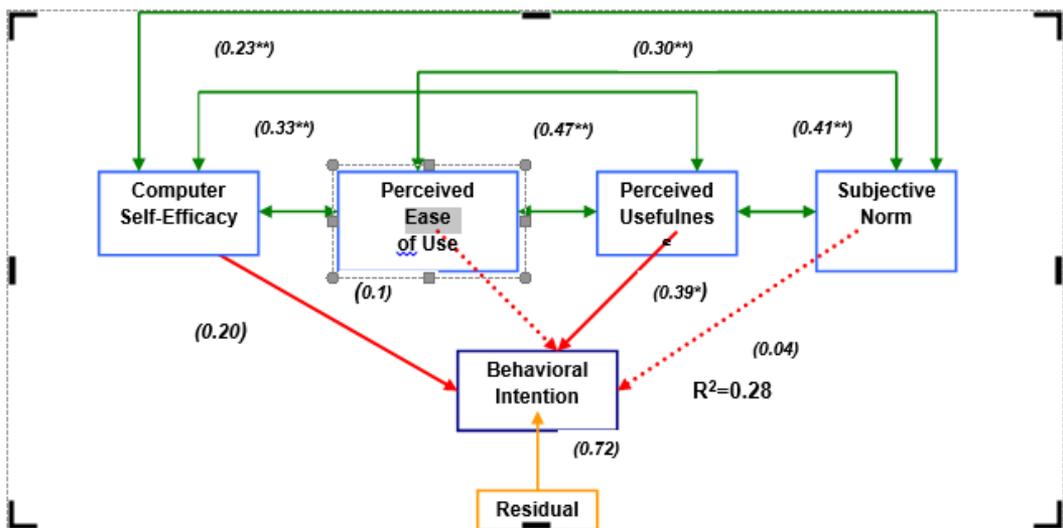


Figure 3-Path Diagram of the Effects of Psychological Predictors on BI

Notes: $**p < 0.01$; $*p < 0.05$ numbers in parenthesis represent correlation coefficients between the variables.

Experiences and aspirations: the voices of Muslim minority women

These days more than 200 Muslim minority women study at the “Anadolu” Open University of Turkey and attend lessons of secondary or tertiary education as distance learner students. Their studies’ duration for their foundation degree is two years and for their bachelor degree is four years. The exams of each semester take place at the Turkish town of Kessan, 30 kilometers east from the Greek-Turkish border. Minority women show also a preference to “Trakya University” for their

master studies. The university is in the city of Edirne which is also very near to the border with Greece.

In the year 2015, 98 people from Komotini enrolled to Anadolu Open University. Fifty of them were women who chose to study at the departments of sociology, Turkish literature, theology, business administration, public relations, commerce, philosophy, economy, agriculture (this information was received from the representative of the University in Komotini). The distance education programs are: 1) “e-sertifika-e-

certificate”, 2) “Açıköğretim Fakültesi Önlisans Programları-Foundation degree”, 3) “Açıköğretim Fakültesi Lisans Programları -Bachelor degree” and 4) Masters at Anadolu Open University in the School of Distance Education. The cost for the foundation degree is 35 € per semester and for the bachelor degree 40 € per semester. For the master studies, with duration of 3 semesters, the cost is 550 €. The duration for the 100 e-certificate programs offered is 6 months and the cost is 40 €.

The target population (more than 200 women) for this study is comprised of adult women students, who have enrolled and those who have gone through distance education programs. From the 28 women interviewed, we found that 19 were married, eight were single and one was a widow. Twenty did not have anyone to take care of and only seven of them had children although 15 of them were married and over the age of thirty. Seventeen had graduated from lyceum, two of evening lyceum, one of high school, one of evening high school, and six had a bachelor degree. Twenty-three catered for their own program tuition and only five were sponsored by their family. Eleven of them had dropped off school more than ten years before they joined the Distance Education programs. The years of leaving school, ranged from 2-30 years and the ages of interviewees ranged from 25-48 years old with a mean of 36 years old. Ten of them were jobless, nine were self-employed mainly in the fields, five were employees and four gave no answer. Twenty said they had no other income and some said they found an income from their work in their family’s fields. They claimed that they stopped going to school due to their early marriage, due to financial problems their family had to face, and to social reasons but 12 of them gave no answer.

When they were asked to explain the social factors that influenced them to

attend such a program the main reason was their aim and dream to gain their economic independence, secondly their zeal to face gender equality inside their marriages and thirdly five said that they were influenced by their husbands. Ayse said something that was heard from most of the women: “I want to improve myself”.

Another woman, Birsen, explained that being a student in a classroom “helps to social adaptation, improves the interaction of the culture of people who meet together. On the other hand e-learning can contribute to the improvement of someone’s self-esteem and personal growth as it brings together people of different places, with different personalities in an impersonal way and you have to find ways for communication.”

The political factors they quoted 14 of them were discrimination between genders, three of them gender policy that Greek state follows and 11 gave no answer. Muslim minority women said they did not want to feel inferior to their male relatives.

The personal factors of the respondents were mainly their desire to join the academic community, to obtain knowledge and have the chance to change their lives.

The cultural factors that influenced them to choose a distance learning academic program were their cultural traditions (11 women), the religion for three of them as they attended a program to become teachers of the Koran and 14 of them claimed some other reasons like Zeynep who said: “I want to become an example to my children”.

All of the women felt of being ready to attend such a program describing probably their desire to become educated as many of them explained at the end of their interviews some of the problems they faced. Twenty-three said they had a target when they decided to join the distance learning program and as they explained

during the interviews their main target for them was to be able to find a job. They even had the intention that they would manage to achieve their targets, as they felt due to this experience, self- confident, courageous, and optimistic.

Zuleiha commented: “Here in Thrace for the women of the minority there are many limits. I want to be surrounded by educated people and so we have to try to become educated. I want to finish my studies by getting not only a bachelor’s degree but also a master’s degree”. Hulya added that “I want to gain my life on my own and have a job that I really love to do it”. Emine commented that “I want to share my knowledge on the Koran with other people” as she is enrolled in the program of Religious Studies.

They mostly felt that the University helped them through the e-campus platform as there is e-guidance and counseling from faculty members of Anadolu University, via webinars, one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon on weekdays. The faculty members use their expertise to offer academic counseling to students via webinars.

The main reasons they choose this program was that they think it is convenient, it is flexible, it is low cost, it has an easy way to enroll, it has a convenient time-structure for someone charged with family responsibilities. Zuleiha made a comment when answering this question: “This program helps me feel better psychologically as my marital status and the fact of being a mother of twins and jobless make me feel unsafe and tired”. One of the women, Sandrie, plans to get her bachelor degree with the aim to enroll for a master’s degree: “The next target after I finish the “lisans program” is to apply for a master.”

The only problem they mentioned several times is the system for the exams they give every semester. During the exams if someone makes four mistakes

one point is added to the score of mistakes and at the end they counts as five mistakes. This gives them a lot of stress for their final results. They also said that they want to get their books as earlier as possible in a printed way and not only as pdf archives. Early morning lessons were mentioned as a problem for women who had kids. They also expressed the desire for a more approachable exam center in the city of Komotini.

Feriste commented: “During my two years studies I did not have any obstacles in my personal and professional life. I would do it again as it is very convenient for an adult”.

It can be said that the ideas and thoughts selected from all the interviews are the ones that represent most emphatically the interviewees’ overarching willingness to become more educated, more qualified, to find a job and to improve their personalities.

DISCUSSION

Breaking down the stereotype

When giving an opportunity, Muslim women were able to challenge the negative stereotypes in the society and reveal a side of themselves that was previously kept under wraps, a side of dedicated strong women that can be superior beyond the confined role of being housewives. This can be seen in both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. In specific, our quantitative data have shown a rapid increase of the number of Muslim female students’ enrollments in primary and secondary schools as well as in higher education settings throughout the years. Although, this is in part because of the new government law has enacted recently, it also reflects a determination of Muslim minority women to break down the stereotype of women in the society and educated and active participants. In fact, these results are consistent with

Georgiadou (2006, 2017) previous works on Muslim women minority in Greece and their education experiences. Along the lines of increasing their existence in education, Muslim women minority in Thrace, hoped to further their achievements by being active participants in the society in the work place as seen in the qualitative data analysis.

Technology as a catalyst for a change

For Muslim women minority, technology was not just a tool, but a catalyst for a change aiming for social justice and gender equality in Thrace, Greece. As seen in the data analysis, these women have seen in technology the promises to reach their dreams and make a change culturally, nationally and socially. Muslim women were happy with their achievement and utilizing the technology tools to learn, advance, participate, share knowledge and come together to define and combat the social, economic and political injustices of the society. This study is consisting with Eubanks' work on women and digital citizenship. Eubanks (2012) found that the appropriate use of technology has empowered poor and working-class women in the United States to fight for human rights and social justice. More studies are needed to further investigate the experiences of minority women and their use of technology in other parts of the world as they work to challenge gender inequality and inaccurate stereotypes to prove themselves and show their success.

CONCLUSION

Muslim women are undoubtedly consumers of technology as much as they are contributors to the body of knowledge and academia. This research has merely shown that even though these Muslim women are challenged by cultural typecasting, gender constraints, and

technological availability, not only still managed, in one way or another, to reach tertiary education, but have the will and determination to pursue further studies and enrich their knowledge and skills. The qualitative results are testimony that emarginated persons that are cast-off by society are eager to further engage into educational activities and that the e-learning medium has made it possible and attainable. The circumstances of these Muslim women go to prove once more the effectiveness of technologies to assist the learning process despite the difficulties and restrictions they encountered. The appeal and affordances of e-learning have once more proved to be instrumental in providing an ideal vehicle for an educational process that delivered more than schooling but also an alternative outlet to a challenging way of living.

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