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LIVING ALONE: PATHWAYS, EXPERIENCES AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

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LIVING ALONE: PATHWAYS, EXPERIENCES AND FUTURE  
EXPECTATIONS

A Ph.D. Dissertation

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EXPECTATIONS**

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## ABSTRACT

# LIVING ALONE: PATHWAYS, EXPERIENCES AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

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As the number of solo-living individuals continues to rise globally, living alone has become an increasingly prominent social phenomenon, attracting significant attention, particularly in academic circles, and emerging as a subject of inquiry in various studies. However, existing literature often conceptualizes living alone as a status, focusing predominantly on its associations with vulnerabilities and stigmatizations. This tendency risks overlooking its multilayered and multidimensional nature. To address this gap, this study explores the pathways that lead individuals to live alone, their experiences of living alone, and their future expectations regarding their living arrangements. The aim is to highlight the multidimensionality and dynamism of the concept. This analysis complements and modifies existing discussions in the literature by introducing categories derived from the study's data. The data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with thirty-six respondents living in Turkey and Sweden, including twenty respondents living in Turkey, seven from Sweden, and nine from Turkey residing in Sweden. The primary contribution of this thesis lies in revealing the multidimensional associations between these pathways, experiences, and future

expectations. It also emphasizes the various factors and resources influencing these aspects while presenting diverse scenarios of living alone.

Keywords: Living Alone, Pathways, Experiences, Future Expectations



## ÖZET

# YALNIZ YAŞAMAK: YOLLAR, DENEYİMLER VE GELECEK BEKLENTİLERİ

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Tek başına yaşayan bireylerin sayısı dünya genelinde artmaya devam ederken, tek başına yaşamak giderek daha belirgin bir sosyal olgu haline gelmiş, özellikle akademik çevrelerde önemli ilgi görmüş ve çeşitli çalışmalarda araştırma konusu olarak ele alınmıştır. Ancak, mevcut literatür genellikle tek başına yaşamayı bir statü olarak kavramsallaştırmakta ve ağırlıklı olarak savunmasızlıklar ve damgalanmalarla olan ilişkilerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu eğilim, kavramın çok katmanlı ve çok boyutlu doğasını göz ardı etme riski taşımaktadır. Bu boşluğu gidermek için, bu çalışma bireyleri tek başına yaşamaya yönlendiren yolları, tek başına yaşama deneyimlerini ve yaşam düzenlemeleriyle ilgili gelecekteki beklentilerini araştırmaktadır. Amaç, kavramın çok boyutluluğunu ve dinamizmini vurgulamaktır. Bu analiz, çalışmanın verilerinden türetilen kategorileri tanıtarak literatürdeki mevcut tartışmaları tamamlamakta ve değiştirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın verileri, Türkiye ve İsveç'te yaşayan yirmi katılımcı, İsveç'ten yedi katılımcı ve İsveç'te ikamet eden Türkiye'den dokuz katılımcı olmak üzere otuz altı katılımcıyla yapılan derinlemesine görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bu tezin birincil katkısı, bu yollar, deneyimler ve gelecek beklentileri arasındaki çok boyutlu ilişkileri ortaya koymaktır. Ayrıca, çalışma tek başına yaşamının çeşitli senaryolarını sunarken bu yönleri etkileyen çeşitli faktörleri ve kaynakları vurgular.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yalnız Yaşamak, Yollar, Deneyimler, Gelecek Beklentileri



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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

With a continuous increase in the number of solo-living people, living alone has become a widespread phenomenon all around the world. This global increase draws much attention and makes the concept an important subject of study for different disciplines. Determining how to approach the issue, however, can be a challenging task since, as a concept, living alone can accommodate more than one specific meaning, while having associations with many different sociological phenomena.

Accordingly, although living alone as an object of inquiry is discussed and examined from various angles, there is still need for further research. In the existing literature, there is an increasing tendency to associate living alone with various vulnerabilities, including physical, mental, and social vulnerabilities that can damage one's health and well-being (Karakayali & Azizoglu, 2025). Since the main focus in such studies is the association between living alone and vulnerabilities (particularly loneliness), living alone is characterized as a problem and a biopolitical concern. The recent discussions on what is sometimes called the “loneliness epidemic” (Murthy, 2017) reflect this biopolitical concern.

When we look closely to these discussions, we can see how loneliness is conceptualized as a health hazard and, thereby, viewed as a biopolitical problem. The perception of health as a part of human capital is argued to be the reflection of neoliberal governmentality (Kenny, 2015).

In this regard, Jentoft, Sandset and Haldar (2024) discuss the “loneliness epidemic” by focusing on the economic aspect of the treatment of loneliness as a public health issue. Loneliness is portrayed as soaking up the vitality of the population and even increasing morbidity and mortality rates, which causes the affected people to burden the healthcare system as well as the business life and welfare provisions (Jentoft et al., 2024: 7).

The authors also note that there is a tendency to solve the problem by constructing specific “risk groups” that are assumed to be in need of governmental intervention (Jentoft et al., 2024). In this context, the solo-dwellers, particularly solo-living elderly, can be categorized as a risk group. The aging population mainly becomes a concern in terms of increasing health care costs (Gist, 2011), which may not be shouldered by the younger working generation, who themselves become dysfunctional mentally and physically due to the “loneliness epidemic.” Therefore, the aim is to make the younger working generations more economically productive by preventing the spread of this epidemic while finding cost-effective solutions against a dramatic increase in healthcare spending with a rapidly aging population.

On the one hand, in order to prevent the spread of the “loneliness epidemic,” “social prescribing” is offered as a remedy, urging target groups to participate in social activities like volunteering, gardening, group learning, sports, etc. (Jentoft et al., 2024: 8). This social prescribing assumes that the solution of the problem requires an individual initiative. This is argued to be in line with neoliberal governmentality, which identifies loneliness as a biopolitical problem while defining the solution as an individual responsibility based on self-care (Lemke, 2001: 203). This remedy proposed for the problem is a cost-effective one that does not burden the health care system. On the other hand, as a remedy for the aging population, “aging in place” policies with non-institutional care services are increasingly adopted by the authorities due to having lower costs than institutional ones (Chappell, Dlitt, Hollander, Miller & McWilliam, 2004; Grabowski, 2006). In other words, there is a two-tier approach that targets cultivating human capital while being able to do that as cost-effectively as possible.

As indicated, there is specifically an ageist tendency in these discussions, which identifies solo-living older adults as the main risk group who are more likely to lack social and economic resources. It is argued that their age-related disadvantage of being more fragile against any challenge that may harm their health made them already vulnerable and increased their vulnerability in combination with living alone (Kojima, Taniguchi, Kitamura & Fujiwara, 2020; Yeh & Lo, 2004). For instance, Portacolone (2015: 287) noted that solo-living elderly has a “unique condition” as “they simultaneously face the challenges of aging as well as … living alone”. It is pointed out that even if the number of solo-living young and middle-aged adults is increasing, with the effect of aging societies all around the world, the biggest share still belongs to the solo-dwelling elderly among one-person households, while the most common pathway to living alone is widowhood (Stone, Evandrou & Falkingham, 2013).

Since older adults have a longer duration of life, they experience more changes in their life course, including changes in their physical and social environment, changes in their physical appearance and their physical and mental health, and changes in their personal and social life like being retired and losing loved ones. In this regard, there are concerns that for older adults, social isolation with the shrinking social network size (Thompson & Heller, 1990; Victor, Scambler, Bond & Bowling, 2000) and, accordingly, loneliness (de Jong Gierveld, Dykstra & Schenk, 2012; Newall, Chipperfield & Bailis, 2013; Victor & Yang 2012) can become the key problems they encountered in their daily lives, which are considered risk factors for their health and well-being. Indeed, these concerns are not unfounded in that they enable the revelation and determination of certain challenging situations faced by solo-living elderly and even the elderly in general.

On the other hand, there is an overemphasis on the case of solo-living elderly in terms of health and well-being, which overshadows the case of solo-dwellers in different life stages from different age groups. In fact, there are also certain studies that put forward this more or less distorted perspective adopted in general. For instance, in her study, Dykstra (2009) challenged certain conceptions related to

loneliness in old age and found that being lonely is widespread among the very old age groups rather than among older adults in general. In addition, there are various studies revealing that living alone is associated with negative health outcomes for middle-aged adults but not for older adults (Davis, Neuhaus, Moritz & Segal, 1992; Henning-Smith & Gonzales, 2020; Li, Yan & Liu, 2024; Udell et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2022).

In effect, the reason for such focus on solo-living elderly is summarized by Dykstra (2009: 96) as follows: “Concerns about the costs of an ageing population, and concerns about how older adults can continue to be self-reliant so as not to be dependent on services have immediate policy relevance.” Normally, there is actually a dichotomous situation between the promotion of ‘aging in place’ understanding with the policies valuing primarily independence and the ability to maintain a living in a house identified as a ‘home’ in old age, and all those vulnerabilities solo-living elderly can face with exhibited in the relevant literature, especially due to their age-related deteriorating health along with other social vulnerabilities like having a low socio-economic status and/or lack of social support (Barry et al., 2018; Golant, 2008; Weicht, 2013). There is also an efficiency aspect behind the promotion of such ‘aging in place’ policies since these non-institutional care services provided by the public authorities have a lower cost compared to institutional ones, as mentioned above (Grabowski 2006). Therefore, rather than encouraging the elderly to prefer care centers or nursing homes, the employed policy preference is to find a solution that can minimize these vulnerabilities while preserving the existing circumstances of the elderly. Thus, it is not surprising that studies focusing on this group specifically are more common.

The above-mentioned discussions mainly reflect the positioning of living alone in the official understanding, including how it is studied and elaborated in the academic work and how public authorities conceptualize and deal with the issue. In this respect, there is a problematization of living alone by associating it with different vulnerabilities. On the other hand, there is also another aspect of the issue that comes to the forefront both in academic studies and in popular discussions, which is the

association between living alone and one's relationship status. In the most common sense, solo-living people tend to be characterized as singletons, which refers to their relationship status as being single or not being in a serious romantic relationship since they do not cohabit with their romantic partners.

In this context, being a singleton has different connotations for the perspectives approaching the issue from distinctive and/or opposing angles. On the one hand, the increase in the number of people living alone is seen as a sign of hyper-individualization, which dominates all aspects of society. This shift challenges traditional family structures, primarily those formed through marriage, and paves the way for alternative forms of family and intimacy while it also enables individuals to prioritize themselves (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Accordingly, this can lead to the impoverishment in the spirit of community membership and feelings of solidarity and belonging (Putnam, 2000; Slater, 1970). On the other hand, this rise leads to the questioning of the traditional ways of living in a nuclear family setting, while challenging the idealization of this family type as the source of a happy and meaningful life.

It can be highlighted that this questioning mainly followed certain discussions about the transformation of the relationships of intimacy. These include decentering of couple relationships as the main source of intimacy (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004), sexual revolution arguments in which sexuality is liberated from the aim of reproduction while the idea of romantic love prevails in the formulation of intimacy (Giddens, 1992), and the domination of logic of autonomy and self-development in the characterization of the family which has become a post-moralistic institution that is no more constructed over the moral ideals of getting married, being together as long as possible, having children and raising them together (Bawin-Legros, 2001). Nevertheless, this pluralization in the characterization of the family and the relationships of intimacy does not mean that all the alternatives to the traditional family can escape from stigmatization.

The attitudes towards singletons who do not have a co-residential romantic partner can be considered a good example of this stigmatization. Of course, most of these singletons also live alone. Accordingly, while cohabitation has become a much more

important determinant in the definition of a serious romantic relationship with the decreasing numbers of marriages (Hughes, 2015), those solo-living singletons' living arrangements are equated with their relationship status. For instance, an article written with the title of "Single shaming": Why people jump to judge the unpartnered" on the BBC website highlights this "single-shaming" (Klein, 2022). In this respect, it is stated that consoling singletons that they will eventually find a romantic partner is associated with the negative stereotyping of being single in society while idealizing couple relationships (Klein, 2022).

On the other hand, in an article published on the Guardian website, a reader who identified herself as being "chronically single" as a 40-year-old woman consulted the columnist who gives advice related to relationships (Frostrup, 2018). She said that in the past, she had short-term relationships with her ex-partners who could not meet her expectations, and she asked whether she should accept any partner for the sake of being in a relationship. Following that, the columnist advised she could meet the love of her life at any time, rather than jumping into a relationship that would make her miserable, and that she should wait for the right person. But of course, rather than advising to make peace with her singleness, she recommends the reader to keep hoping to find the one since she is an involuntary celibate. In this respect, being single is only featured with a negative experience while accepting this negative stereotypical image of singleness.

In contrast, the opposing camp that criticizes this negative stereotyping of singleness puts forward their personal positive experiences of being single and they embrace their singleness as a positive feature of their self-identity (Haupt, 2023). In their books, social psychologist Bella DePaulo (2004, 2015) and sociologist Elyakim Kislev (2019), who define themselves as long-term singles and appreciate their relationship status, challenge this stigmatized image of single people as being unhappy due to their relationship status and hoping and seeking to find a partner. On the contrary, they try to show that being single can be a voluntary choice; that is, one does not look for a partner and does not base his or her happiness on having a romantic relationship. There is a relevant literature, which demonstrates that singlehood is not always associated with weaker social ties and/or social isolation

(Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016), unhappiness (DePaulo, 2023), and having relatively lower life satisfaction (Kislev, 2021).

What we can derive from these discussions related to the subject of this study is that living alone and solo-dwellers as uncoupled single people are becoming more visible in society, and consequently, their way of living is also becoming an object of inquiry. This visibility can be very much traceable in people's everyday lives, especially in consumption practices, and, accordingly, can affect and shape the attitudes of service providers to some extent. To illustrate, there are now various holiday and accommodation options specifically designed for solo travelers who prefer to take their vacations, including staying at a hotel, joining culture and sightseeing tours, visiting a foreign country, etc., by themselves without being accompanied by a partner.

Moreover, as a routine activity, singletons prefer to dine alone more and more. There is a related article on the CNN website about the issue that even if having dinner outside alone used to be stigmatized, many more people now make dinner reservations only for themselves (Meyersohn, 2024). In the article, it is marked that while the increasing number of solo-living people has an impact on consumption behavior, according to some experts on the issue, the spread of restaurants catering to solo workday lunches and dinners also enabled those singletons to take the step to sit in a table or bar in order to have their dinner alone (Meyersohn, 2024). As a formerly stigmatized practice, now dining alone does not make singletons feel uncomfortable; on the contrary, it makes them feel like by eating alone, they are actually having "me time" or "much-needed alone time" (Meyersohn, 2024). Besides, in other related articles focusing on food news and dining culture, it is underlined that one should realize how eating alone can be a self-enjoyment and therapeutic activity rather than limiting solo dining to fast-causal lunches during the workday (Arnold, 2024; Swiers, 2023). In this sense, a solo diner can enjoy oneself and the environment while being much more conscious about what is happening around oneself.

It can be argued that in many of these discussions held in official settings, academia, and also in popular culture, living alone is characterized as a unidimensional concept lacking nuances. Furthermore, it is mostly investigated in relation to its association

with either vulnerabilities or relationship status. Nevertheless, as social phenomenon, living alone deserves a deeper and broader understanding. This study, by concentrating on how solo-dwellers make sense of their pathways, experiences, and practices of living alone as well as what they are expecting and planning to do in the future related to their living arrangements, aims to draw attention to the multi-dimensionality of living alone.

Accordingly, this thesis aims to present a framework for understanding the three aspects of the issue, namely pathways leading to living alone, experience of living alone, and future expectations of solo-living people about their living arrangements. The thesis consists of the following chapters: "*Chapter II: Pathways Leading to Living Alone; Chapter III: Experience of Living Alone; Chapter IV: Future Expectations; and, Conclusion.*"

In the second chapter, the pathways leading people to live alone and the categories derived from the data related to these pathways are introduced while factors affecting these pathways are analyzed. The chapter begins with discussions related to the pathways in the existing literature, which mostly focus on the demographic variables of the solo-dwellers while investigating the pathways. In the following sections, I introduced two main pathway categories and two subcategories under each of these main categories based on how the solo-dwellers sense and characterize these pathways. These two main pathway categories are “those who think they have a choice when making the decision to live alone” and “those who think they have no other option available when making the decision to live alone,” while for the former, “starting to live alone as a voluntary decision” and “starting to live alone as a preference” are the subcategories, for the latter “starting to live alone as a consequence of life-changing events” and “starting to live alone as an involuntary decision” are the subcategories. In addition, the factors, including cultural and economic aspects, are also analyzed in terms of how they affect the pathways.

In the third chapter, how solo-dwellers experience living alone is put forward. In this chapter, the two main categories of experience, vulnerability and independence, which are derived from the existing literature and the data, are analyzed, and related subcategories, as well as the factors affecting these categories, are discussed. In the

existing studies, there is a common tendency to focus on only one experience category while investigating the issue. However, I tried to analyze both of the experience categories in detail and reveal their multidimensionality, which can be missed out in the related studies, by displaying subcategories within these two main categories and the factors affecting them. In terms of vulnerability, it is possible to talk about physical and mental vulnerabilities based on our data, which will be elaborated under the vulnerability section. In terms of independence, I formulated and discussed five main subcategories, including “taking a step into adulthood,” “liberation from traditional gender roles,” “enjoying spatiotemporal control,” “resting and relaxing” and “enjoying solitude.”

In the fourth chapter, the future expectations of the solo-dwellers are discussed. Firstly, I describe the “factors affecting possible future scenarios of the solo-dwellers regarding their living arrangements” which are “housing opportunities,” “career-related plans,” “health conditions” and “finding a suitable romantic partner to cohabit or to marry”. Then, the chapter breaks the future expectations of solo-dwellers into several types. These include “living alone,” “cohabiting with a romantic partner and/or spouse,” “cohabiting with a friend”, “cohabiting with a housemate,” “living in an assisted living facility,” “living in a communal housing.” In this part, also a section related to “the futures of living alone” is added, which addresses the broader question of whether solo-dwellers expect or plan to embrace this living arrangement as a permanent lifestyle or whether they see it as a temporary phase.

In the conclusion part, a brief summary of findings from each chapter related to the associations among the pathways, experiences, and future expectations is put forth. After this summary, various scenarios derived from the findings of the study for living alone in the long-term and short-term are introduced. Finally, the limitations of the study and the prospects for future research are addressed. Before starting the chapters, however, I will first introduce the methodological assumptions of the study.

## 1.1 Research Methodology

In this study, I adopted an inductive qualitative research approach inspired by grounded theory method yet do not strictly follow the data analysis techniques identified by grounded theory. In this respect, the grounded theory methodology<sup>1</sup>, which aims to formulate a theory grounded in the data and prescribes starting with research and then coming up with a theory and hypotheses rather than vice versa (Bryant, 2020), became a point of reference in the research. Since the main aim is to understand and reveal how solo-living people start to live alone, how they experience living alone, and what their future expectations are related to their living arrangement (three main areas of inquiry: pathways, experiences, and future expectations), adopting an inductive qualitative approach is considered to be appropriate for the objectives of the study. Rather than starting with a hypothesis and trying to test this hypothesis with the collected data, it is intended to gain theoretical insights during the collection and analysis of the data. Therefore, it will be the data that show the way for the possible theoretical reasoning. Accordingly, the research process will be an iterative one goes back and forth between the data and the concepts available in the literature, while the data collection and the data analysis will be done simultaneously.

Another important difference of this study from classical grounded theory approaches is that it does not necessarily start with the assumption that there is a single theoretical framework within which living alone can be understood. In fact, as we shall see, this study ultimately emphasizes the difficulty of theorizing solo-living which is a multi-dimensional concept that can be featured through the practices of solo-dwellers, rather than simply reflect a household status. Therefore, instead of presenting a general theoretical framework, this study tries to display all those different dimensions and aspects of solo-living derived from the experiences and practices of solo-dwellers.

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<sup>1</sup> See (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

### **1.1.1 Data Collection and Data Analysis**

I conducted 36 semi-structured in-depth interviews for the data collection. After conducting 36 interviews, it was determined that no new insights could be gained by collecting additional data, so the process was concluded. The data collection was held between the years 2021 and 2023. To gather my data, I engaged in purposive sampling. I tried to reach respondents who had started to live alone before the pandemic (living alone for nearly two years or more at the time) since, in the interviews, there are specific questions requiring a comparison between the times before and after the pandemic process, which aims to reveal any possible effects of the pandemic process on the solo dwellers' perception regarding their living arrangements due to social distancing measures. The data was collected both in Turkey and Sweden, and the interviews were conducted with respondents from both countries. There are 7 Swedish and 29 Turkish respondents (20 of them live in Turkey, and nine live in Sweden). The respondents were contacted through different channels, including second-degree contacts (acquaintances of acquaintances) and internet ads like announcements on social media or announcements with e-mails to the people within the associated platforms.

On the one hand, as I try to explore the perceptions of those living alone in terms of their pathways, experiences and future expectations, my sample simply consists of one-person households. On the other hand, the important part of my study is to explore as varied perceptions as possible in order to set forth more nuanced sense-making of living alone, which is mainly missed out or shadowed in the existing literature, and this is adopted through reaching those respondents with different backgrounds based on their age, gender, and socio-economic status, which is assumed to vary this sense-making accordingly in reference to the related studies.

Among the 36 respondents (See Appendix A for the demographic information of the respondents), there are 20 female and 16 male respondents. The respondents' age range is between 24 as the youngest respondent and 84 as the oldest one. The mean age is 46. If we look at the age distribution of the respondents, there are 7 respondents from 20 to 29 years old; 11 respondents from 30 to 39 years old; 4 respondents from 40 to 49 years old; 3 respondents from 50 to 59 years old; 8 respondents from 60 to 69 years old and 3 respondents are 70 years old and older.

In the literature about the demographics of one-person households, living alone is asserted as initially a common condition mainly among the elderly who start to live alone after losing their partners or spouse, while in today's world, more and more younger generations have begun to play a part in the acceleration and spread of the trend<sup>2</sup>. Living alone as a living arrangement, which initially became more widespread and visible in the 1960s (Snell, 2017), has become a much more common living practice among various age groups, including much younger age cohorts from different genders and social statuses with a noteworthy increase in their number after the 1980s (Hall & Ogden, 2003). Therefore, while the proportion of the elderly among one-person households still holds its importance mainly due to their greater number, the increasing number of solo-living young adults stands out in this rising trend as well.

Growing urbanization is specified to contribute to this change in the profile of those living alone as big cities provide different job opportunities that enable younger adults to afford such living arrangements as well as rich housing options (Hall & Ogden, 2003; Ogden & Hall, 2000). In this context, it can be anticipated that living alone is something common around educated middle classes who can afford such living without having difficulty and can identify themselves with specific individualistic values, including independence and privacy, specifically in the Western context (de Vaus & Qu, 2015). When making comparisons among different countries, it is seen that living alone is a much more common trend in economically advanced Western countries; therefore, it can be associated with rising living standards in the Western context.

In the literature, there is also gender related differentiation in terms of the social position of those living alone. In this regard, it is highlighted that solo-living women are in higher social positions compared to men who live alone (de Vaus & Qu, 2015). Moreover, with the increasing age, women are more likely to continue to live alone in a more permanent manner than men (Chandler, Williams, Maconachie, Collett & Dodgeon, 2004). So, in light of this literature, I tried to reach out to people from

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<sup>2</sup> See Chandler et al. (2004), Hall & Ogden (2003), (Ogden & Hall, 2000), Snell (2017), Wall (1989)

different age and occupational groups and genders who have different relationship statuses, such as separated or divorced or widowed, single or having a romantic relationship, and so on. I limited my sample to the urban middle classes due to limitations in the accessibility of one-person households and time constraints. Thus, I diversified my sample mainly based on the demographic qualities of the respondents.

#### **1.1.1.1 Interview Questions**

I have tried to formulate my interview questions in line with my research objectives (see Appendix B for interview questions). As my main questions, I have mostly asked ‘how’ questions like “how did you start to live alone?”, “how would you describe one of your ordinary days” and “how would you characterize living alone in general?”. On the other hand, I dug up the issue through specific follow-up questions in order to elaborate on the respondents’ considerations further about their living arrangements by asking questions such as “if you make a comparison between your former living arrangement and the current one, what comes to your mind as the prominent characteristics and differences of the two living arrangement?”, “what can you say about your relationship with your family/friends, if you make comparison between the times before and after you started to live alone?” and “would you say you feel lonely because of living alone?”.

The interview questions are also categorized into three parts following the three main areas of inquiry, namely pathways, experience, and future expectations. In the first part, the respondents were asked about the pathways leading them to living alone. This part starts with a question about how they start living alone and continues with specific follow-up questions about their former living arrangement in which they cohabit with somebody. Accordingly, they were asked to compare their experience of current living arrangements with their former experiences to see how they characterize these in reference to each other. Moreover, their rituals in their family house, like eating rituals or other activities that they specifically do with their families on a regular basis, and whether these rituals somehow are effective in their current living arrangement while setting in their own way, were questioned. It can be especially significant to see whether they still somehow keep these rituals in their

new living order or leave them behind and formulate new rituals in their own order. This question can also provide insights related to their relationships with their families.

The first part, in general, includes questions related to the respondents' relationship statuses, their daily routines, their working lives if they are working, their socialization preferences and practices, and their relationships with their families and friends. The second part consists of questions related to how they sense living alone, whether they enjoy it, what qualities they identify as advantages or disadvantages in terms of solo living, whether they feel lonely, and if they feel lonely whether they associate their loneliness with living alone, and in what aspects they do that and finally, whether pandemic process affected their perceptions regarding their living arrangement. In the third part, they were asked to tell their future plans, specifically related to their living arrangements, like whether they are considering changing or maintaining it and, if they are planning to change, what kind of living arrangement they envision living in.

Indeed, especially in formulating follow-up questions, initial interviews with preceding respondents became guiding for the latter interviews since the collected data in these former interviews provide a framework concerning what kind of themes should be elaborated further (see Appendix C for how those questions were formulated). While the interview questions were initially prepared in light of the relevant literature, they were iteratively reconfigured in accordance with the collected data to reveal more nuanced, overlooked, or understudied aspects of the issue. The aim is to uncover the unobserved dimensions of living alone, which is either treated as unidimensional or evaluated tangentially in the former studies. In this regard, diversifying the questions as much as possible to cover different aspects or themes discussed in the existing literature while trying to go beyond these by benefiting from the data itself when formulating the questions enables us to analyze the issue profoundly and extensively. At the same time, however, there is a limit to this iterative process, and at some point in the research, the interview questions became more or less stabilized in the sense that there would be no need to cover more aspects to frame the analysis and also to avoid deviating from the main subject of the study.

### 1.1.2 Rationale Behind the Choice of Methodology

In this study, I try to explore the pathways, experiences and future expectations of solo living people in relation to their living arrangement. An extensive literature review exhibits that while living alone attracts academic attention as being a rising trend in the modern world<sup>3</sup> with an increasing number of related studies, the perceptions of those who live alone related to their condition is a relatively understudied aspect of the issue. Those who studied the experiences of living alone did not adopt an inductive research approach inspired by the grounded theory; moreover, they mainly focused on a particular demographic group within the solo-dwellers, e.g., older adults. Therefore, these studies can be considered more limited in scope since they focus on specific aspects of the issue derived from their prior theoretical positioning. On the other hand, this study tries to address and exhibit that living alone is not a unidimensional concept, especially when it is examined in relation to other phenomena, including loneliness and social isolation. In the existing studies, this multidimensionality of living alone is mostly overlooked, while the concept is identified as an objective condition referring to household composition.

It should also be highlighted that the contextual framework of these studies is predominantly limited to Western countries where the numbers of solo-dwellers are relatively higher compared to the rest of the world (Jamieson & Simpson, 2013: 34-35). Recently, more and more studies have been conducted in the Asian context as well (Chen, Hicks & While, 2014; Chen & While, 2019; Dommaraju, 2015; Ho, 2015; Raymo, 2015; Teerawichitchainan, Knodel & Pothisiri, 2015). However, a distinctive feature of this study is the data collection was held in Turkey and Sweden; that is, while the former experienced a relatively recent rising trend in the number of solo-dwellers (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020), the latter is one of the European countries with the highest number of one-person households in addition to being the most common type of household (Statista Research Department, 2023). Indeed, even

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<sup>3</sup> The rate of one-person households reached approximately % 12,5 within all types of households in the world (UN, 2022). These rates are much higher in the specifically Western context. On average, the share of one-person households within all types of households reached nearly % 30 in most Western countries and some Asia-Pacific countries like Japan and South Korea (OECD 2016; OECD 2023) and even almost % 40 in some Western countries (Eurostat, 2024; Korhonen, 2024). To illustrate, in the EU, with the recent increase in the number of solo-dwellers, single-person households got the highest share among all types of households (Eurostat 2024). Meanwhile, in the USA, with more than 38 million people living alone, the country has witnessed the highest number of solo dwellers in its history (Korhonen, 2024).

if the data collection was held in both countries, most of the respondents are from Turkey (29 respondents). Nevertheless, it is presumed that this characteristic of the data can enable us to explore at least some cultural differences or nuances related to living alone. Sweden can be considered a typical example of a representation of living alone portrayed in the relevant literature focusing on the Western context. On the other hand, Turkey, with its socio-culturally diverging population and the existence of very few relevant studies examining the context while focusing on a specific group, namely the solo-living elderly (Adana, Durmaz, Özvurmaz, Akpınar & Yeşilfidan, 2022; Sever, 2018; Şentürk, 2019), provides more of an undiscovered terrain regarding the issue. It should, however, also be underlined that this study is not designed as a general cross-cultural comparison but as an attempt to see whether cultural environment can lead to any salient variation. In this respect, similarities between the experiences of solo-dwelling individuals in these two societies were also striking and important for the concerns of this study, which shall be highlighted throughout the study.

At this point, looking closer at some demographic variables of Turkey may provide insight into understanding why the data collected from the country, alongside Sweden, which represents an example of the Western context as a pioneering country in the rising trend of solo living (Therborn, 2004), can contribute to the existing findings about the issue. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's data, in 2014, the country's most common type of household was a nuclear family consisting of two parents and two children, while one-person households were in fourth place after 3 and 4 membered households (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). On the other hand, in 2023, among all types of households, one-person households became the second most common type after two-membered households, while the average size of households decreased to 3,1 from 3,6 in 2014 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). The increase in the number of one-person households from 2014 to 2023 is nearly 80% (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). In other words, the country mainly caught up with its European counterparts in terms of shrinking household size with a rising trend of living alone. However, since this is a relatively new transition for the country, it is probably much easier to trace the possible effects of this transition, specifically in the experiences of solo dwellers.

In the relevant literature, it is indicated that in the 1950s Turkey experienced a socioeconomic transition (Koç, 2018: 37). Its young population turned into an aging population, the growing proportion of population started to live in the urban areas rather than in rural areas, and the nuclear families mainly replaced the extended families (Koç, 2018: 37). After the 1990s, the divorce rates increased, and delaying marriage to a later age became much more widespread; nevertheless, the family has still been very important while marriage has continued to be the primary institution for the establishment of the family (Koç, 2018; Koç & Saraç, 2018). When we look at the demographics of one-person households in the country, we see that they are predominantly composed of elderly women (Koç, 2018: 55), which can be considered as an indication that being an elderly widowed is a common pathway to become a single household in the country.

In this respect, it is found that those women who are 70 years old or older, poor, have a secondary or higher education, and living in more economically developed metropolitan areas have a higher possibility to live alone (Adana et al., 2022: 6). For men, again being 70 years old or over, being poor and living in metropolitan areas increase the possibility of living alone, yet this time, education has no specific effect (Adana et al., 2022: 4). These findings show that on the one hand, there is a weighted presence of those who are identified as a vulnerable group within solo-dwellers, namely the very old and the poor (Klinenberg, 2001). It is argued that due to this vulnerability, they become a victim of this living arrangement (Portacolone, 2015). On the other hand, there are also those solo-dwellers in line with the profile formulated for the ones who prefer to live alone rather than being obliged to live like this due to lack of options, like educated elderly women (de Vaus & Qu, 2015). This relative heterogeneity among the solo-living people, even if limited to an age-based group in this context, can enable us to unveil the multidimensionality of living alone based on possible variations in the sense-making arising from diverse socio-cultural qualities.

## CHAPTER II

### PATHWAYS LEADING TO LIVING ALONE

The discussions concerning the pathways leading to living alone, specifically with the increasing number of one-person households all around the world, mainly revolve around demographic changes, with the questioning of who those solo dwellers are and why they live alone. So, taking a look at these discussions can provide a general framework related to how the issue is addressed in the existing literature. In the related studies, a specific emphasis is placed on the “Second Demographic Transition” theory (Lesthaeghe & van de Kaa, 1986) as an explanation of changes in the demographic structure and household composition in mostly Western societies (Chandler et al., 2004; Hall & Ogden, 2003; Ogden & Hall, 2000; Snell, 2017). In this respect, while the first Demographic transition refers to decreasing trends in both fertility and mortality, which can be traced back to the 18th century in European countries and can be seen roughly in the early 20th century in the rest of the world, the second demographic transition is argued to start during the 1950s with increasing divorce rates, and followed by increasing first marriage age and proliferation of premarital and post-marital cohabitation with decreasing tendency for remarrying (Lesthaeghe, 2011: 179-180). According to the theory, in Western countries, “a sustained sub-replacement fertility, a multitude of living arrangements other than marriage, the disconnection between marriage and procreation, and no stationary population” became the case after the 1960s. Moreover, further increases in life expectancy accompanied by decreasing fertility created a heightening aging effect in those countries (Lesthaeghe, 2011:180).

The second Demographic Transition basically points out that while the Western populations are getting older, their household compositions are becoming much more varied as now marriage is not the only game in town and even in certain countries, it is not the most common one. People now more and more prefer to cohabit with their partners while the age of first marriage and the rate of divorce are increasing and the rate of remarriage is decreasing (Lesthaeghe, 2014: 18113). In addition to the postponement of marriage, people are also postponing having children, and the number of couples who prefer not to have children is also increasing, as well as the number of single parents while having children outside of wedlock is increasing (Lesthaeghe, 2014: 18113).

All these changes are usually associated with the growing increase in the number of solo-living people. In an aging population, now older people prefer to live by themselves, specifically in the case of widowhood, which is a widespread pathway for them to start living alone, specifically for older women who mainly outlive men, rather than living with their children who left the family house and possibly started their own nuclear families (Wall, 1989). For the younger generations, delaying marriage and having children, increasing divorce rates, cohabiting with a partner which can be considered as a looser household composition compared to marriage, especially in the case of separation are all considered to contribute the rise in the number of people living alone (Chandler et al., 2004; Snell, 2017). In other words, by looking at these changes in demographical structure and household composition, both older and younger generations are more inclined to live alone with such increasing numbers of solo-living people, especially compared to nearly seven decades before. In this regard, while the size of households is getting smaller, the number of households is increasing. This is why Snell (2017: 2) defines living alone as a “form of family structure” since now, one-person households become an alternative family form to traditional nuclear families consisting of at least three people: a husband, wife, and child.

## **2.1 Changes in ways of living and lifestyle choices**

While focusing on the changing demographical structure and the household composition to understand this rise of living alone, another aspect of the issue also

comes to the forefront in those discussions, which is related to the changing way of living and people's lifestyle choices over time. In the specifically Western context, the following developments are addressed as factors playing a role in the rising trend: increasing prosperity of individuals with economic development and industrialization; expansion of welfare states and accordingly social security system and pension schemes; urbanization and accordingly migration to more urban places with more job offers as well as allowing easier upward mobility for individuals from relatively lower socio-economic classes; embracing more individualistic values and attaching more importance to privacy, independence, and self-development; and, the changing understanding of intimacy and how the family is defined and positioned in one's life (Chandler et al., 2004; Hall & Ogden, 2003; Jamieson & Simpson, 2013; Klinenberg, 2012; Lesthaeghe, 2010; Lesthaeghe, 2011; Lesthaeghe, 2014; Lesthaeghe & Moors, 2000; Ogden & Hall, 2000; Snell, 2017; Wall, 1989).

When we look closely and elaborate on the issue, we can see that, again, demographically, certain groups are affected more by certain aspects of this changing way of living and, therefore, make their lifestyle choices accordingly. Most notably, we can observe age-related and gender-related variations in this respect. For example, those younger and middle-aged generations can be affected more by urbanization, which can, again, be different for men and women. In comparison, older generations can be affected more by expanding pension schemes.

### **2.1.1 Factors affecting age-based groups**

The related studies set forth that in the Western countries the post-industrial cities where the job offers were now more of professional and managerial positions rather than industrial or manufacturing ones became hot attraction places for young and middle-aged adults, specifically in the 1980s and 1990s periods (Hall & Ogden, 2003; Ogden & Hall, 2000). Accordingly, this triggered an internal migration from different less-developed rural areas to urban spaces. Those young and middle-aged adults enthusiastic about climbing up the social ladder are now residents of those urban areas and living mainly in a career-focused way; thus, they started to prefer smaller household sizes, including a one-person household (Hall & Ogden, 2003: 883).

Accordingly, other related studies reveal that specifically among the younger age cohorts, the number of those who never married and have no children is much higher compared to relatively older age cohorts (Demey, Berrington, Evandrou & Falkingham, 2013; Glick, 1994; Raymo, 2015). This shows that younger generations prefer to postpone marriage or cohabitation with their partners, if they have one. This postponement can be affiliated with the changing priorities of people in terms of how they should live their lives since now there is no right way of doing it by simply getting married and establishing a family. There are various options and one can choose any of them including the traditional one but now the timing is different since s/he does not have to be so hasty while making this decision. One can wait as much as s/he wants until s/he feels ready to do that if changing his/her living arrangement is something s/he wishes to do (Hughes, 2015). On the other hand, what should be highlighted at this point is one can now make the necessary life-related adjustments at her/his own pace, which suits her/his wishes and needs, rather than feeling some kind of social pressure to meet the expectation for establishing a traditional family as soon as possible.

In this context, leaving the family house to live independently rather than getting married as a young adult has become more or less normalized due to being a common practice in the Western world (Goldscheider, 2000; Jamieson & Simpson, 2013; Kiernan, 1986). Yet, it can still be perceived as a big step for the transition to adulthood and some kind of a mark of distinction among the young adults (Klinenberg, 2012: 31). So, when a young adult leaves the family house and starts living alone, this can be considered as a new chapter or stage in his/her life and named “emerging adulthood,” “early adulthood,” or “extended adulthood” in which one is being busy to have education, building a career and exploring different life paths before marrying or cohabiting with a partner and having children (Arnett, 2000; Cote, 2000; Heath, 2004). In other words, at this stage in their lives those solo-living young adults are very much interested in discovering themselves and their own identity.

In a similar fashion, an assumption of a shift or a change in the attitude towards establishing a traditional type of family while positioning living alone as an alternative to this traditional type is put forward in these discussions by looking at

the relationship between the growing number of solo dwellers and the demographic variables belonging to them. While the age of those people establishing this kind of traditional families is mainly rising when it is traced in the data, some concepts belonging to this kind of family structure are also started to be questioned by many like is there a right time for that or how a life-long partnership should be (mainly associated with romantic love) (Hughes, 2015: 709). Indeed, it is not a surprise to see the growing number of younger people who live alone and delay marriage or cohabitation with their partners or the increasing number of those middle-aged people within older age cohorts who decided to separate or divorce their partners and then started living alone (Glick, 1994; Demey et al., 2013; Raymo, 2015).

There are various studies related to the issue. For instance, Glick (1994) in his study made a comparison between the characteristics of solo-living unmarried middle-aged adults and cohabiting unmarried middle-aged adults in the age range of 25 to 54 living in the USA. He was interested in the question of why there is a growing number of middle-aged people who are not married. Therefore, he particularly focused on this unmarried group of people living alone or cohabitating. He maintained that increasing education levels and improving economic status enables a higher number of American people to adopt living alone as their living arrangement rather than following the traditional route and establishing a family by getting married to someone. According to Glick, as people are now more educated, they are less pressurized in terms of embracing a traditional way of life and as becoming more prosperous, they have more financial means to afford this relatively expensive living arrangement (Glick, 1994: 455).

In this respect, Glick asserted that such a growing trend of living alone among middle-aged adults could be associated with postponement of marriage or separation and divorce, and rising income. Since now more and more people choose to delay marriage or wish to end an unsatisfactory marriage by separating or divorcing from their partners, they prefer to switch to living alone. Besides, their income is mainly high enough to make them adopt such living arrangement that provides freedom (Glick, 1994: 455). Relatedly, he found that most of the solo-living middle-aged people are wage-earning people, and have no children; that is, they possibly only need to financially support themselves. Although, in general, solo-living middle-aged

people have less household income compared to married and other unmarried householders, their income becomes higher when it is considered per household member (Glick, 1994: 455).

In their study on the demographic characteristics of solo-dwellers in Australia for a three-decade period, including the years 1986, 1996, and 2006, de Vaus and Richardson (2009: 7) found that over this period while the share of those young adults in their twenties and older adults in their sixties and seventies within the solo-dwellers were getting smaller due to a moderate rise in their number, the increase in the rate of those middle-aged adults in their forties and fifties among the solo-dwellers became much more pronounced. They asserted that, on the one hand, the increased longevity for both men and women brought along the postponement of widowhood to a much later age, including 80 years old and over; on the other hand, the increasing rate of separation and divorce among the couples affected this noticeable increase in the number of solo-dwellers within the middle- age group (de Vaus & Richardson, 2009). Accordingly, they indicated that the marital status of those solo-dwellers affected the likelihood of their starting to living alone, that is, the widows have the highest likelihood to live alone while being followed by those separated or divorced (de Vaus & Richardson, 2009: 11).

In this respect, even if the number of solo-dwellers who were never married, specifically within the youngest age cohorts, has the highest share among all the solo-dwellers in the most recent time period (de Vaus & Richardson, 2009: 11), the impact of those separated or divorced middle-aged groups in the rising number of solo-dwellers became much more apparent and vital. In other words, while the postponement of marriage and possibly having children has been losing its effect on the rising trend of living alone, separation or divorce has become a much more common pathway for one to start living alone rather than delaying co-residential partnership. Indeed, this is more pronounced in the later stages of the middle-age, contrary to the younger ages like early thirties and twenties as the authors underlined.

Like Glick, Raymo (2015) also investigated middle-aged solo dwellers but focused on a non-Western context—conducting the research in Japan. He looked at three groups: married young adults, solo-living unmarried young adults, and cohabiting

unmarried young adults. Raymo (2015: 1273) underlined that in Japan, while the couple cohabitation before marriage is not common, cohabitation with parents before marriage is very widespread. In this context, according to the scholar, delaying marriage has a potential explanatory power on the increase in the number of one-person households in the country. Accordingly, there is a reference to the changing family structure since those who are supposed to be married in their middle ages actually prefer not to establish a traditional family at the time they are expected to do that but prefer to live within a structure being an alternative to this by delaying it to a later time. Glick (1994) also highlights this aspect while de Vaus and Richardson (2009) focus more on the growing fragility and instability of the traditional family structure.

In the case of the elderly, becoming a solo-dweller is, in most cases, due to widowhood (Stone et al., 2013). However, as mentioned above, widowhood can be delayed to much later ages and accordingly becomes more and more a very old age phenomenon rather than earlier stages of old age like sixties and early seventies (de Vaus & Richardson, 2009). Longer life expectations possibly make older people and their children or other family members and relatives outside of their nuclear family more reluctant to live together. For those elderly, since they have to be included rather than establish another house order other than the one they established and maintained for many years, it may not be tempting to cohabit. Moreover, they do not want to be a burden to anyone else (Izuhara, 2000).

In effect, what needs to be highlighted here is that even if they fulfilled the traditional gender roles in their whole lives, did not challenge these roles, and have more conventional perspectives and understanding of life, they can still very much appreciate the independence brought along by their living arrangement and want to continue their lives with more self-actualizing activities by putting themselves at the center probably for the first time. This can be interpreted as now it is their turn to be modern individuals who have the opportunity to be self-centered in the absence of all family-related responsibilities in line with the spirit of the time. On the other hand, it is also argued that what makes it possible for those elderly to live alone is the opportunities to sustain good health in the older ages as well as improved community

care services enabling one to maintain her/his living arrangement rather than being institutionalized (de Vaus & Richardson, 2009: 26).

In our data, even if our sample size is small (36 respondents), when we look at the demographic variables of our respondents, we can clearly see that they are in line with these trends put forward by the above-mentioned relevant studies. Nearly all of our respondents within the age cohort of 24-44 have never been married or cohabited with a partner before. In addition, the respondents who are 40 years old and older are more likely to be divorced or separated from their partners. Nine of the respondents from the older age cohorts (45 years old and older) are divorced or separated, but four of them within this group have never been married (Serhat, Beril, Tuna, Eva). There are also three respondents from the older age cohorts who lost their spouses and became widows or widowers (Emel, Murat, and Suna), while one of them started living alone after her daughter left the family house (Suna).

### **2.1.2 Factors affecting gender-based groups**

Along with the factors affecting age-based groups, factors affecting women and men are also examined and analyzed in the literature. In this regard, Glick (1994: 455) found out that in the middle ages (from 25 to 54), especially under the age of forty, more men than women live alone while more women cohabit, specifically with their children, in the USA. The rate of never-married middle-aged people, specifically among men, is higher than the rate of separated or divorced ones which is high among women. Moreover, he remarked that the unmarried women who are separated or divorced are mainly among the oldest age cohort, which is between 40 and 54 (Glick, 1994: 448-449). In the case of unmarried cohabiting middle-aged adults, it is mostly those unmarried women under 40 years old who live with their children rather than men (Glick, 1994: 450). Among the solo-living middle-aged people, men tend to be more educated compared to women while there is a wider difference between cohabiting unmarried middle-aged men and women in parallel (Glick, 1994: 450). Predominantly, middle-aged solo-living people, especially men, are more educated compared to other middle-aged householders.

The author also examined the dating situations of the respondents, which was chosen to understand whether solo-living householders differ from the rest of the unmarried

householders in terms of social participation. The number of solo-living men who have dated is higher than the number of solo-living women, which is also the case for other unmarried male and female householders (Glick, 1994: 450). This gender difference is even much more visible for cohabiting householders. Glick argued that the reason for this can be since women, unlike men, are mainly cohabiting with their children rather than another adult, dating can be more challenging for them (Glick, 1994: 451). In addition, those who have been dating are mostly under the age of forty.

Similar to Glick's findings, even if, in general, more women than men live alone, the age structure of those male and female solo-dwellers shows that living alone is more of a male phenomenon for those aged under fifty while it is mostly a female phenomenon at age over sixty in Australia, according to the findings of de Vaus and Richardson (2009: 9). The authors also specified that middle-aged solo-living women are much more educated, compared to both their cohabiting counterparts and solo-living men, whereas middle-aged solo-living men have mainly a poor educational background in contrast to cohabiting men and solo-living women (de Vaus & Richardson, 2009: 14). They argued this could be an indicator that for solo-living women, living alone is an individual choice; on the contrary, for solo-living men, due to being in a socially disadvantaged position, it is an indication of a failure to establish a family due to having lack of necessary resources.

Accordingly, in their study which focuses on the relationship between gender and the socio-economic status of those living alone in the Australian case, de Vaus and Qu (2015) also found out that women who live alone are in a socially advantaged group in terms of education, labor force participation levels, income, and occupational position compared to women who do not live alone and men who live alone. However, when this comparison is made between men who live alone and men who do not, we see that the opposite situation is the case. For women, those in the socially advantaged group tend to live alone, while for men, those in socially disadvantaged groups tend to live alone.

Another related study in this context was conducted by Sandström and Karlsson (2019), who focused on the association between living alone and education in the

working-age (30-64) population in Europe by looking at 12 European countries. They found that whereas in the countries that have more gender equality, the effect of education levels on the rate of living alone is much more modest, in the countries with lower gender equality, they are positively associated that people with higher education levels in these countries have a higher tendency to live alone (Sandström & Karlsson, 2019). On the other hand, in those more gender-equal countries, the solo-living trends are much more similar between men and women, while differences are more apparent among low socio-economic groups since mainly women within these groups tend to be single parents (Sandström & Karlsson, 2019: 1659). Nevertheless, in less gender-equal countries, higher education levels specifically increase the tendency of women to live alone (Sandström & Karlsson, 2019: 1660).

Finally, Demey et al. (2013) also focused on the gender groups while examining the pathways leading people living alone in their mid-life in the UK. The authors tried to capture different stages of mid-life in the study; therefore, they included a wide range of age groups to investigate under three categorizations which are early (35-44), mid (45-54), and late (55-64) mid-life. They also formulated two main trajectories for living alone in mid-life: "never having experienced a co-residential union and ever having experienced a co-residential union that has dissolved" (Demey et al., 2013: 164). They further differentiate these trajectories by accounting for parenthood status and for the ever-partnered ones by dissolution type. In this respect, never partnered ones can be with children or without children. Those with no children are argued to be possibly the ones who delay partnership formation, while those with children are assumed to be either non-residential or empty-nest single parents. Those ever-partnered ones can also be with or without children. They are either separated or divorced from their former partner or lost their partner. Those ever-partnered who have children are again either non-residential parents or empty-nest single parents.

In line with the above-mentioned studies, they found out that more men live alone in their early and mid-mid-life compared to women, while more women live alone in their late mid-life compared to men (Demey et al., 2013: 167). Moreover, the authors specified that those men and women who are living alone in their early mid-life have mainly no children, which is specifically compatible with the case of women since mostly they are the residential single parents in case of having children (Demey et

al., 2013: 168). According to the findings, while for solo-living and cohabiting men, the socio-economic status remains consistent across different age groups, this is not the case for solo-living and partnered women. Those solo-living women in their early mid-life are more educated and working full-time compared to partnered women (Demey et al., 2013: 169). In this respect, the differences in terms of socio-economic status are also much more visible between never-partnered and ever-partnered solo-living women in their late mid-life as, again, never-partnered ones are more educated and economically better off condition (Demey et al., 2013: 171). On the other hand, those solo-living men who never partnered in their late mid-life are in a much more economically disadvantaged position compared to the never partnered solo-living women. The most common partnership trajectory leading those former couples to live alone as a pathway is partnership dissolution in mid-life despite a noteworthy number of men who have never cohabited with their partners (Demey et al., 2013: 171).

The authors identified the most common pathways for men and women in their mid-life in line with the findings they derived from the data. In terms of early mid-life, three common pathways are specified for men: 'never-partnering, ever-partnering without any children and with partner dissolution, and ever-partnering with children and partner dissolution.' For women, two common pathways are indicated: 'never-partnering and ever-partnering without any children and with partner dissolution' (Demey et al., 2013: 172). In this regard, it is possible to see the difference between men and women as women are the ones who mostly take care of the children when their partnership ends in the case of having children. Thus, 'ever partnered with children and with partner dissolution' is not a common pathway for them. In the mid-mid-life category, three different pathways are stated to come to the forefront. The first one is a childless person (mostly men) who may have cohabited but not married. The second one is a childless woman who experienced marital dissolution. The last one is the dissolution of a couple's marriage with children. Finally, in late mid-life, two common pathways are maintained to become prominent, including 'never-partnered people who have no children (most common among older solo-living men) and the dissolution of marriage of a couple with children (most common for older solo-living women)' (Demey et al., 2013: 172).

This picture roughly shows us that for a woman, living alone at a young or middle age, in a period when she is expected to start a family and have children conventionally, means going out of those gender roles depicting them as a wife or a partner or a mother who should take care of other household members, especially the children. This can be the case because she delayed marriage or partnership and/or having children or she is a mother but not a single parent who cohabits with the children. Nevertheless, the latter scenario is the least likely case for many mothers. In other words, it is mostly the men who can directly get out of familial responsibilities when their family unit is dissolved after a separation or divorce, but not the women in the case of having children. Thus, they are still identified or define themselves as the primary caregiver. Furthermore, the longer a woman lives alone, her tendency to maintain her living arrangement increases, as well as their decreasing propensity to remarry or cohabit as being single parents and/or empty-nesters, which indicates that they possibly feel more comfortable when they are not the primary caregiver but focusing on their own self-care.

It is again possible to trace these trends in our data. There are both verifying and also deviant examples within the data. To illustrate, there are two female respondents from older age cohort who were empty-nesters and started living alone when their children leave the family house. Indeed, in one of the case there is a divorce and after the divorce female respondent became the single parent (Nehir) but in the other case, the respondent lost her husband and then became a single parent (Suna). Moreover, one of the male respondents became a solo-dweller after a divorce while his former wife became the single parent of their two children (Victor). Nevertheless, there are also reverse cases. Another female respondent who got divorced from her ex-husband directly started living alone after her husband got the custody of their two children (Derya). Moreover, there is one male respondent who became an empty-nester since after his separation from his ex-wife, he became the single-parent of their three children (Tolga). Socio-economically, on average the female respondents are more educated, but there is no clear evidence that points out a noteworthy financial differentiation between male and female respondents.

In general, as discussed in the above-mentioned literature, being a solo-dweller as a young or middle-aged adult is more of an upper-social-class phenomenon in the

Western context, specifically for women. On the other hand, this case can be different in other parts of the world where living alone is rather a relatively new trend. To illustrate, in the Asian context, including countries like China, Korea, and India, instead of urban solo-dwellers of Western countries from upper-social-classes, there are a noteworthy number of solo-living people from lower social classes with lower education levels and lower economic resources like migrant manual workers who can be either single or married and left their families in their hometowns to come to urban areas for work (Cheung & Yeung, 2015; Dommaraju, 2015; Guilmoto & De Loenzien, 2015; Park & Choi, 2015; Podhisita & Xenos, 2015).

In this respect, in the Asian countries and possibly in other parts of the world, solo-dwellers constitute a much more heterogeneous group compared to those people living alone in Western countries. In the Asian context, marital status has a meaning and an effect when trying to understand the position of solo-dwellers in society since the rate of cohabitation without wedlock is relatively rare (Ho, 2015; Raymo, 2015). On the one hand, a married solo-dweller is more likely from a lower social class since the necessity to live distant from his or her family (mostly males) is possibly because of finding a job somewhere else to make a living. On the other hand, a solo-dweller who is not married is more likely to postpone marriage (Raymo, 2015). Accordingly, in such cases, pathways leading to living alone can be varied further as the circumstances in which one makes a decision and may bring along living alone eventually as a consequence are also manifold.

The above-mentioned literature addresses the pathways leading to living alone essentially based on the demographic variables. Nevertheless, simply focusing on the demographic variables provides a somewhat limited understanding related to the issue. This study aims to provide a broader framework while trying to reveal both the perceptions and experiences of solo dwellers regarding how they started living alone. By this means, it will be possible to capture more nuanced aspects of the issue that are mostly missed out.

When we look at the data, it is possible to make a categorization among the respondents in terms of how they make sense of the pathway that led them to live alone. In this respect, we can divide them into two main groups: those who think they have a choice when making the decision to live alone and those who think they have no other option available when making the decision to live alone. Under the main category of “those who think they have a choice when making the decision to live alone,” there are two subcategories, including “starting to live alone as a voluntary decision and starting to live alone as a preference.” Within the main category of “those who think they have no other option available when making the decision to live alone,” there are also two subcategories including “starting to live alone as a consequence of life-changing events and starting to live alone as an involuntary decision.” All these categories will be elaborated and discussed below regarding how these categorizations are formulated.

## **2.2 Those who think they have a choice when making the decision to live alone**

Under this category, it is discussed that for those respondents, their decision to live alone does not result from a necessity due to the lack of any alternatives other than living alone according to their perception, but it is a choice they’ve made among different available options. They can either voluntarily decide to live alone or prefer to live alone as a more convenient way of living for themselves for the time being, which is elaborated under the two subcategories within this pathway category.

### **2.2.1 Starting to live alone as a voluntary decision**

According to the respondents in this category, living alone is a desirable option, and they ascribe a positive meaning to their decision. There are nine respondents who indicated that they started living alone by making a voluntary decision. These respondents are Aylin, Koray, Defne, Onur, Berk, Canan, Gizem, Sarp, Irmak, Lucas and Ida. The mean age of this group of respondents is 31.6, which is the youngest group among all. This can be argued to overlap with the above-mentioned discussions about the young adults’ motivation to become an adult by leaving the family house and living alone. If we examine the statements of the respondents, it is possible to observe different motivations of the respondents, which are pinpointed in

Figure 1, including the desire to become an adult by voluntarily deciding to live alone in line with the existing studies. For instance, Defne (Female, 24 years old, never married) stated that:

Actually, I started living with my sister first. So, my sister and I moved to a separate house when I was seventeen. Then we lived like that for six or seven years. I lived with my sister until the end of university. Then, when my sister decided to live with her boyfriend, so I said, I should move to my own house... I wanted to see how I could manage my own life as an individual... My mother actually wanted me to live with them, but they allowed me because I wanted to try it.

The respondent explicitly indicated that she wanted to stand on her own feet and try to become self-dependent as part of adulthood by experiencing living alone.

Similarly, Onur (Male, 31 years old, never married) said that:

Entering into business life after graduation is a difficult and important step. Taking this step, that is, gaining your first professional work experience, is a bit challenging, especially in a city like Istanbul. Because in Turkey's conditions, they do not give very good financial opportunities to a person who starts a new job. For this reason, both during my student life and in the 2 years after I started my professional business life, I became a housemate with a person I trusted and whom I had known for years. It was like this again at university. And when you graduate from university, you can't get out of that mindset right away. The student mentality continues for a while, and even if financial means allow it, sharing a house with someone can be enjoyable because that mentality continues. I became a housemate with someone for these two reasons. Afterward, of course, you advance in your career, you gain experience, and as you gain experience, you get out of this student mindset a little more, you improve your financial possibilities, and when this is the case, after a while, you say, well, I'm not living the student life anymore, in fact, I've enjoyed it enough, but it's over, now a new life begins for me. Frankly speaking, the desire to live alone is related to establishing your own order, buying the furniture you like and have been dreaming of for years, organizing the house according to your own taste, and being solely responsible for cleaning the house and not being accountable to anyone. That is why I started living alone.

According to Onur, cohabiting with a friend corresponds to a transition period in becoming an adult, which can be completed by switching to living alone as a working person who makes a living and is able to take responsibility for their own. Indeed, becoming an adult should not be considered a unidimensional concept. It has different properties, including taking one's responsibility either by simply being in charge of domestic duties as in the case of Defne or taking care of oneself by both earning a living and handling the domestic duties as in the case of Onur. In this

regard, another property of becoming an adult is put forward by Koray (Male, 29 years old, never married). He expressed that after living with his relatives for a while during his university years, he “decided to leave alone,” adding that:

... I have been living alone for approximately four years... My family is not here. My family is far away, and staying with others inevitably makes one uncomfortable. Also, after a certain age, one starts to feel uncomfortable around others. Even though you feel close to them, now the things they do for you without any malicious intentions actually seem disturbing to you.

He also further explained his discomfort while living with his uncle and his uncle's family by adding that:

For example, you have a girlfriend and you want to meet her, but you need to get approval from them even to meet with her. Or you want to go out somewhere, you want to do something with your friends. You will come late and you need to get approval from them even for these. There are many things like this. Or, for example, you don't want to eat that food that day. But you have to eat that food. You can't say something like I don't want to eat the food you cook. You are forced to do this.

His statements show that since he is now an adult, he wants to feel that way and does not want to answer an authority figure like his uncle and notify all his actions while waiting to get approval. He wants to make his own decisions and act freely without feeling obliged to get a higher opinion for these, which is, according to him, part of being an adult. Furthermore, possibly living with his uncle made him feel like he was living in a family house in which he was expected to follow all the rules while lacking the comfort of living in the family house. It can be easier to behave freely around his parents but not around his relatives, even if they are close relatives. Therefore, living alone enabled him to act freely and be in control without the supervision of another adult.

On the other hand, the motivation of voluntarily deciding to live alone is not solely about becoming an adult. We can also observe that there is the motivation for having one's personal space in which he/she can isolate himself/herself from others intentionally. This is something also discussed in the existing literature as a factor affecting the rising trend of living alone in the modern individualized world. This time, the former cohabitation experiences made the respondents realize their need to have personal space. To illustrate, Irmak (Female, 29 years old, never married) indicated that:

I started (living alone) at university. I moved to another city ... I lived with someone for the first two years and lived alone for the next two years until I finished university. Then I lived with someone again. Then I started my doctorate and started living alone again... I had a roommate at that time (first two years of university) and too much socializing tired me out, so I wanted to live alone for a while. I think living with someone is a good way to meet people because there are always people coming to your house, you meet your friend's friend, etc. But, then it tired me.

The respondent highlighted that she had initially enjoyed meeting new people and socializing with them as a freshman university student eager to discover and be part of new social circles. However, at some point, this turned into something overwhelming for her. Therefore, by starting to live alone, she created an isolated environment for herself in order to take control of her own social relationships in a space where she is the sole responsible. As another example Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated from her ex-cohabiting partner) highlighted that:

I've been living alone since 2017. Before, I cohabited with my ex-partner. So I used to be a Sambo for 10 years. Since 2017 that we split up, I've been living alone and I am very enjoying it [sic.]. It's really fun to live alone... I think it's common in Sweden or perhaps in Stockholm that people at certain age actually prefer to live alone and you have your friends, you have your lovers or whatever you have but you don't have to live together because you don't have a family, you don't want to have a shared everyday life. I'm a sociologist. I'm a researcher at a university in social work. So, I'm kind of very interested in how different norms forming people's choice or life courses and what choice do I have as an upper-middle class research person who is kind of having own career, living in central Stockholm. I have quite a big space of mine to do whatever I like, and I don't have any pressure from my family or anyone in my life. I can choose for myself. Then, I happen to choose this.

In her statement, she emphasized that living alone provides her with a space she does not have to share with someone while also being able to maintain different types of relationships, including a romantic one. Similarly, Sarp (Male, 31 years old, never married), who previously lived in a dormitory and stayed in a shared room in a hostel, decided to live alone due to sharing a small space with too many people. He expressed that:

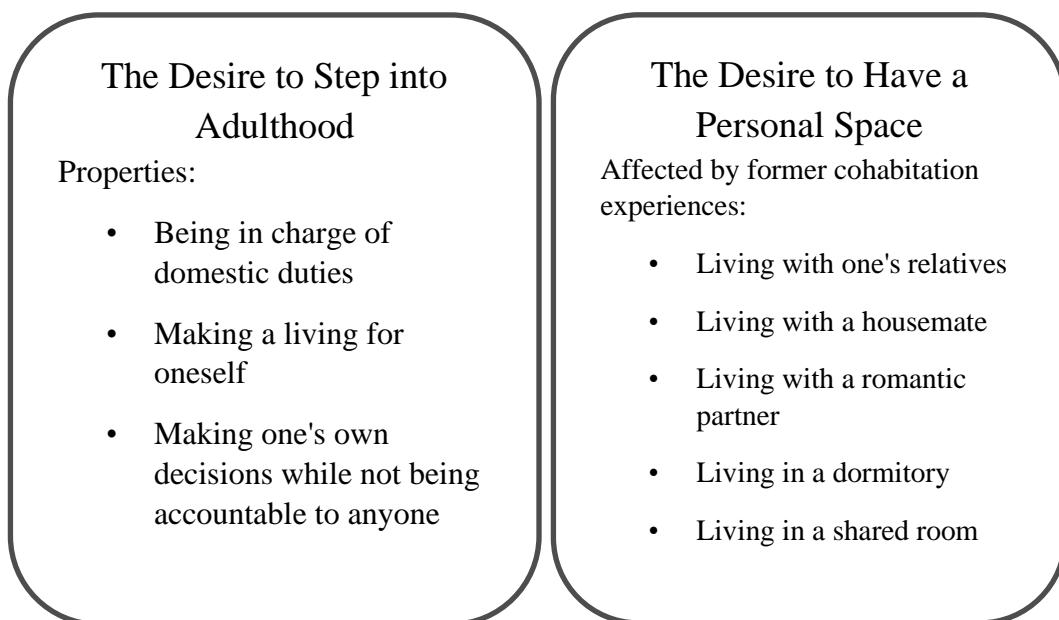
The first time I lived alone was when I moved to Istanbul. When I moved there and started my working life, I rented a house for myself. I have been living alone since 2015... I had the opportunity to share a house with my friends, but as soon as I reached the financial position to do so, I chose to live on my own... I lived in a dormitory for 3 years before living alone and after moving out of the family home. The dormitory I lived in was an area of 15

square meters where 4 people lived. There is an interesting situation that comes with living in such a narrow and dense area... After living in the dormitory, I suspended my studying for a year. I went to Australia to work. There I stayed in a backpacker hostel. This backpacker hostel is like a motel looking like a dormitory. You go and ask for a bed and there are rooms for 8 people, 4 people and 10 people. There are bunk beds there. Travelers like me live there and these are cheap places. Since I didn't want to spend too much money while working, I stayed at this hostel for 8 months and it was a place with continuous circulation. People are constantly changing in the hostel. If there are 100 people in the hostel, 70 of them change once a week. Constantly new people and not having a comfort zone all the time means just having a place to sleep and wake up. Actually, after that, when I went back to school, I wanted to move in to an apartment and when I moved in, I had to share the house, of course, due to economic reasons. Then, when I went to Istanbul, the first thing I thought was that it was time to try living on my own. From now on, I wish I could at least have my own space and see how it goes.

Similarly, Canan (Female, 28 years old, never married) also indicated that she decided to live alone after her dormitory experience in her university years, in order to have a personal space of her own. She said:

... in graduate school, I said I wanted to stay in my own house, I didn't want a roommate or a housemate, so I started living alone... So it was my choice. I didn't necessarily have a dream of living alone, but at least when I moved into a house by myself after staying in the dormitory, I never thought of looking for a housemate, so I wanted to live alone.

Figure 1: Motivations of voluntary decision to live alone



## 2.2.2 Starting to live alone as a preference

Contrary to 'starting to live alone as a voluntary decision', those who prefer living alone do not attribute a specific meaning to the living arrangement, yet they find it as a convenient option for themselves in comparison with other options and accordingly, find this decision sensible. In this respect, the main difference between starting to living alone as a voluntary decision and as a preference is that while in the former, the decision to live alone is the primary one, which is intentionally taken, in the latter, it is mainly a secondary decision following the primary one which can be related to one's career, work, or living conditions in general. In this respect, both primary decisions and the related motivations of the respondents are summarized in Figure 2. The respondents who prefer to live alone are Arda, Gaye, Selim, Beril, Tuna, Bartu, Peter and Eva. The mean age of this group is 49.

Accordingly, Gaye (Female, 52 years old, never married), who pursued an academic career and, after completing her graduate education, worked in different places, expressed that:

It is my decision to live alone... Life took me there anyway. I graduated from university and earned my master's degree. I finished my master's degree and earned my doctorate. After that, I became a lecturer at -University-. Then Eskişehir, then America, then Germany. So, life took itself somewhere. But I always set plans and goals.

She underlined that her primary decision is related to her academic career while her decision to live alone simply followed this. In the case of Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married), his former dormitory experience made him make the decision to move into an apartment, and then even if he had a very weak attempt to find a housemate at first, he decided to live alone. Accordingly, he expressed that:

After staying in the dormitory for about 6 years, my tolerance level towards people started to decrease. In my last year, especially, I was starting to go crazy. I had a lot of fights with the people in the room. Another reason ... was that my right to stay in the dormitory had expired. ... I put pressure on my family to rent a house for me. ... This is how I rented the house. At first, I thought of looking for a housemate. I even put a small ad in a Facebook group. Two people who were interested wrote to me. Yet, it remained there. They didn't ... get back to me. I didn't insist either. I was suddenly alone, and I was happy with my situation. I was already becoming fond of my own comfort. Since I already could not tolerate other people, I started living alone in that house.

Bartu (Male, 31 years old, never married) also had former cohabitation experiences with both housemates and his romantic partners; however, in his case, the priority is given to work-related needs, and living alone became a preference to the extent that it can meet these needs by providing a functional space for this use. He indicated that:

I was living alone from time to time when I was working in Istanbul. But in general, I lived with my partner in there. Then, when I first moved to Sweden, I lived in Stockholm. First, I had a housemate in Stockholm. Then, I moved to another house, where I had three housemates. After coming to -City-, I said I would live alone from now on because I have visitors coming and going and guests during the day, etc. I also have my own company in Sweden. I do IT work as well. I also use the house as an office. When there is a housemate, there can be noise because, for example, I do video work, I watch this video I shoot. Sometimes, I may have guests at 1, 2, 3, or 4 o'clock at night. That's why living alone is much healthier. It costs a little more, but I don't mind the cost side at all. So far, for me, comfort is greater than cost.

Indeed, it is possible to discuss the age-related aspect of the issue; that is, for the older respondents, this primary decision can be about whether to have a family of their own or not. The three respondents within this group remarked that they prefer neither to have a family, nor a partner, and nor children; thus, they also indirectly prefer to live alone which is characterized as the alternative to the traditional way of living. To illustrate, Beril (Female, 84 years old, never married) indicated that:

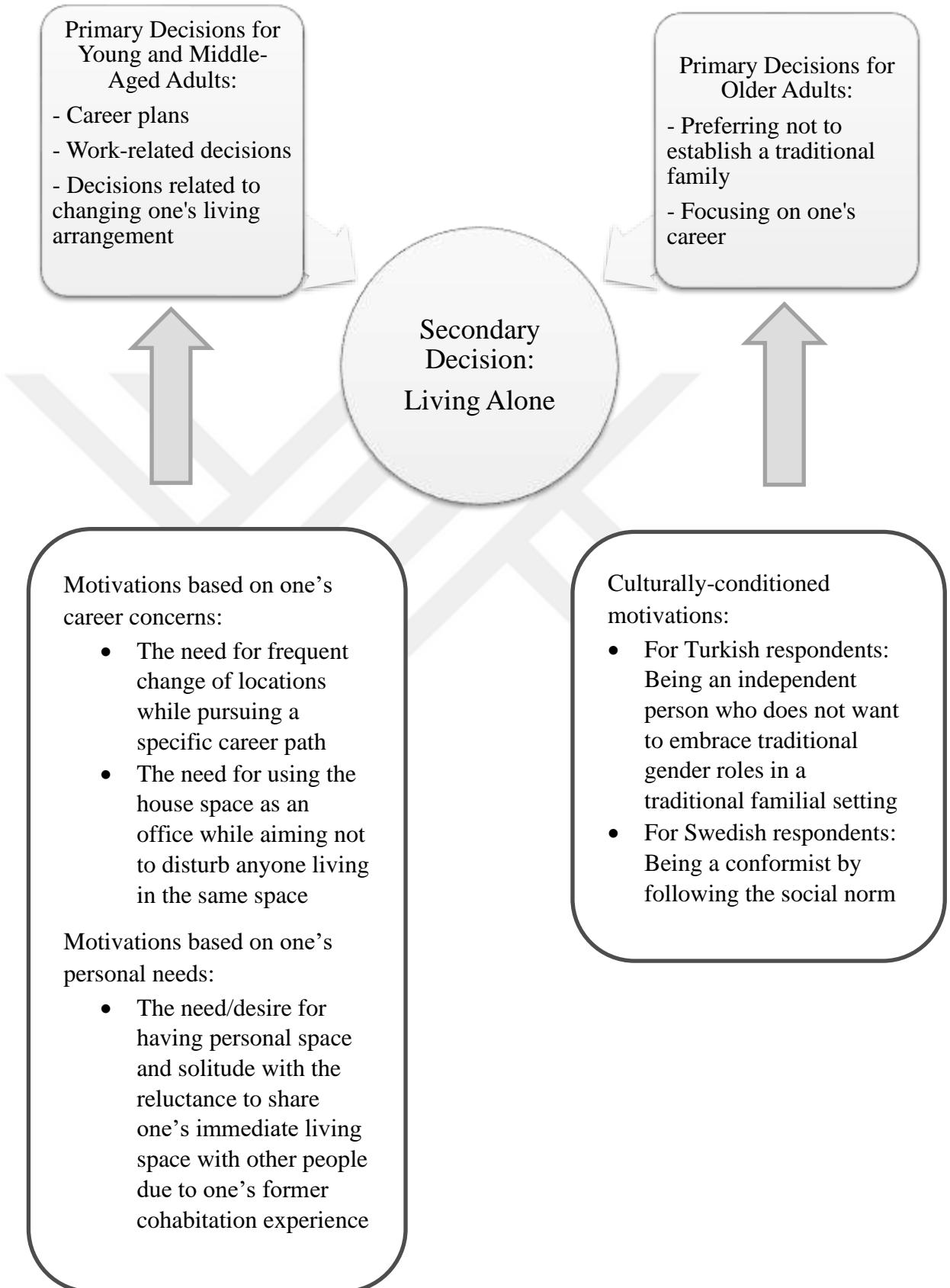
I did not marry. I didn't need it. I've been really busy... I've always been involved in art and I've always worked... I think like this. Life is a whole, a blessing given to you. It has everything in it. But which one of these you will look at and which one you will prioritize depends on your decision. Some care about their health, some care about family relationships, some care about creating something. My life has some shortcomings. So, for example, marriage can be considered as a threshold that must be crossed in one's personal life. But it's not like that for me... But our society sees it differently. The priority is marriage. I've experienced it a lot. Why? It never even occurred to me. Weren't there people at school who liked me? There were. I also had lovers. But they all ended at a certain point. It had to end. Because I am a free person. Independence is truly my nature; it is part of my nature.

The respondent's priority is her art; therefore, after she made this decision to devote her life to her art, she secondarily preferred to live alone rather than establishing her own family. In the case of Tuna (Male, 74 years old, never married), he expressed that he was able to move into his own apartment at the age of 50 since he did not

challenge the mentality of his family that one should only leave the family house for establishing his own family which is something he did not prefer; thus, again he secondarily chose to live alone as a result. He said that: "The family views it with the mentality that one could only leave the family house if he or she gets married. They realized that I was too old to get married at 50." Also, Eva (Female, 65 years old, never married) pointed out that since it is the norm to leave the family house in Sweden, she also did that at some point, but she also specified that she did not prefer to have her own family. She expressed that:

... There is nothing like now I am going to live alone. We all did. I mean we all moved out in some way (from family house). Some of us didn't make a family and some made family, some get divorced. I've been living nearly the same all the time. It hasn't been like well 'I'm going to be living alone'. No. Sometimes it wasn't felt like this but now it is okay I think. It's convenient... I was so young when I started to live alone. Of course, it is the natural way, you have to go away.

Figure 2: Primary decisions and motivations in the pathway of starting to live alone as a preference



## **2.3 Those who think they have no other option available when making the decision to live alone**

This category refers to those respondents who think that living alone is a circumstantial imperative and is the only viable option to decide; therefore, it is not a choice for them. In this regard, the decision to live alone can be a consequence of life-changing events, specifically related to one's career, or an involuntary decision as a result of transformations one experiences in his/her intimate relationships, which will be elaborated below.

### **2.3.1 Starting to live alone as a consequence of life-changing events**

Although those respondents who are categorized under this subcategory consider that they decide to live alone because of a necessity related to a life-changing event, they do not sense this pathway leading them to live alone with a negative connotation or any particular feeling. These respondents are Bahar, Gözde, Nur, Serhat, Aslan, Lale and Kevin. Nearly all of these respondents had to move to another city due to work or education-related reasons, which is a life-changing event. The mean age of this group is 37,7.

There are two respondents who underlined that when they moved into another city, they had no one with whom they preferred to cohabit; thus, they had no other option than living alone. In this sense, Bahar (Female, 37 years old, never married) specified that: "I came to –City- for work and started living alone because my family did not live here." Her statement shows that she only prefers to live with her family if she cohabits, but since her family lives in a different city, she has to live alone. Similarly, Gözde (Female, 28 years old, never married) expressed that: "When I passed the examination for specialty in medicine, I had to come to –City-. We can say, I had to do it (starting to live alone) because I didn't have a circle of friends, a romantic relationship, or a family in Ankara." Contrary to Bahar, Gözde has a more extensive list of people to cohabit including her family, friends, and romantic partner, yet still, since she has no connections in the new city she moved in, again, she had to live alone.

More generally, migrating to another society without a family or community can have similar effects to leaving one's hometown and losing contact with the members

of one's family and friends. The case of Lale (Female, 54 years old, divorced with a child) can be considered an example, in this sense. She expressed that:

So this was not a choice, it was a necessity for me... Over time, and here (in Sweden), your chances of making friends and forming a social circle with people of your own choosing are very low. In other words, a person generally chooses all his/her friends until the age of 50. That is, one has already picked the people to be around in his/her mind at that age. There is no such thing when you come here. Everyone probably comes here to work. You cannot create cultural equivalence. But I tried to establish very good relationships, warm and humane, with everyone around me, everyone I could see and meet... There were those people living alone in Sweden who offered me to live with them. However, I observed that their psychological health was not good, and therefore, I decided to live alone rather than live with them and go crazy.

Her statement shows that as a migrant in another country who left behind her social circle in her hometown, including her family and friends, even if she made an effort to create a new social circle with which she could establish strong bonds the way she had with her existing social circle, due to both her advancing age and being a newcomer in a foreign country, she was not able to succeed in formulating a new one. Moreover, there were those solo-dwellers who offered her to cohabit with them, yet she did not take into account these offers as viable options since she actually did not consider them as people who could become part of her social circle because of their mental health problems, which made her feel if she had lived with them, she would have experienced similar problems.

As another aspect of the issue, the pressures created by commuting from home to one's workplace can be an important factor for one to decide to live alone by moving into another city where s/he does not actually desire to live. A respondent, for example, felt she had no option but to live alone since she got tired of shuttling from one city to another every working day while for some time refusing to move into the city she had to work due to not enjoying living in there. In this respect, Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married) stated that:

I was appointed to -City-. I did not settle in -City- for two years. It's not about being scared of loneliness, but I didn't like -City-. I was born and raised in Ankara. I go back and forth between the two cities for two years. Afterwards, I became tired. I couldn't make it to [work]. So I had to settle here. If a position is opened in Ankara, of course my social circle is there since my childhood, everyone, my acquaintances and my friends are there. So I'm still not very fond of this place. It's a good, beautiful, pleasant city, but it's not

Ankara or Istanbul... So, it's not something I prefer (living alone). Am I having trouble with it? No. I mean, I'm neutral.

Another respondent simply did not question whether he had any other option or not but accepted the job offer coming with a deal package including him living alone. In this regard, Aslan (Male, 27 years old, never married) indicated that: "When I signed my first professional contract, [my workplace] rented an apartment in -City- in my name. That's where I started living alone."

Indeed, this consideration can be the reflection of one's sense of responsibility towards his/her work. Serhat (Male, 46 years old, never married) expressed that:

I was actually born in Germany. My father returned from Germany and died in 1986 when I was nine years old, but he also divorced my mother. I didn't see my mother. Actually, I grew up very alone... When you look at it, I have always done what I wanted. I loved art from a young age. I was able to follow my dreams because there was no one telling me not to. So, let's say, if I had a parent who would say, 'No, you will be a lawyer or any other thing.' I say this because I look around me. I don't know if it would happen to me either, though... Reading always gave me great pleasure, so I was able to follow these dreams. What could happen? I might not have received an education. I would find a job in -City-. I would continue there. My life could have turned into something else, but it didn't happen to me. I always knew what I wanted to do. So, I came to -City- when I was 22 to study fine arts. I had friends in Ankara; I came from -City- and stayed with them. I wasn't alone then. After graduate school, living alone became a necessity in terms of my production. So when it comes to producing something, from the moment you say you will be a subject as well, things change a little.

He addressed that although he felt like he was alone from the beginning of his life since he was not raised in a traditional family environment in which mother and father figures existed and played their prescribed gender roles, living alone became a necessity once he started to produce his art. Nevertheless, he also highlighted that not growing up in a traditional family could be an advantage in terms of his decision to become an artist and shaping his life in accordance with the necessities his art requires because if he had those traditional mother and father figures, they would have possibly affected his decision while choosing a career path for himself and prevent him from becoming an artist.

### **2.3.2 Starting to live alone as an involuntary decision**

The respondents categorized under this subcategory experienced emotionally loaded life-course changes, particularly in terms of their intimate relationships, which led them to live alone as a consequence. The respondents in this group are Mehtap, Emel, Derya, Murat, Nehir, Suna, Tolga, Oya, Alva and Victor. The mean age of this group is 62.7, which is the oldest group. Most of the respondents in this group are separated or divorced from their ex-partners, while three of them are widowed (Emel, Murat and Suna).

To illustrate, there are those respondents who started to live alone after their separation. For instance, Mehtap (Female, 65 years old, divorced with two children) expressed that:

I started living alone after I separated from my husband. I broke up with my first husband. After that, I married my second husband. I lived with him. Then, after I broke up with my second husband, I started living alone.

Similarly, Derya (Female, 45 years old, divorced with two children) indicated that:

I was actually planning to live with my children. But my ex-husband manipulated the children. ... Since the children were already adults and needed their father's financial possibilities, they sided with their father. I didn't say anything... I stayed with my family for a while, but I was planning to return. I had a plan: my ex-husband would leave, and I would come back and live with my children. It didn't happen that way. ... Since there was no divorce or division of property yet, I did not establish a new order for myself. But something nice happened. There was a house of my friend's mother, ... and the house became empty ... Then my friend insisted very much and said, why are you doing this to yourself? Go there, there is an empty house, you will feel freer, etc... So I went to that house. I lived in there for about 1.5 years.

Alva (Female, 57 years old, separated with two children), who also started to live alone after her separation, and said that:

I had a divorce. I met the father of my children when I was maybe 23, got my first child when I was 24 that was very fast. So then we have been living together like 26 years and then we divorced. And then I was living alone... It was I who kind of divorced. It was not a mutual agreement. It was a bit of catastrophe, very very sad actually. And now I have a boyfriend and he doesn't really want to live together. For him, it's too big step I think.

It was she who made the decision to separate from her partner, but at the same time, she was affected negatively by this separation. On the other hand, the decision to live alone was more of a side effect and an involuntary consequence of her separation,

which is something she underlined as the norm in Sweden; therefore, she did not have any other option to think of. Moreover, even if she does not want to maintain her living arrangement and desires to cohabit with her current partner due to her partner's unwillingness to live together, she continues to live alone.

Some respondents specifically underlined that once their roles as parents in a familial setting are no longer needed by their adult children, the problem of redefining their relationship as a couple rather than parents became a reason for the separation. In this respect, Alva underlined this aspect related to her divorce. A similar situation is also the case for Victor (Male, 69 years old, separated with 2 children) that he dealt with this as a problem in his former marriage. Even though he underlined that the main reason behind their separation was non-existing sex life between him and his ex-wife, he also underlined that he questioned his life and also his marriage after his children became grown-ups.

In this context, he stated that his marriage life mainly revolved around his children; however, when the children reached to an age that they can take care of themselves, he again as in the case of Alva lost his purpose as the family man. Indeed, when he completed this part of his role in the family, he possibly redefined his relationship with his ex-wife yet he did not get a response from her as the way he expected in terms of intimacy. So he explained his separation from his ex-wife that:

It was really my former wife's unwillingness to have an intimate relationship. It's really all about that. I had a period on work. It was very very tough and I ended up for a sick leave... I had customers pouring their discontent and anger over my head couple of times a day. So, I started with this psychologist and it took only one or two sessions. Then we started talking about my marriage. So that was that. She got me to see that it doesn't necessarily have to be like this. So that was a big push.

For those respondents who are widowed, living alone is surely an involuntary decision, but even if the transition process is very painful, it does not automatically bring along a negative sensation of living alone, which is the case for Emel (Female, 68 years old, widow with two children). She expressed that:

My husband got sick. Suddenly we lost him. After that, I had to live alone. My daughter got married. My son got married ... Sometimes you have to live

alone. But I'm not complaining. The neighborhood is nice, the environment I live in is nice. So I'm happy with my life. I have no complaints.

Even if starting to live alone after being an empty-nester when her daughter left the family house, as another widow, Suna (Female, 62 years old, widow with a child) indicated that:

After losing my husband, I had to live alone. I don't have any relatives here. People from Turkey have aunts, uncles or sisters-in-law in here. I have no one, just me and my daughter, and of course I have priceless friends... I did not choose to live alone willingly. I lost my husband, and I didn't think about getting married because my child was a girl. Because the news I heard and the events I read frightened me. And more precisely, I could not replace my husband with anyone.

Her statement shows that as a single parent of a daughter, she would have never thought of remarrying with another man who may hurt her daughter, but most importantly, since she actually still grieves over her deceased husband, she did not think of being with some other man. Nehir (Female, 60 years old, divorced with a child) who is also an empty-nester expressed that:

... I got married and my ex-husband and I shared the same house for 11 years. I had a daughter and I got divorced when my daughter was 10 years old. I started living with my daughter and left the house I lived in with my ex-husband and moved to another house. I lived there with my daughter ... Then my daughter went abroad ... I started living alone and they call this empty-nest syndrome. I experienced it. So I fell into a mild depression. Because all those rituals including seeing the light of her room when coming home, knowing she was at home when entering the house or welcoming her after school were over and I fell into a void. I even made an artwork about this representing that period.

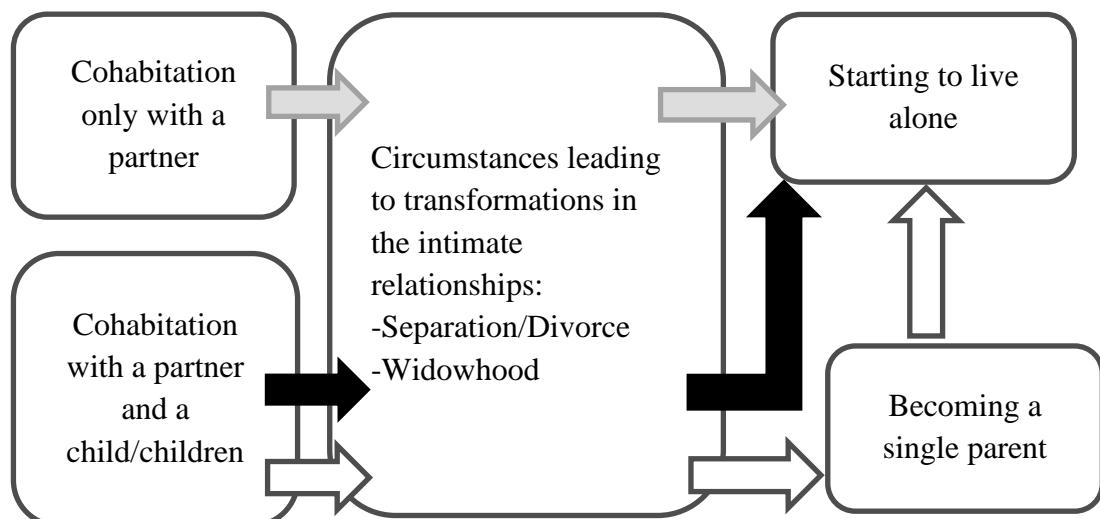
She highlighted that as in the case of widowhood, the transition process can again be painful for the empty-nesters whose children leave the family house. Tolga (Male, 67 years old, separated with 2 children) is another empty nester who looked after his children after his separation from his ex-wife, which was due to his ex-wife's leaving him after she found out about her illness. In this regard, Tolga indicated that:

When I started to be alone in 2010, I was both working and taking care of my children. The first year was really tough for me. The second year was even tougher because it was very difficult for a man to both work and take care of the children. After two years, I got used to being alone.

His statement exhibits that while he embraces traditional gender roles and expects his wife to fulfill her domestic duties including raising the children, when she got sick and chose to leave her house and even the country to get her treatment in Turkey, he had difficulty in embracing and fulfilling both of these gender roles. He was the one bringing home the bread and the one who also took care of all the domestic tasks. In this respect, he also wanted to underline that his wife's leaving affected him negatively while he has felt already bad about her sickness. After a long, married life (they were married for nearly 30 years) in which husband and wife followed their traditional gender roles, he had hard times to adopt himself to such a transition.

In general, it is possible to talk about three main routes followed by those respondents to start living alone, which is displayed in Figure 3. There are those respondents who only cohabited with their partners (Mehtap, Emel, Murat, Oya, and Alva), and even if all of them have children, their children had left the family house before they either separated/divorced or lost their partners. Therefore, when they lived through a transformation in their intimate relationships as a result of separation/divorce or widowhood, they directly started to live alone. On the other hand, there are those respondents who formerly cohabited both with their partners and their child/children before they separated/divorced or lost their partners. These respondents can start to live alone directly afterward (Derya and Victor) or become single parents (Nehir, Suna, and Tolga). Those single parents start to live alone after their child/children leave the family house.

Figure 4: Circumstances leading to transformations in intimate relationships



## **2.4 Factors affecting the pathways leading to living alone**

### **2.4.1 Cultural Aspect**

Since the data has been collected both in Turkey and Sweden, it is possible to detect some differences based on certain cultural characteristics attached to each country between the two groups of respondents in terms of the pathways leading them to live alone. In this regard, it can be illuminating to look closely at country-specific peculiarities that may provide a framework to understand these diversifications between the two groups.

To begin with, Sweden is among the countries with the highest number of solo-living people (OECD, 2024), while historically, it took the lead with the “lowest average household size and highest percentage of single-person households” within the Western countries (Popenoe, 1987: 179). In other words, in Sweden living alone as a mode of living has a long history and it is a common way of living; thus, it is a social norm (Trost, 2016).

Sweden is identified as a country where individuals and individual values precede familial ties, which brings along relatively weak family links (Reher, 1998). In this regard, while mostly the younger members of the family leave the parental house at an early age to establish their individual house order without needing to get married and move to a separate house, those more vulnerable members of society, specifically the elderly in need of support, seek help from the established public or private institutions rather than their families (Reher, 1998). In this context, it is much easier in Sweden to make the decision to leave the family house and accordingly to live alone. As a matter of fact, it is something encouraged and considered to be healthy to leave the family house after a certain age.

In terms of domestic relationships, the country was able to formulate an individualistic, egalitarian, and secular family definition while challenging the patriarchal understanding of family with the earlier official-legal interventions (making family law reform in the early 20th century) (Therborn, 2004: 196). In the country, cohabitation – i.e., having a shared household with one’s romantic partner rather than marriage – is a very common phenomenon. Cohabitation is even

considered a “social institution” along with marriage (Trost, 2008: 50). On the one hand, due to its prevalence, since the late 1960s, non-marital cohabitation was termed “sambo” and officially recognized (Trost, 2016: 19). On the other hand, later on, another form of relationship type was coined as “särbo,” which is also known as “living apart together,” referring to relationships consisting of couples living in different households (Trost, 2016: 22). In other words, while marriage as a more rigid type of family formation was losing its appeal and eligibility for the Swedish people, alternative relationship types, including non-marital cohabitation and non-residential relationships, have become more prevalent and preferable.

In their book “The Swedish Theory of Love,” Berggren and Trägårdh (2022) elaborated the individualist tradition in the country. The authors indicated while Sweden has a strong welfare state tradition, this strong state actually derives its legitimacy from its citizens’ desire for social equality and individual autonomy rather than certain communitarian or nationalistic ideals (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 29). They underlined that Swedish society can be characterized with an alliance between state and individual that the individual is given the opportunity to be independent from his or her family and the charity of the civil society (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 30). While the principle of equality lies at the heart of the process of liberation, the main feature of this equality is actually individual autonomy. In other words, only autonomous individuals can be considered equals.

Berggren and Trägårdh (2022) highlighted that in the Scandinavian countries including Sweden, the welfare policies are mainly overarching and establishes a direct exchange relationship between the state and the citizens in terms of rights and duties rather than entailing certain intermediaries such as family, employers or voluntary organizations (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 31). For instance, the social insurance system was formulated in a way that the individual’s relationship with his or her family, employer, or some kind of charitable organization does not matter for one’s benefitting of the system (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 31). In this regard, the direct dependence on family, neighbors, employers and civil society is aimed to be minimized. They asserted that:

Statist individualism has an antisocial aspect: the lone citizen whose freedom is dependent on a powerful state. There is a good deal of romanticizing of

solitude and freedom in the images of Swedishness to be found in classic Swedish literature and contemporary popular culture (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 33).

They remarked that whereas according to the critics of this system, there is a conformist image of the Swedish citizen who reposes on a strong state and prefers to keep his or her distance from one another, what defines the social relations of the Swedish society is not their absence, but rather their being based on voluntary choice (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 34). The authors coined the way Swedish people view their all interpersonal relationships as “the Swedish theory of love” and noted that in the country there is a notion of pure love built on a foundation of autonomy rather than mutual dependence. They argued that on the one hand, when it is about love and family, individuals become part of a larger entity that is stronger and bigger than the total of its individual members, which is the case in the most parts of the world, and there is either an emphasis on family values or strong kinship ties (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 36). On the other hand, there is an emphasis on individual autonomy. In this context, when people are self-sufficient, specifically in terms of finances and law, they can be sure that they love and are loved in return, in the absence of instrumental motives or compulsion of a forced relationship (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 36). In this view, love based on independence is considered more genuine since individuals do not have to make compromises from themselves while the relationship is built on a spontaneous encounter of the two autonomous people.

In contrast to Sweden, living alone as an apparent social phenomenon is a recent development in Turkey. With the establishment of the republic in the country, a modern and secular way of governing and arranging relationships in both official and social arenas by following the country’s Western counterparts was tried to be adopted while trying to leave behind the Ottoman tradition (Therborn, 2004). Nevertheless, these attempts, which aimed to bring along a full-scale modernization embraced all around the country did not yield the desired results but having a limited sphere of influence (Therborn, 2004: 88). In this respect, the country is mainly characterized to accommodate modern and traditional values together.

In the country, patriarchal values can be very much visible in family affairs. Even until the early 2000s, there are official references to the patriarchal understanding of

the family such as “the legal doctrine of male family headship” and wives’ requiring to have permission of their husbands for seeking jobs (Therborn, 2004: 112).

Therefore, even the legal removal of the patriarchal family conception is a recent phenomenon in the country, which did not find an overall embracement within the society. In this context, traditional gender roles in marriage and also the approach towards single women based on sexual purity expectations are still accepted cultural norms of society (Sakallı-Uğurlu, Türkoğlu, Kuzlak & Gupta, 2021).

In addition, while the number of extended families, which is still an existing family form, especially in the eastern regions of the country, and more traditional practices like demanding bride price or having arranged marriages are decreasing in the country, certain traditional values still persist including adopting traditional gender roles in a marriage or prioritizing family and kinship affairs (Cindoglu, Çemrek, Toktas & Zencirci, 2008). In this respect, even if Turkish people less and less prefer to live with their parents, they still support their parents in case of need and even live with them; moreover, they maintain their strong ties with their older family members by living closer to them (Aytaç, 1998). Indeed, in case of living with the older family members if it is not specifically based on certain needs of support, it mainly consolidates patriarchal understanding of family since in these cases dominantly it is the husband’s family they cohabit (Aykan & Wolf, 2000).

In order to gain further insight about family patterns and, accordingly, the formulation of relationships among family members in Turkey, the study of Kagitcibasi and Ataca (2005) can be illuminating. The authors pointed out individualism and family-collectivism duality while explaining two essential and also opposing family patterns: the “family model of interdependence and family model of independence” (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005: 319). The family model of interdependence is assumed to be prominent in rural and less-developed socioeconomic settings with ‘cultures of relatedness’, and the family relationships are mainly shaped by such interdependence among the members (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005: 319). The family model of independence is assumed to be prominent in urban, industrialized socioeconomic settings with individualistic cultures and the family relationships are defined over independence among the members. Sweden is considered to be a salient example of this model (Liljeström, 2002: 63).

In the family model of interdependence, having children are mainly valued over its economic contribution to the family (utilitarian value of children) (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005: 318). In this respect, families are more dependent to the children's material contributions and also are more prone to consider them as their old-age security (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005: 320). There is an intergenerational dependency. In these less developed, less affluent settings, with collectivistic mutually dependent family patterns, young adults are the ones providing financial assistance to their elderly parents. In other words, there is a wealth flow towards parents, especially through patrilineage, which has the implications of "son preference" and high fertility (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005: 320). On the other hand, in the family model of independence which is situated in individualistic cultural contexts with industrial, urban lifestyles, children are mainly conceived as economic costs rather than economic assets, and provision of other sources of financial support in old age, wealth flows are towards children, not towards the elderly parents (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005: 320). Low fertility and the relatively higher status of women are stated to be the characteristics of this family structure.

However, the authors argued that in Turkey, the relationship between the parents and child is formulated more in line with the "model of psychological (emotional) interdependence" by prioritizing the psychological value of having children when the decision to have children is made (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005). This means the parents and child are emotionally interdependent; that is, both are emotionally responsible against one another, and they are expected to fulfill the requirements of this emotion-based relationship in accordance with their identified roles in the family. Therefore, rather than their economic and/or utilitarian value, in Turkish families, children have more psychological value based on the feelings of appreciation and emotional satisfaction of having children.

These cultural differences between the two countries can be traced explicitly in the data in terms of the understanding related to young adults leaving the family house as part of a process to step into adulthood and become self-reliant and autonomous, as well as the perception concerning older adults living with their children and their children's families in an extended family structure. These will be elaborated below.

#### **2.4.1.1 Stepping into adulthood**

As discussed above, the existing literature focusing on the Western context highlights that a grown-up child's leaving the family house in order to become an adult and a self-dependent individual is the norm, which is also the case for the respondents from Sweden. In a country where a family is based on the unity of autonomous partners who value independence highly, young adult children, as the members of the family, also enjoy greater autonomy compared to their peers living in different parts of the world (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022: 38). In this context, leaving the family house can be conceived as a step toward adulthood and gaining autonomy to become a self-sufficient, independent individual for Swedes; therefore, it is something expected to happen as well as a natural thing to happen. On the other hand, in the Turkish case, young adults need to have an excuse to leave the family house, which can persuade families who have emotionally interdependent relationships with their children. This possibly means that those who want to leave the family house and live alone should battle to carry out their desire to do that.

Relatedly, when we look at the data, we see that the respondents from Sweden addressed that leaving the family house as a young adult is almost a natural process which does not require any specific reasons. On the other hand, Turkish respondents accentuated that one is required to have a good reason to leave the family house, such as studying at a university in another city or working in another city. In other words, moving to a new location away from their hometown provides them the tools necessary to justify moving out of the family house and eventually living alone. Leaving the family house to live alone is not considered a natural process, which young adults can simply decide to do. Even if he or she can economically afford this, in these cases they still needed an excuse to do that.

Indeed, this can be traced in the data as well. For example, Gaye (Female, 52 years old, never married) expressed that:

My family was against me renting a house when I was a student. After that, life brought this. They didn't say much. They just wanted me to be with them in Istanbul. But I loved Ankara. I didn't want to leave anywhere. Then they accepted it. No parent actually wants or supports their child being away from them.

She explained that after she got accepted into a university located in a different city distant from her family house and moved there to study her major, her family disapproved her renting an apartment, yet at some point, as she continued her academic career in other distant places they somehow acknowledge the situation. However, the respondent specifically highlighted that no family voluntarily consents to sending their children away from themselves.

On the other hand, the respondents themselves become more reflexive about the process of leaving the family house and starting to live by themselves away from their families, either while living alone or cohabiting, and they appreciate it since they were able to learn a lot from it, which would possibly not be the case if they had continued to live with their parents. Accordingly, Koray (Male, 29 years old, never married) stated that:

Of course, it endowed me a lot. First of all, you have the opportunity to improve yourself a lot as an individual. Let me give an example. If I had stayed with my family, with my mother, I would not have learned how to cook or how to clean. For example, many of the things I do now, which will affect my married life, are things that do not seem difficult. For example, if my mother had raised me by then, these would have been very difficult now. As I said, cleaning, cooking, ironing, I got used to these things because I live alone now or with my friends during my university years, and these are also obligations for me. There is nothing difficult about them for me right now. But if it had happened otherwise, if I had been with my family, I would not have done any of this.

At this point, it should be also highlighted that all the young and middle-aged Turkish respondents had a former cohabitation experience as a step between leaving the family house and starting to live alone, specifically while they were university students in another city distant from their family house. Either living in a dormitory or sharing an apartment with housemates, some respondents particularly underscored the value of the cohabitation experience they lived through in their university years in terms of stepping into adulthood. To illustrate, Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married) indicated that:

So when you stay outside (in a different city away from family house), for example, you get sick, you struggle on your own. So there is no one with you, maybe except your close friend. I can say that this matured me a little more in that respect. At university you meet different people, ... It was nice, I was happy with that crowd. I didn't prefer to move in an apartment. We could rent an apartment, but dormitory life is more crowded, people are together.

Even if she did not live alone at the time, since she stayed in the dormitory while away from her parents, she emphasized that this enabled her to step into adulthood by taking responsibility for herself alone. At the same time, she also accentuated that studying at a university away from her family house and living in a dormitory facilitated her to access all the opportunities provided by the university with a full package of university life experience.

In effect, the intermediary cohabitation experiences that they lived through while they were university students can be characterized as moderating transition periods before they started to live alone since even if they started to live by themselves away from their families, who are the main providers of support until then and started to make decisions for themselves, they were still living in a collective structure that they can support one another, especially in times of need and crisis either in dormitories or in shared student apartments. Various Turkish respondents mentioned that they formulated strong ties and close friendships with some of their friends at the time while they were living in such collectivistic structures. This is not the case for the Swedish respondents since, in their case, accessing more individual housing units rather than more collectivistic ones as a student who has limited financial resources is possible and much easier, which will be elaborated further in the economic aspect subsection.

#### **2.4.1.2 Changing conception of household membership**

It is also important to discuss that for older adults who have children and whose children have established their own nuclear families after leaving their parents' house, living in their children's house is no longer considered an available option. There is a perception among the elderly that they will be a burden to their children if they start to live with them. For those older adults, the thought of being a burden to their children by cohabiting with them possibly aligns with accepting that now they cannot meet their own needs and they depend on the support of their children by switching the roles of the parent and child. Therefore, for older adults, this thought of being a burden can be very disturbing (Izuhara, 2000: 106).

Moreover, they feel that they do not belong to their children's new household and invade their privacy. In this respect, even if it is an involuntary decision, living independently enables them to sustain their self-respect and self-worth. It also prevents possible tensions between the parent and the child due to this confusion with blurring definitions of their roles. Of course, older adults can limit their self-dependence by getting outside help, but again, not from their families to avoid burdening them. In this regard, they can hire someone to assist them in their daily lives instead of living with their children and getting their assistance at the expense of losing their independence (Gangopadhyay, 2020).

When we look at the data, we see that those elderly respondents from Turkey have similar concerns in terms of wishing to be not dependent to anyone, especially to their children, and being self-reliant and independent are very valuable for them because of that. For instance, Emel (Female, 68 years old, widow with two children) expressed that:

I'm happy living alone. May God not make anyone dependent on children. So I come to my daughter as a guest. I go to my son as a guest. So I love my own order, my own home. I would never consider leaving my home and living with my children. They also have their own lives. I mean, if I live with them, I will not find my own place. I am self-sufficient for now. I want to live like this as long as I can, and I continue to do so.

Since she is self-reliant and does not need any outside help at an advanced age, she is pleased with living alone. Relatedly, Mehtap (Female, 65 years old, divorced with two children) indicated that:

Everyone has a routine. Everyone has privacy. In other words, just as I want to be comfortable at my home, my children also want to be comfortable at their home; they want to talk comfortably. They want to be comfortable with their children. As everyone cannot follow my rhythm, I cannot follow theirs. So, at some point, you have to keep a little distance.

Her statement focuses more on differentiating life rhythms and their changing family formulations as her children now have their own nuclear families, to which she does

not belong; thus, she represents a different household. Accordingly, Murat (Male, 70 years old, widower with 2 children) expressed that:

It's better to live alone. Because why would I be a trammel to them? Now my son is working, I cannot go to my daughter-in-law's house. Since it doesn't look good. The woman can be naked, she can take a bath, she can have a guest, her mother can come, and she can talk to someone on the phone. ... Even if I go, for example, to my son in Izmir, he says come, then I say I will come, but are you at home? Are you on a leave? If you're on an annual leave, I'll come. If you're working, I won't come.

Again, a similar case with the former examples is that since they do not consider themselves members of the same familial household as their children, they do not feel comfortable living with them and their families. In other words, living with their children at their children's house is no longer an option for them. Indeed, it can be argued that in those statements Turkish respondents give reference to the traditional family understanding covering an extended family tradition in the country. In Turkey, even if today the number of such extended families is few (mainly limited to the eastern regions of the country), this tradition based on the country's strong filial piety and family ties with intergenerational support still maintains its validity (Aytaç, 1998). Therefore, in the Turkish context, this changing understanding of household membership has a more culturally nuanced meaning, signifying that despite the country's existing strong family ties, more and more older adults who are parents prefer not to cohabit with their children but to live under separate households to be more autonomous.

#### **2.4.2 Economic Aspect**

In addition to the cultural aspect, economic aspect also comes to the forefront in the data. In this context, to start living alone, one should have certain economic means to afford this living arrangement, specifically in the cases of young adults who leave the family house as students to study at a university. Several respondents underlined that since while they were students, they had no economic means to afford living alone or move into an apartment in general, they had to delay their wish. To illustrate, Berk (Male, 33 years old, divorced) indicated that:

So I got into the university ... in 2007. I started living in a dormitory out of necessity. You know, back then, I wanted to rent an apartment and live alone,

but since financial situations did not allow this, I had to stay in the dormitory, and even if I rented a flat, I had to do it together with someone else. If I could choose, I would want to live alone.

In a similar vein, Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married) pointed out that even if he felt suffocated while he was staying in the dormitory since he was financially dependent on his parents, who were experiencing economic hardships at the time and did not have the means to support him financially, he had to postpone his wish to rent a flat and stay in the dormitory. At this point, it can be significant and illuminating to look closer to the available housing since several respondents mentioned it in discussing the pathway leading them to living alone.

#### **2.4.2.1 Housing opportunities**

Housing opportunities are significant economic factors while one starts living alone. Even if one can support herself/himself economically, s/he has a limited budget in terms of affording available houses. In this regard, living in a big city and in a small city matter in terms of availability and affordability of housing. It can be noteworthy to underline that housing opportunities in big cities are much more limited due to expensive housing prices. On the contrary, due to its narrower surface area, small cities may not offer a great variety of housing options to their residents, but still, housing can be much more affordable and accordingly accessible for the residence seekers.

For a student who can be assumed to have relatively limited financial resources, accessing affordable housing can become an issue while finding a place to live, specifically if he or she will live alone. In this respect, Lucas (Male, 30 years old, never married) remarked that there was no such available housing for him when he was a student in a big city; therefore, he chose to move to a small city and study university there, mostly because he wants to live alone. He was not satisfied with the offerings provided by a big city to the university students as he was looking forward to have campus-based student life while also having the opportunity to live alone, both of which are missing in the big city university life. These opportunities were actually provided by a small city which he characterized as a student city. Relatedly, he specified that:

... In Sweden it's pretty common to move out and live alone after you turn 18 or 20 or something like that. And I was trying to do that but it was difficult to get a job and find the opportunity to move out basically. So, I moved to -Town- first to study up in the north. That's when I started living alone for the first time in dorm basically... It's pretty far from Stockholm. But it's somewhat a small city. So getting an apartment isn't as difficult as it is in Stockholm. If I would have studied in Stockholm, it still takes years to get an apartment or even a dorm.

Irmak (Female, 29 years old, never married) who initially lived with a housemate when she had moved to the city she studied remarked that:

I had a roommate back then, and socializing too much made me tired, so I wanted to live alone a little. Also, studio apartments near the university were becoming very common at the time. Because I've always lived with someone with the thought that it would make sense economically. But then I realized that I could live alone with the rent I paid while I was living with someone more or less. After that, I lived alone for two years there.

Her statement exhibits that increasing housing opportunities with more affordable prices for the students in the city she resided while studying enabled her to change her living arrangement from cohabitation to solo living. In other words, she had the chance to voluntarily decide to live alone due to having the necessary economic and material means to afford this.

To illustrate further, Peter (Male, 36 years old, never married) and Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married), who also left their family houses to study at a university in another city, went through different paths due to having different kinds of opportunities in the cities they studied. While Peter studied at the university in a small city in Sweden, Gizem studied at a university in a big city in Turkey. Peter had the opportunity to live alone right away as an undergraduate student by finding a student apartment in the small city he moved in. On the contrary, for the Gizem, the process was gradual. She firstly stayed in the dormitories but in a room that she did not share with a roommate when she was getting her undergraduate education and then when she got her master's degree, she cohabited with a housemate while she was in USA. Finally, when she started doing her doctorate, she moved to a small city in Sweden and started living alone.

The reason why Gizem had to postpone her desire to live alone at an earlier stage of her life is mainly related to her lack of financial resources, which can be assumed to be also related to her studying at university in a big city as increasing her economic incapacity. Since she was a student when she left her family house and continued her higher education abroad, she was in an economically tight situation in which she cannot basically afford such living arrangement. Nevertheless, when she came to Sweden as a Ph.D. student, she got the opportunity to realize her wish to live alone as now she can afford it financially. Moreover, living in a small city in Sweden possibly enhance her financial ability to afford this living arrangement.

Sarp (Male, 31 years old, never married) has experienced living alone both in a big city in Turkey and in a small city in Sweden. His economic resources are sufficient enough to enable him to live alone in both places. However, he also underlined that in a big city in Turkey, this is an expensive thing to do, and in Sweden, the housing market offers very limited options to those who want to rent a flat. He expressed that:

When I first came to -City-, I was offered a house to stay in, and that house was a really bad one. Because its neighborhood was so bad. Everywhere was full of drug dealers. After that, I realized that you can't live where you want in Sweden. Finding a house to rent is difficult. So then I said, what's the solution to this? The solution is to buy a house. When you buy a house, you can live wherever you want. Don't think like Stockholm; house prices here are much lower than in Stockholm.

His statement shows that in a small city in Sweden, as he can afford to buy a house, he did that so that he can choose the house he wants to live in. But if he lived in a big city, that wouldn't be an option for him because house prices are much higher there. Therefore, he might have been living in a flat that he is not happy with, and he would have considered cohabiting with a housemate if he had not afforded to live alone.

The material condition is that a big city provides relatively limited options with a higher demand for housing. Therefore, when someone decides to live in such big cities, there will be certain compromises that should be made by the resident. For instance, in the case of Bartu (Male, 31 years old, never married), he underlined that when he first came to Sweden he lived in a big city where he had to cohabited with different housemates due to not finding a suitable and affordable house to live alone.

On the other hand, when he moved to a small city in the country, he was able to find an affordable house for himself to live alone. His compromise is living with housemates in the big city, but when he got the opportunity to find a housing for solo living, he chose to live alone.

Those who left their family house when they started studying in another city also indicated that as working people, they had to bear certain challenges while living in big cities. To illustrate, in the case of Peter, he underlined that he has a relatively good income which enables him to afford his living arrangement as a solo-dweller easier. However, it should also be noted that even if he likes the neighborhood he lives in, it is distant from his workplace so this is his compromise. In the case of the Lucas, he formerly lived in a small city where he is very close to his workplace. However, he wanted to live in a big city and being close to city center. For this, he made savings, and waited to have the budget to afford a house he can live alone in the big city. Now, his house and his work are distant from each other yet he is not bothered by giving such compromise since this is something he was looking forward to from the beginning, and he is satisfied the way he lives now including his house and his neighborhood.

In the case of Kevin (Male, 39 years old, never married) at the time he was a university student, and with his housing queue, he could have only rented a student studio in a big city, which made him start living alone. He emphasized that this was not something he decided but the available housing he can get led him to live alone. Moreover, he drew attention to the issue that the housing condition in the big city he resides makes him prevent to change his living arrangement since he cannot get a bigger apartment to share with a housemate due to his current housing queue. He specified that:

When you are young and move from your family, it's easier to get a small one-room apartment, a studio. It's also the only affordable option. It's really hard to get a big apartment so you can share a house. But I also think that, like there is a housing career, people begin by climbing the ladder by taking a small studio first and coming into the system, so to speak. So I began by

renting a flat. I was moving between my parents and the one-room apartment of a friend who was away, and then later, I got a student apartment, a studio. That's how it started. But then later I was sharing for two and a half years or three years almost in different constellations for different reasons. I was about to get 3 room apartment for a friend of the family who wanted to leave it, but the landlord did not allow this transition to take place. So I had to take a one-room apartment from the queue. So I was actually never sure; when you are just moving from your family, you want to be maybe independent, but otherwise, it was never really a goal to live alone. It was more a consequence of this situation, material situation.

Aslan (Male, 27 years old, never married) also indicated that it is expensive to live alone in a big city, so he considers this living arrangement is less accessible for those who live there. In his case, he had lived alone in a big city for a brief period before his girlfriend moved in, and this is because the apartment actually belongs to his parents and they economically support him. Moreover, since in the housing market there are not too many options, when his girlfriend was evicted from her apartment<sup>4</sup>, he offered to live together in his parents' apartment as a solution. In other words, the difficulty of finding housing in the city made Aslan abandon his former living arrangement in which he was living alone for the sake of his relationship with his girlfriend.

As discussed above, housing opportunities can be a determinant factor when someone decides to live alone since they can either block or enable one to carry out this decision based on the affordability and, accordingly, accessibility of the houses. In this respect, the differentiation between big and small cities in terms of provided housing opportunities is apparent in the data that big cities with limited and pricey

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<sup>4</sup> In order to provide high quality housing that is affordable for everyone, the public rental housing became the essential element in public policies in Sweden from 1930s to until 1990s (Elander, 1991). This housing system while satisfying the housing needs of a broad cluster of social groups including low and middle income people, turned into one of the main pillars of social democratic welfare state in the country (Turner & Whitehead, 2002). On the other hand, in two decades between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of public rental housing decreased dramatically in Stockholm from %32 to %18, especially in the inner city where is much more profitable in case of such transition, and it has been gradually replaced by market based cooperative housing (Andersson & Turner, 2014). Moreover, the rate of private rental housing dropped to %36 from %73 in the inner city area of Stockholm (Andersson & Turner, 2014). These changes in the housing market triggered a housing shortage in the city and made people to look for alternative solutions to find a housing like renting a housing second-handedly from a first-hand renter. This situation puts them in a vulnerable position, specifically in case of eviction as they do not have legal protection. In this respect, mainly the lower income people affected since it is much more difficult to find an affordable housing in the city.

housing options make it difficult specifically for young adults to become solo-dwellers, whereas small cities by providing more affordable options to their residents facilitate them to become solo-dwellers.

## **2.5 Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter tried to reveal that there are various pathways, as well as various factors affecting these pathways, to living alone. While in the literature, there is a specific tendency to explain these pathways mainly in reference to certain demographic variables, this kind of approach possibly makes us miss out on the nuances and different dimensions of the issue. Moreover, it is also important to explore how the solo-dwellers make sense of these pathways in order to identify the possible associations among these pathways, experiences, and future expectations related to living alone, which will be discussed respectively in the following chapters.

But before moving on to the following chapter, it can be illuminating to discuss the findings of this chapter in terms of what the pathways leading people to live alone are, and under what conditions they emerge. So, I categorized four pathways leading people to live alone, including “voluntary decision,” “preference,” “consequence of life-changing events” and “involuntary decision,” which are depicted in Table 1. In all these pathways, it is possible to observe the effects of the demographic factors discussed in the literature. In this respect, the voluntary decision to live alone as having the youngest age average among all categories is common among younger respondents, and it reflects the individualistic tendencies among this group. In this group, living alone is mainly considered a necessary phase that one should experience for his or her self-development. Accordingly, adulthood is equated with being self-reliant in every aspect of one’s life, and by living alone, one can achieve this goal to become a self-dependent adult. In other words, it is a self-investment process in which one can increase his or her individual value. Moreover, there is an attributed importance to privacy and having personal space in line with the increasing individualist tendencies.

In the case of living alone as a preference, it is possible to see the demographic differentiation based on age groups much more explicitly. On the one hand, for older adults, the decision is mainly made between whether one chooses a traditional way of living by establishing a family of their own while embracing traditional gender roles or not. There is this alternative lifestyle in the form of a package covering living alone; therefore, the decision is primarily made for the former, and then the latter follows it secondarily. Indeed, there is also a cultural aspect of the issue since, in the Turkish context, one needs to challenge the norm by choosing the latter, whereas, in the Swedish context, it is more of a conformist behavior since it is accepted as part of the social norm. On the other hand, for young and middle-aged adults, the motivation for preferring living alone is much more pragmatic, including both personal and/or work-related reasons, since they simply focus on the convenience of this living arrangement by characterizing it as an instrument in order to carry out their primary decisions.

Essentially, both living alone as a preference and as a consequence of life-changing events specifically reveal that for young and middle-aged adults, their careers have a primary place while making life-related decisions and plans. In this sense, living alone provides them the flexibility they need to adapt to the changes their work or career requires easily. Finally, as the opposite of voluntary decision, involuntary decision is more of an old age phenomenon by being the oldest group among all, which is again in line with the demographic discussions in the literature since it is related to the transformations in one's intimate relationships like separation or divorce and widowhood that become more prominent and common with the advancing age.

Even if the cultural differentiations between Turkey and Sweden do not become manifest themselves as a specific pathway in the data, it is still possible to argue that such cultural nuances are important factors affecting these pathways. As I discussed above, the most prominent differentiation can be observed when a young adult leaves the family house and forms his or her own individual living order. In this respect, while in the Turkish context, young adults are required to have a valid reason to

leave the family house, like studying at university or working in another city away from their hometown, in the Swedish context, leaving the family house is a normalized process that is an expected behavior to do by the young adults. However, this should not necessarily be perceived as a result of individual struggle or initiative but possibly signal more of a structural change in the Turkish context. The opportunities of getting a higher and better education and/or finding a white-collar job are mostly available in the big cities, which is also the case in the country. Therefore, internal migration from more rural areas to urban ones became more or less inevitable for those pursuing an urban lifestyle in which they can access all those opportunities and have the chance to formulate a life path for themselves that can be different from the traditional ones.

Indeed, when living alone is identified as an urban phenomenon in the relevant literature, it is also characterized as a specific lifestyle with a certain mentality, including all those individualist values and accordingly changing priorities of the urbanites while underlining the differentiation between urban and rural areas, which can also be traced in the Turkish case as the cultural aspect of the issue. Nevertheless, at this point, the cultural and economic aspects actually intersect since the opportunities big cities provide cannot be considered independently from the economic cost of these opportunities as to whether they are equally accessible for any socio-economic group. In the data, respondents who are mostly living in Sweden clearly highlighted that, especially in terms of housing opportunities, big cities offer limited and expensive housing options, and they were mainly able to start living alone in smaller cities where housing is much more affordable. In Turkey, living alone can still be considered an urban phenomenon that the educated middle classes can afford; however, in Sweden, those educated middle classes who embrace this urban lifestyle are mainly not in a condition to afford to do so in the big cities but in small cities. Therefore, in Sweden, living alone in a big city has become more and more an upper-class phenomenon, whereas the middle classes are more likely to live alone in smaller cities.

While these above-mentioned discussions deserve to be analyzed more carefully and deeply, they can be considered an attempt to pave the way for future research objectives as well as an initial presentation of the findings related to the pathways leading to living alone, which will be elaborated and discussed further specifically in terms of its associations with other objects of inquiry, namely experiences of living alone and future expectations in the following chapters.



Table 1: Pathways leading to living alone

<b>Pathways:</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Key Characteristics</b>
<b>Voluntary Decision</b>	A deliberate and intentional choice to live alone driven by individualistic motivations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Viewed as a transformative and/or necessary step.</li> <li>- Emphasizes independence, autonomy, or personal growth.</li> <li>- High emotional investment.</li> </ul>
<b>Preference</b>	Living alone is chosen because it is convenient or practical.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secondary to broader decisions (e.g., career).</li> <li>- Neutral framing, less emotional weight.</li> <li>- Often situational.</li> </ul>
<b>Consequence of Life-Changing Events</b>	Living alone results from external circumstances such as relocation due to work or education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decision is circumstantial.</li> <li>- Often framed as inevitable.</li> <li>- Perceived as neutral or functional.</li> </ul>
<b>Involuntary Decision</b>	Living alone follows emotionally significant life events such as separation, divorce, or widowhood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of perceived choice.</li> <li>- Often involves grief or adaptation.</li> <li>- Tied to loss or relational changes.</li> </ul>
<b>Factors Affecting Pathways:</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Key Characteristics</b>
<b>Cultural Norms (Swedish Case)</b>	Living alone is a natural progression into adulthood, rooted in cultural expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Autonomy and independence are prioritized.</li> <li>- Weak family ties.</li> <li>- Minimal emotional or practical barriers.</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Norms (Turkish Case)</b>	Living alone needs to be grounded to a valid excuse like studying or working in another city away from the family house.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Autonomy and independence are not prioritized.</li> <li>- Strong family ties.</li> <li>- Existence of emotional or practical barriers.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Necessity</b>	Living alone is shaped by financial or housing constraints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Housing affordability and availability matter.</li> <li>- Decisions may involve compromises (e.g., location, roommates).</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER III

### EXPERIENCE OF LIVING ALONE

When we look at our data as well as the related literature, the two themes “vulnerability” and “independence” come to the forefront while characterizing the experience of living alone. In general, these two themes set an analytical framework, which contains various subcategories and sublayers of the solo-dwellers’ experience. On the one hand, vulnerability refers to being in a relatively fragile condition regarding one’s health and well-being due to their living arrangement. On the other hand, independence mainly refers to not being spatiotemporally bounded or accountable to anyone. Independence and vulnerability are the themes that have been mainly positioned as opposed to each other in the literature concerning either how the solo-dwellers experience living alone or how officially or scholarly it is discussed while only one of them became the object of inquiry (Bergland, Tveit & Gonzalez, 2016; Gangopadhyay, 2020; Klinenberg, 2001; Portacolone, 2011; Russell, 2007; van den Hoonaard, 2009; Yetter, 2010; Wong & Verbrugge, 2009). However, this study is intended to shed light on both of these oppositely positioned concepts while attempting to explore and detail as many subtle underlying layers as possible.

#### 3.1 Vulnerability

Vulnerability as an experience of living alone can be positioned at the negative extreme of the spectrum while independence can be considered at the positive extreme.

There is extensive research constructing a relationship between living alone and health, investigating the issue from different angles. When we elaborate on this literature as well as our own data, we can come up with two main categories regarding how living alone affects health. These categories include, essentially, physical and mental vulnerabilities associated with living alone. In this context, physical vulnerabilities mainly contain cases of illness and death, age-related physical hardships, and the general physical condition based on self-rated health evaluations of solo-dwellers (Bergland & Engedal, 2011; Henning-Smith & Gonzales, 2020; Kojima et al., 2020; Matthews, Rasmussen, Ambler, Danese & Eugen-Olsen, 2024; Meisinger, Kandler & Ladwig, 2009; Li et al., 2024; Pimouquet et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2021; Kandler, Meisinger, Baumert & Löwel 2007). Other than illness and age-related mortality, some research also set forth the association between living alone and pre-mature death due to either substance abuse or suicide (Calati et al., 2019; Chai, Liu, Huang & Tan, 2023; Shaw et al., 2021).

Mental vulnerabilities include feeling of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and other mental/cognitive difficulties (Bu, Steptoe & Fancourt, 2020; Charpentier & Kirouac, 2022; Fukunaga et al., 2012; Stahl, Beach, Musa & Schulz, 2017; Vasile et al., 2024; Widhowati, Chen, Chang, Lee & Fetzer, 2020; Zheng et al., 2023). Finally, although some authors also refer to social vulnerabilities, these are essentially well-known sociological disadvantages that might affect solo-living people as much as any other group such as socio-economic status (living in poverty) (Klinenberg, 2001; Wong & Verbrugge, 2009), social network type and size (loose and limited social ties) (Djundeva, Dykstra & Fokkema, 2019; Kersten, Mund & Neyer, 2024) and lack of social support (having lower levels of support due to mainly being childless or not having a partner) (Chen et al., 2014a; Chen, Hicks & While, 2014b; Chen & While, 2019; Forward, Khan & Fox, 2021; Pei, Cong & Wu, 2020; Sakurai et al., 2019; Stahl et al., 2017; Xu, Norstrand & Du, 2015). Here, therefore, I will not consider it as a separate type of vulnerability but I will return to the ways in which sociological disadvantages can mediate physical and mental vulnerabilities in the discussion part.

All these related research studies on the topic put forward an association between living alone and health, mostly in negative terms. In this respect, living alone is argued to affect health and well-being negatively and turn solo dwellers into vulnerable residents because of their living arrangements. Nevertheless, there is a need to look closer at the relationship between living alone and health by elaborating on whether solo-dwellers are vulnerable, if they are vulnerable, in what circumstances, and whether this vulnerability is specifically related to their living arrangement.

### **3.1.1 Physical Vulnerabilities**

In the studies focusing on the relationship between physical health and living alone, when an association between the two is revealed, since it is not like a causal relationship, how they affect each other cannot be explicitly displayed. Therefore, elaboration on the subject by primarily concentrating on presenting an association between the two can easily lead to possible nuances in this relationship being overlooked. In our data, we can actually observe these nuances related to physical health and living alone in the respondents' experiences and different sensations. There are those respondents who have experienced certain physical health issues including accidental bodily injury, chronic illness and COVID-19 in the pandemic process. These respondents are Defne (bodily injury), Canan (COVID-19), Serhat (chronic illness), Beril (bodily injury), Tuna (illness), Lale (illness), Nehir (COVID-19) and Tolga (COVID-19).

In this context, Beril (Female, 84-years-old, never married) as an older adult that is the main target population of the studies within the topic expressed that:

I had some difficulties while establishing [an institution], and I fell down before that. I fell backwards, broke my spine. After that, some things changed in my life, and I started taking a lot of medication... After it was decided to establish that museum, I had to organize it, take every precaution to protect it, and train people... That's the time when I got very sick. My blood pressure went up. The conditions were actually very good, but not for me... I had some trouble there. I had bleeding, etc., but they are over now. Once I undertook duties at a certain level, I felt a little more relaxed... Now, due to these diseases, I have to get up several times throughout the night and into the

morning, taking some extra medication. Because this blood pressure issue is very bad and has become something that disrupts the functioning of my heart. That's why I have to wake up every two hours until the morning, and then I go back to sleep.

In her statement, she underlined that both an accidental event and her workload and accordingly occurring work-related stress caused the deterioration of her health. Due to having such poor health, she has to bear certain consequences, which pull down her quality of life. It can be argued that she became vulnerable as a solo-living older adult against the risks of having such health issues and being alone in her immediate living environment. Moreover, the respondent herself also said that "so it looks like this (living alone) will be troublesome in old age." Nevertheless, the context she gave while establishing this relationship between living alone and her health condition is important. She expressed that:

...I can maintain living this life because I don't want to live a luxurious life, but I live by looking into my finances. That is not a good thing. It's very difficult at this age. Healthcare costs, in particular, have changed a lot. So I'm really having a hard time. One of my medical analyses costs around 2000-2500 with 20% payment. So think, just 20% of it. Actually, it seems like too much... The money I invest for health is too much.

In other words, what makes her vulnerable as a solo-living elderly who has poor physical health is the health costs she has to meet by herself rather than living alone. For specifically older adults with a more or less stable income who cannot return to the labor market to earn extra income by working, the ambiguity of health costs, whether they will rise sharply to a limit one cannot afford with his or her earnings, can bring along this vulnerability. This can indeed be explained as a social vulnerability mediating physical health issues based on low socio-economic status. Nevertheless, it can lead to missing out on something. On paper, she possibly seems not to have a low socioeconomic status (she has several houses and other kinds of real estate); however, in the absence of comprehensive health coverage, she feels her current way of living is threatened and made her vulnerable. Therefore, living alone by itself does not explain much about why she became physically as well as socially vulnerable as an elderly with poor physical health. In this respect, vulnerability results from not being able to maintain one's accustomed way of living and going

down below a level they determined as their threshold for normal. Adapting to a new condition, especially at an advanced age, which is worse off than one's former living conditions, can easily produce such an outcome.

Meanwhile, it should be also highlighted that there are those respondents who more directly establish a link between living alone and being very old in terms of being vulnerable due to deteriorating health with advancing age. Yet, in these cases there are rather concerns about what will future bring instead of experiencing certain effects related to age at the time. To illustrate, Alva (Female, 57 years old, separated with 2 children) and Eva (Female, 65 years old, never married) pointed out their considerations that it would not be wise to live alone at a very old age when one will become physically very vulnerable and fragile.

Indeed, these are more of concerns based on possible scenarios that can happen in the future when one gets old, according to the respondents. Other than the relatively vague association between living alone and physical health discussed formerly, a more direct relationship between them based on experiences was also formulated and defined by the respondents. But again, this relationship is not simply a negative one. There are examples of both negative and positive relationships in accordance with the different perspectives of the respondents. On the one hand, Serhat has a chronic illness, and when he has seizures, he questions his living arrangement and feels vulnerable due to being alone at his home since nobody is there to help him get through these episodes. He expressed that:

Sometimes I would get a lot of headaches, but I later learned that it was due to blood pressure. I would wake up in the morning with a headache, I was coughing, I felt like my head was going to explode, what would happen at home, would I die, etc. My head is pounding like this, I start vomiting and so on. This was caused by high blood pressure; in fact, it was very high at that moment. I always had it. I force myself to vomit in the sink, then crawl to bed, etc. Every part of me feels numb, then I say let me rest for a while. Then I take a shower with warm water. But I'm really crawling. I like it sometimes, but it is what it is. Because of the health issue, I can say that this aspect of living alone scares me... When I'm sick, I think something, like psychologically, not all the time; for example, if you have a headache like this or nausea or something, you may say you have to get up now because you need to eat. Now you should cook, but you can't in that condition. It's hard. You're forcing it. You know, if there was someone, a woman, there, she would cook a hot pot of food.

In a similar vein, Tuna (Male, 74 years old, never married) specified that:

I had an illness a few times. It's something I need to figure out on my own, but I can't move. My vein burst. I never expected that I suddenly started losing blood. There was no phone, it was far away. So there has to be someone. For example, I had a friend. He was alone. Because as you get older, you enter the risk group. I think he had a blood clotting at home and he was alone. He had separated from his wife a long time ago. He couldn't be reached for about 3-4 hours. Of course, unfortunately, he has been living paralyzed for 3 years, it is very bad. Why? Because he stayed like this for a long time, I guess the medical intervention has a certain duration. Then what happens is you start to be afraid of being alone.

Both his experience of such a health condition and also what his friend experienced make him concerned about being alone at home. Indeed, in the case of Tuna, there is an age-related worry that he defines himself within the risk group due to his advancing age, which makes him more alarmed about his living arrangement.

Moreover, Canan (Female, 28 years old, never married) who had COVID-19 during the pandemic process expressed similar concerns related to becoming vulnerable when having poor health based on her former experience of sickness and said that “As a disadvantage (of living alone), no one could take care of me while I had COVID-19. So no one can take care of you when you are sick”.

On the other hand, Lale (Female, 54 years old, divorced with one child) pointed out the opposite side of the issue and how being alone at home actually works in her favor due to her physical health problems. She indicated that:

I have a health problem; I even manage myself with difficulty. Sometimes, while I'm cooking or doing anything else, I say this, for example, I came home from school tired, if I lived at home with someone, there might be something I should do with them. I don't know, an event or, eating a meal together. But for example, I came home from school that day, I was very tired, my leg was hurting, so I immediately prepared some oats, watched a movie, ate it, and went to bed. And that day, I said, oh my God, I'm glad there is no one in my life.

As her statement exhibits, in her case, being alone at home enables her to rest by herself after a tiring workday, which she needs due to her health issues, rather than spending this time with someone from the household. In other words, rather than feeling vulnerable as a solo-dweller, she actually finds her living arrangement advantageous in her case.

### **3.1.2 Mental Vulnerabilities**

When making a separation between different types of vulnerabilities, what needs to be kept in mind is that they also have associations among themselves as well, which was put forth in several studies (Dean, Kolody, Wood & Matt, 1992; Savikko, Routasalo, Tilvis, Strandberg & Pitkälä, 2005; Wu, Liu & Huang, 2022). Therefore, a mental vulnerability can bring along a physical vulnerability or vice versa, which is already the case in social vulnerabilities by mediating both physical and mental vulnerabilities. In this context, there is a hotly debated issue: feeling of loneliness has now become an epidemic (Murthy, 2017), which in certain aspects is argued to be a possible side effect of the rising number of solo-dwellers (Snell, 2015). These arguments bring forward the prevalence of loneliness among the population and raise concerns about how it affects the health and well-being of people. In this regard, feeling of loneliness which can be categorized as a mental vulnerability is associated with certain health problems. When elaborating on the issue, another concept, social isolation, mainly accompanies loneliness, and this tripartite relationship becomes the object of inquiry in most studies (Beller & Wagner, 2018; Kersten et al., 2024; Long et al., 2023; Smith & Victor, 2019; Victor et al., 2000).

When defining social isolation and loneliness separately, the primary quality emphasized for this differentiation is that social isolation refers to an objective and quantifiable condition, while loneliness refers to a subjective and negative experience (de Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2016: 175). A socially isolated person has a lack of social contacts and interactions with their social circles including people from their kin as well as their non-kin (Valtorta & Hanratty, 2012: 518). On the other hand, a person having the feeling of loneliness experiences a discrepancy between his/her actual and desired social relationships in terms of their quality and/or quantity

(de Jong Gierveld & Raadschelders, 1982: 108). It is indicated that one can feel lonely without being socially isolated, while another can be socially isolated but not feel lonely. Nevertheless, social isolation as an objective condition can bring along feeling of loneliness, and in this respect, living alone is considered to be a part of this objective condition by providing a physical aloneness to one and can be used as a measure of social isolation (Klinenberg, 2016). In other words, the three have a multilayered and intertwined relationship; therefore, it is hard to draw strict lines among them from an epidemiological perspective.

The two concepts, loneliness and social isolation, also have a history together when their separation had no valid meaning. Once, loneliness was referred to more as a physical state of aloneness rather than a psychological one as “a conscious, cognitive feeling of estrangement or social separation, an emotional lack that concerns a person’s place in the world” (Bound Alberti, 2018: 243). In other words, before such a psychological turn shaping the modern understanding and identification of loneliness, the concept can possibly be used interchangeably with social isolation. On the one hand, when the feeling of loneliness was pinned down as a subjective condition related to how one perceives, experiences, or senses their relationship with oneself and one's outer social environment, the two concepts drifted apart, even if not definitely disconnecting. On the other hand, this separation between the two actually serves to the advantage of the vulnerability argument put forward by such literature discussing the association between health and living alone. By characterizing living alone as part of an objective condition of social isolation, when the association between social isolation and feeling of loneliness is established, and their effects on health are discussed accordingly, solo living also becomes automatically part of this association and gains an explanatory value (Holwerda et al., 2012; Vasile et al., 2024).

At this point, what can be questioned and analyzed further is whether living alone has a direct effect or role in a relationship with mental health and, if there is one, whether it is negative or not. When we look at our data, we can see that there are those respondents who experienced feelings of loneliness as well as other kinds of

mental vulnerabilities. These respondents are Defne (loneliness), Mehtap (loneliness), Selim (loneliness), Gözde (depression), Nur (loneliness), Kevin (loneliness), Alva (loneliness), Suna (loneliness) and Lale (loneliness). However, their expressions should be treated carefully, and the kind of relationship they construct between their vulnerability and living alone should be investigated. In this context, it is possible to divide the respondents into those who establish a direct link between their living arrangement and their mental vulnerability and those who do not. Of the former group, Kevin (Male, 39 years old, never married) expressed that:

...If you are not alone while living alone, if you're not lonely, I mean if you spend a lot of time with people, it could be nice you know just go home and sleep in a silent flat. But generally I think there is a sensation of separation that I don't like so much about it. But there is of course also an autonomy. Like you can bring home anyone you want, like without disturbing anyone. There is an ambiguous sensation of being both autonomous and like a victim of this in a way. If I could choose, I would have a nice big space and share it.

According to him, living alone creates an illusion of autonomy, which is expected to bring along a sense of independence and freedom by providing an isolated space; nevertheless, rather than freeing oneself, a solo-dweller is more likely to become the victim of this living arrangement by separating oneself from others. Similarly, Alva (Female, 54 years old, divorced with 2 children) underlined that:

Living alone, you are lonely, and don't share your life with anyone else. In a way you don't get to know people very closely if you live alone...I am self-responsible from everything, that I don't have to argue about paintings or socks on the floor or whatever, that I can leave my stuff all over the place. Don't clean my mess every day. Stuff like that. But that's not so important I think in the long-term. In the long-term more important is human contact.

In this statement, the respondent again establishes a direct connection between living alone and feeling lonely since, according to her, living alone does not give her the opportunity to know and bond with someone she can have an intimate relationship. Mehtap (Female, 65 years old, divorced with two children) also said that;

So I like it (living alone), I love it, yes. But you get stuck somewhere. You want to have a conversation or share something with someone over coffee. I miss the conversation. That doesn't always happen. But still, it has its difficulties.

Similar to Alva, she indicated that living alone can lead to feeling of loneliness due to not having companionship in her immediate living space. Of the latter group, Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married) expressed that:

It's (feeling of loneliness) something I feel a little bit all the time anyway. But this is completely independent of the fact that I live alone. It was there when I was staying in the dormitory. That is more of a feeling stemming from not having a relationship. I mean, there are times when I feel overwhelmed because I'm lonely and all that. But that is something that developed independently of my living alone.

He openly stated that he feels lonely because of not having a romantic partner, which is not related to his living arrangement. Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married) also underlines that she also feels lonely from time to time due to not having a romantic partner. She indicated that:

I was affected by a friend's words... She said, for example, there was a problem at school. "Oh," she said, "I feel sorry for you." I said, 'What happened? Why do you feel sorry for me?' "We had a problem," she said, "I have a husband; maybe I will share it with him when I get home. I will play with my children and forget about it, and it will go away." "But do you brood on this by yourself?" she said. However, no, I am interested in other things. I'm interested in homeopathy and this and that. I don't have time anyway, but God, I wonder if I look like that. I think it affects me; How I look from the outside. They say, "Oh, she's single." Could something like this happen? It makes more sense to live alone than to live in an unhappy marriage... I realized later. Am I really alone? But I say that is not my temperament. I shut the door of the university at 5; it's over. That's why I'm not bringing this issue home. But that sentence of hers had an impact on me. You know, it happens from time to time; you feel lonely. Because you can't share everything with your family, sometimes you can't reach your friends either.

Even if both Selim and Nur associate their feeling of loneliness with their relationship status, Selim does not establish a connection between his loneliness and his living arrangement, while Nur does that to some degree by equating her relationship status with solo living as the declaration of being single.

In the case of Gözde (Female, 28 years old, never married) while she does not hold her living arrangement responsible for her current depressed mood, she still specified that spending time alone at home affects her negatively, and even if not being the

cause of her depression, living alone actually mediates its effect by extending its time of persistence. She said that:

I'm in a period where my depression is increasing these days, and staying alone at home all the time doesn't make me feel good right now... The biggest disadvantage (of living alone) is that especially such depressive periods last longer. At some point, nobody notices you. You may not get help.

On the other hand, she also remarked that:

I think that a person's capacity to be healthy is measured by their capacity to be spiritually alone, and the more we are alone, the better we get to know ourselves, and as we get to know ourselves, our communication with other people improves in that sense.

Her statement displays that living alone and spending time alone are indicative of good mental health; in other words, she does not establish a negative relationship between the two. However, since she is currently going through a period of poor mental health, living alone has a contrary effect on her and creates a vulnerability because of that.

Eva (Female, 65 years old, never married) is the one who has the longest experience of living alone among all the participants. She indicated that she actually enjoys living alone and she defines it as involving both freedom and loneliness. She likes that she can arrange her life in accordance with her own needs and wants and not take any extra responsibility other than the ones related to herself. On the other hand, she also pointed out that her living arrangement includes some level of loneliness which she should put up with due to being physically alone in her living space. She expressed that:

I don't feel lonely but there is a kind of loneliness in living alone. I have to arrange my social interaction when I just want to hang around, "oh, nobody here!". When you're sitting together with other people as we are a group, we are really part of a group. So in one way, it's not natural for a person, to be alone, just one person. It's more natural for us to hang together with others. So that's the difference. I mean this is natural, other bodies in the same room. This feeling of belonging to a group, a collective. That is not when you are living alone. I am apart from it... Maybe I have been used to it now because my whole life I've been living alone. So, I have the skills and I have tools how to deal with it and also fulfill my own needs. So, if I feel lonely, then I

can call a friend. And sometimes I feel lonely and my friend calls. But of course not always everything goes in line with plans so I have to stand some loneliness.

Her statement displays that living alone contains such loneliness because you are by yourself in your private sphere, you are not sharing this space with anybody else, and accordingly, you have no immediate human contact there. Therefore, you have to make an effort to reach out to people. On the other hand, since she has been living alone for nearly 40 years, she has been accustomed to living like this. Moreover, she was able to develop certain skills in order to cope with loneliness so it does not bother her.

### **3.1.3 Socialization as the main means of alleviating vulnerabilities**

Both in the literature and in the data, socialization is appeared to be the main strategy of solo-dwellers to alleviate vulnerabilities, especially the feeling of loneliness (Beller & Wagner, 2018 Kersten et al., 2024). In this respect, socialization is mainly positioned opposite to social isolation and considered an antidote to it as well as feeling of loneliness (Davidson, Daly & Arber, 2003; Forward et al., 2021). We can give a basic definition of what socialization is as purposive interaction with other people, including both those from one's social circle (family members, friends, relatives, acquaintances, etc.) and those who are not. So, the purpose here is the social interaction itself; in other words, there is a specific intention and will to interact with others. Indeed, solo-dwellers can adopt methods to socialize. This can be in the form of reaching out to people from their own social circles, including family and friends or doing various social activities like joining a hobby group or volunteering so that they can interact with people or just hanging out in public places to meet with new people. Accordingly, in the following part below, the respondents' social life and socialization practices are elaborated to reveal their methods and the factors affecting the choice of these methods.

#### **3.1.3.1 Social life and socialization practices**

It is possible to observe different kinds of social life preferences and socialization practices embraced by different participants in the data. In this context, it is possible

to talk about certain variables affecting social life and socialization practices, including self-concepts and socialization opportunities. These variables will be evaluated below.

### **3.1.3.1.1 Self-concepts**

Self-concept is defined as the individuals' considerations, feelings, and assessments about themselves by sociologists and social psychologists. Self-concepts have various dimensions. In this regard, two main dimensions, which are relatively "factual descriptions" and "self-evaluations" come to the forefront (Karakayali, 2021). While "factual descriptions" mainly rest upon social roles and identities, "self-evaluations" are mainly equated with "self-esteem." The important point for my concerns here, however, is that, as many researchers observe, self-concept, due to its overlap with self-esteem can have important motivational effects.

If we look at the data, we see that when the respondents were specifically asked to describe their personal characteristics, they mainly mentioned their self-evaluations. Indeed, what needs to be highlighted here is why these self-concepts of the respondents matter. It is mainly because how they identify and evaluate themselves also gives shape to their social life and socialization practices to some degree. For instance, Kevin (Male, 39 years old, never married) identified himself as a social person. He indicated "I guess I am very social, and I'm also quite strong-willed. I'm quite happy with other people but I'm also quite clear about what I like or do not like in such things."

His statement shows that despite being a social person, he is also peculiar about what he expects from social relationships; therefore, he is careful about not crossing his personal limits while establishing these relationships with people. He underlined earlier that he is looking for more spontaneous socialization rather than a planned one. His search for spontaneous socialization can be related to his carefulness about not exceeding his limits since such spontaneous socialization possibly does not require too much effort and deep connection. He does not have to make sacrifices for

the sake of maintaining a relationship in order to have strong bonds while socializing. His search for spontaneous socialization makes him try to find a bigger apartment and have a housemate. He expressed that his current apartment is suitable for cohabiting couples but not for cohabiting with a housemate. In other words, if he was into establishing strong bonds, he would possibly look for a suitable partner with whom he can live and share his life in a more intimate relationship rather than trying to change his apartment to cohabit with a housemate. He also underlined that he appreciates his living arrangement since it makes him challenge himself to reach out to people more. By this means, he can be more socially active as the social person that he defines himself.

In contrast, Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married) identified herself as an introverted person. She specified that:

Actually, I'm a bit of an introverted person. That's why socializing and talking with others seems unnecessary to me. I have to be in that mode for this. How can I explain it, should I say it's about being a controlling person? I also have such a side; some things can bother me. I'm thinking of an example, yes, the case of my roommate's boyfriend, for instance. I think she should have told me that. So that's an annoying thing for me... Maybe I could communicate with her, but I didn't dwell on it either because I was going to move anyway. But I think I'm not respected in such a situation, and I don't think it's nice. So, some things can bother me, yes. In general, the thing is about my desire to be alone. I mean, sometimes it's unnecessary to talk about or share things all the time, so I like to stay on my own like that.

As a person who conceives herself as being 'introverted', she is not into too much socialization. Moreover, she feels uncomfortable if someone she does not know transcends her personal space as in the case of her former housemate's bringing her boyfriend without informing Gizem. This is a problem for her since she does not enjoy such spontaneity as opposed to Kevin. Socializing through entering new social circles and meeting new people is not possibly something she desires to do. She enjoys her solitude and prefers to communicate with people when she wants to do that. In other words, she prefers planned or scheduled socialization rather than a spontaneous one.

Similarly, Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated from her ex-cohabiting partner) expressed that:

I'm an introverted person, prefer to be on my own. I'm a social introvert. I like to spend time with my friends but only in one on one. So, I don't like to be in crowds or group of people. My home is very part of my functionality that I need to have my own space and I really need to go off from other people's spaces to be in my own space.

As another introvert, while enjoying spending time with her close social circle, Ida does not prefer to socialize within crowded groups. She specifically emphasized that having her own place is a requirement for her in order to be charged up to turn into a functioning person, in her words, for the next social interaction. Alva (Female, 57 years old, divorced with two adult children) also characterizes herself as more of an introverted person in her own words with a relatively negative connotation. In this respect, she expressed that;

I am not that outgoing. I am not very good at languages. I am not that communicative, or talkative. I am more like a listener. I am shy in some kinds of situations. I mean if I go into a room, I am not the one to be seen.

The negativity she attributed to her personality can be understood by her choice of words as she mainly preferred to talk about what she cannot do while defining her personal characteristics. On the other hand, she also underlined that:

I mean in some sense I am not that dependent on the people. I mean I have integrity. I don't need to talk to people all the time and I don't need to have value because other people give me value. So in that sense, I guess I can be alone. I mean some people can never be alone. They have their value by talking, by getting appreciation of other people all the time. I am not like that.

In other words, she holds in esteem her personality as an introvert since she can carry on with her life by herself without a constant outside reminder of how valuable she is. Although she may find some aspects of her personal characteristic more unfavorable, she still enjoys and accordingly appreciates certain aspects of her personality due to some benefits provided by it. In this respect, on the one hand, as a shy person, she may not socialize as easily as she desires; on the other hand, she does not seek too much attention from others and interaction with them.

Another participant who also identified himself as more of a shy person is Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married). He specified that:

Shyness, timidity... Being antisocial, having a lot of anxiety. Those are the things that come to my mind. Those are the things that make my life the most difficult, related to my personality. That's why they came to my mind first. Other than that, I'm generally quiet; I'm not very talkative.

His statement shows that due to being a shy person with anxiety, he possibly struggles with socializing. Parallelly, he also indicated that he did not have contact with his friends outside of the university environment throughout his academic career as a Ph.D. student and shared one of his related memories:

I realized much later that during my undergraduate, graduate and doctoral studies, I generally do not see my friends outside of school. It is usually limited to school. We get together at school, we see each other, but we do not do any activities outside of school. Generally, everyone has their own groups of friends, they see them anyway. They have partners, they spend time with their partners. I have a friend from my undergraduate studies who I spend a lot of time with outside of school. She is also my closest friend. I see her all the time. But other than that, seeing both my undergraduate friends and my other acquaintances from my graduate studies has always been limited to school. But of course, that is also partly due to me. Because when something is said, let's do this, let's do that, I am generally not very positive about it. For example, the people in my department went somewhere a few times; they got together to drink. I went with them for the first time the other day. I never went before. They have been doing this every now and then since I came here... But then, I wanted to get up after 10 minutes because I get uncomfortable in a crowd, and finally, I lasted about an hour and a half. Then I ran away. I wouldn't have felt uncomfortable if there were only 3-4 people. If I were with people I truly call my friends, I wouldn't have felt uncomfortable, but because it was crowded, I felt uncomfortable and ran away.

Selim underlines that he mainly prefers intimate social gatherings rather than crowded ones, in which he felt disturbed since, probably as a shy person, he is overwhelmed by such intense interaction with people he is not close to. Therefore, his personal characteristics can be argued to affect his socialization practices.

Eva (Female, 65 years old, never married) defines herself as a social person who in time became more skillful in terms of understanding and bonding with people. She

also emphasized that since she is not in a romantic relationship, she is able to sharpen her socialization skills and has the ability to meet new people and make friends much more easily in new social environments. In this regard, she expressed that:

I have some friends that always have been living in relationships, and when they divorce or the man or the husband dies, they are standing there, they don't know how to make friends. I have some examples of that. They don't know because they have always been in these, to be a couple. But, I have been quite skilled in making friends because of this. I have a big social life outside my home. And, I've also been quite skilled in making new contacts new friends, and so on. I'm also getting more mature and better as a person then I also feel like I can fulfill my social needs in different ways with different people. That's the positive way of it because then I have access to a lot of people. I have access to a lot of different people and I also have access to friendships. So, that's the positive part of it. The negative part of it is that I have to be very alert. I have to take initiative. It's not always that people "hello do you want to go out" but, I have to call them. So, I have to work a little bit of it. But, I prefer that to not being able to make friends as some of my friends do.

So, her statement exhibits that as a single person she can improve her skill to meet new people and make friends even if this is something requiring effort. In contrast to her friends who are in couple relationships most of the time, she can socialize easily in a new environment rather than keeping in the background, waiting someone to make contact with her. In other words, she does not need somebody's company to mingle with the new social circles but can do it on her own and more easily adopt herself in these circles. She actually specified how she gained and developed her human skills over time, as well as starting to know and understand herself better and learning how to deal with the problems she encounters:

When I was younger, I was much more insecure about how to relate to other people. That's how, I think, this started, how shall I relate and how shall I cooperate? Now, I am much better at relating, cooperation, and also much better in a relationship with myself.

Tolga (Male, 67 years old, divorced with three adult children) reflected himself as a person who is humble, helpful, and self-giving; thereby, a popular and favored figure in his social circle. He said that:

I am a person who helps people a lot. I am someone who never thinks of evil. I am a very beloved person. I also have a very good character. If someone

needs something, I try to find out what is his/her need and to meet this need immediately. I mean, everybody loves me here, in Sweden. Also, my social life is very good. I am not a person who values money. If there is someone I love very much, I sit, eat and drink with him/her.

By looking at his statement, it is possible to state that his modest and benevolent character enable him to socialize easily since people can appreciate these characteristics of him, and accordingly prefer to be part of his social circle. After he was disappointed by his ex-wife since she left him and her children, he specified that he lived through a trust issue. Therefore, being loved in his social circle can be something particularly important for him as he emphasized twice in his above statement. It can be argued he may want to prove that he is actually very much a loveable person and he is already loved very much in his social circle even if his ex-wife could not do it anymore. Indeed, this can also facilitate his socialization since he is already a well-accepted and beloved person in his social circle; thus, reaching out to people can be easier for him.

All these above-mentioned self-concepts can be argued to impact and shape the socialization practices of the respondents to some degree. While being a social or loved and respected figure and having the required skills to socialize can simplify the respondents' work to reach out and interact with people, being a shy and introverted person can be a challenge for them to socialize. But indeed, it is again related to how the respondent makes sense of these self-concepts. To illustrate, both Gizem and Ida define themselves as introverted persons; however, they do not specifically attribute a negative characteristic to this as they are mainly satisfied with the quality of their relationships with their close friends. Moreover, rather than seeing it as a challenge, one can basically consider his/her being an introverted person a fit for his/her living arrangement as a solo-dweller, which is the case for Lucas (Male, 30 years old, never married), who expressed "I'm definitely an introvert, I say. That's probably part of why I am so comfortable living alone as well".

### **3.1.3.1.2 Socialization opportunities**

In the literal sense, living alone means one is physically being alone in his/her immediate living space, so s/he cannot spontaneously socialize face-to-face with others in this living space other than entertaining guests. In other words, their house space does not mainly provide them the opportunity to socialize. Indeed, at this point, the available socialization opportunities, specifically the ones outside of house space, become important and affect their socialization practices. When we look at the data, we can see that respondents underline how living alone can bring along the feeling of loneliness due to not being able to socialize with others in the immediate living space physically, as discussed above. In this context, the socialization opportunities that are available for them, to some degree, frame their socialization practices while specifically trying to cope with the feeling of loneliness. It is possible to derive two main socialization opportunities from the data, which are “family and friend relationships” and “work life.”

### **3.1.3.1.2.1 Family and friend relationships**

Family and friend relationships can be considered to provide the main socialization opportunity to the respondents since if they are on good terms, in general, both with their families and friends, they surely have a more extensive network available to socialize; besides, in the case of having intimate and close relationships with them, they can motivate to meet with them much more often. On the one hand, it is possible to talk about certain factors affecting these familial relationships, which will be discussed below. On the other hand, we can derive that the support mechanisms provided by family and friends facilitate participants to fight the feeling of loneliness as well as other vulnerabilities. Moreover, the answer to the question of who is providing these support mechanisms can be a determinant for the participants when they prioritize either their families or friends. In this regard, it can be more challenging to distinguish family and friends from one another in terms of their meaning to the respondents since their friends can become their families with their own words while they also appreciate friend-like relationships with their families, which will be elaborated in the “Providing support mechanisms” section below.

#### **3.1.3.1.2.1.1 Factors affecting family relationships**

In terms of family relationships, it can be maintained that there are several factors affecting this relationship between the person and his or her family negatively. In what follows, these factors will be specified as “having different world views,” “lack of communication,” “lack of respect for one’s individuality and personal space,” and “taking too much responsibility.”

### **3.1.3.1.2.1.1.1 Having different world views**

Different world views are a factor highlighted by the participants affecting their relationship with their families negatively. For example, Suna (Female, 62 years old, widow with a child) expressed that: “I'm meeting with a few people from my family. Our worlds with the others are now very different. Our perspective on things is very different. Therefore, inevitably, our relationship loosened and eventually broke off.” Her statement shows that since the participant and her family members have different world views, in time, their communication has decreased and terminated.

Victor (Male, 69 years old, separated with two children) pointed out a similar situation that due to their differences in their world views, he is not close to his sister. He explained that:

I'm pretty close with my brother right now. We had a long, long fallout. But when he got seriously ill about 5-6-7 years ago, I decided that no, I wanted to stay at the hospital, and he was kind of shocked, but it turned out very good. So we have a really good brotherly relationship now that we had never actually. So, with my elder sister, not so much. I think if you look at it, my brother and I have similar political views that we don't share with our sister. I think that's a factor, and it could be that we are brothers; we are man, could be. But it's really about political views. There are some issues that our sister doesn't really want to talk about.

While their similar political views made Victor and his brother come close, and communicate and share things easily, since their sister does not think in the same way, she was not included in this sibling relationship. In this respect, Victor also said: “A typical Swede doesn't really persist in entertaining relationships with people that are not their relatives and that have different political views. “

According to his statement, for a Swede, having a kinship and sharing the same political views are the two important determinants of establishing and maintaining a relationship with someone. In his following statement, Victor also briefly talked about the political atmosphere that polarizes people in the country, which makes world views become a more significant element for the sustainability of a relationship, either as a family or friend. In this context, while it is assumed that these differences in political views cannot be easily resolved and tolerated, dialogue with a dissident is probably something to be avoided in the country.

Another issue the participant talked about was the idea that Swedish people are famous for avoiding disagreements or arguments and searching for consensus. It is possible to argue that since they do not like disagreements and are enthusiastic about finding a midway, they choose not to engage with those who think differently from them. All the Swedish participants indicated that they did not have any kind of arguments with their friends or family even if, according to Alva (Female, 57 years old, divorced with two children), such arguments can make them closer and enable them to know each other better. Therefore, instead of having an argument, those who have disagreements, including the family members, possibly choose to go their separate ways.

### **3.1.3.1.2.1.1.2 Lack of communication**

Lack of communication between the child and his/her family also came forward in the data in terms of affecting the familial relationship. In this respect, Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married) specified that "... I'm not really close with my family. I mean, maybe it's something over the years..." She indicated that her relationship with her parents became rather more one-dimensional over time, while in her following statements, she also expressed that she does not prefer to narrate specific details about her life to them but possibly communicate with them to maintain contact to some degree with the feeling of responsibility in accordance with her identified role within her family.

In addition to Gizem, Victor (Male, 69 years old, separated with two children) talked about having no deeper communication with his children. During the pandemic, he could not meet his children and could not introduce them to his girlfriend, while his normal routine did not change much, and he continued to spend time with his girlfriend. He pointed out that:

We haven't met in person for a very long time. But I will arrange it so that I meet them all together and individually. I mean, I buy them lunch, so they have to show up. But they are sort of that age, specifically the youngest. I think, at least typically, Swedish father-daughter relationships would be like this at that age maybe. You don't want to meet your father that often, you want to build your own private life.

Victor laid stress on when his kids became young adults what they want to do is focusing on their personal lives to make their own way while neglecting their relationships with their parents. Indeed, at some point they possibly sink into their own routines and their communication with their parents in the case of not living under the same roof mainly lacks such depth.

In the case of Victor, his lack of communication with his children is more related to the attitudes of his children who are freshman adults preferring to focus on their own lives. On the contrary, Berk (Male, 33 years old, divorced) talked about his lack of proper communication with his family results from his lack of effort. He expressed that:

My relationship with my family is good. I don't have any problems with my family. Of course, they would prefer me to be more companionable, more talkative, and to call and ask them more. But still, they don't show any reaction just because I don't do that. Well, no matter how undutiful I am, my family is faithful, let me put it this way... I call my mother and father once a month, once every two months, depending on the situation. They call me more. But when they call, I answer and talk. Same thing with my brother. This is partly due to the way I was raised. I don't know, maybe because I didn't have a crowded family environment, my family ties weren't that strong.

He states that whereas his family makes effort to be in touch with him, he mostly depends on his family's effort to maintain his relationship with them rather than taking initiative. On the other hand, he highlighted that his preference to remain

distant could be associated with the family environment he was raised in, which is a nuclear family in that he possibly did not have to interact with so many people other than the familial households. In effect, his attitude towards his family resembles the attitudes of Victor's children towards him since, as young adults, focusing on his/her life can be prioritized by the one who tries to be self-reliant at that stage of his/her life; therefore, rather than cultivating their relationship with their parents who once had control in their lives, they prefer to focus on their individual lives and cultivate their self-dependence as adults.

### **3.1.3.1.2.1.1.3 Lack of respect for one's individuality and personal space**

It is possible to talk about being unable to respect for one's individuality and personal space as a factor mainly degrading the relationship between family and children. Living alone, specifically for those who started at an early age, is considered a manifestation of self-dependence and a step toward adulthood as also mentioned above (Klinenberg, 2012). In this respect, living alone means putting aside the former dependency and need-based relationship between oneself and his/her family. At this point, when the solo-living young adult actually enjoys and is accustomed to having personal space as the sole controller of the house s/he lives, especially after leaving the family house in which one is expected to comply with the rules determined by his/her parents and mainly deprived of such space, families' interventions can be bothering and unbearable in some situations. To illustrate, Gizem mentioned that when she visits her parents after she left the family house, she is annoyed by small interventions. She remarked that:

For instance, here in the family house, okay, I haven't lived in that house for a long time, but I go on holidays and so on. I am sitting on the balcony, my mom says you are cold, put on something. I'm saying mom, I'm 30 years old, I think I can decide for myself whether I'm cold or not, you don't have to say it. These things are very small, but it makes me tense. For example, when I went last summer, I went crazy at home in five days because my father was intruding into everything, like even asking should I open the window of the room? I say I can open it too, so you don't have to do it. Their pressing on me, it is well-intentioned but can suffocate me.

In this case, it can be stated that a young adult who can already take care of herself/himself does not want to return to a relationship in which they are still treated

as a minor, unable to make decisions for themselves. In this context, their personal space becomes valuable and something to be respected especially by their families so that they can maintain the independence they gained by leaving the family house. If the family fails to accept their individuality and respect their personal space, this can lead to the children's pulling away from their families.

In a similar vein, Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married) remarked that:

I wonder if my fondness for my family has decreased a little because I am used to living alone? Because when I really go (family) home, after a week or 10 days that boredom and suffocation come, and I miss my own space and my own environment. So, I think my fondness for my family has decreased a little. Maybe because I am older now, the idea of staying in the family home does not appeal to me. I don't know, I still use the bed from my childhood. For example, that bed was bought for my brother at one time, and then my brother's bed was given to me when I didn't fit in my own bed. That's why I still use the same bed and I am still treated like a child there. I sometimes complain about that, I say, I am an adult now, they say you are still a child. However, I am now 30 years old. But they still see me as a child. Okay, I guess being a child in the eyes of your family never ends, but of course it also overwhelms you a little... That's why my fondness for my family has decreased a little, my visits there have become less frequent.

He emphasized that even if he is the one taking all the responsibility for his life as someone living alone while he is in his own house when he goes to his family house, he is suddenly treated as a minor, which makes him feel repressed and damages his devotion to his family.

Indeed, it should be also addressed that being unable to accept one's individuality and respect their personal space has a cultural connotation as well. This aspect is mainly valid for the respondents from Turkey. As we discussed in the previous chapter under the cultural aspect subsection, in Turkey, the relationship between the parents and child can be characterized by the "model of psychological (emotional) interdependence" (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005). This means the parents and child are emotionally interdependent; in other words, they are emotionally responsible against one another, and expected to fulfill the requirements of this emotion-based relationship in accordance with their identified roles in the family. In this case, it is

not surprising that the families of the respondents failed to recognize that their child is a grown-up who has his/her own personal needs as an individual so that they can ensure the continuity of this interdependent relationship between them and their adult child.

Similar to Gizem and Selim, the individuality of Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married) is also disregarded by her family; however, this time, it is the respondent herself, so to say, following the deeds of her family without much questioning rather than her family's external interference. She indicated that:

I mean, a friend of mine brought me back to my senses. She said, "Do you realize that you don't have your own life?" I asked, "What do you mean?" She said, "You are so selfless that you live other people's lives. You know, you decide on something and someone else wants something else and you say, "Okay." "Why doesn't anything happen the way you want it?" So this is the gaze of an outsider. She noticed this when she looked at my family life. Excessive selflessness. Excessive giving. After all, this world, the universe has a balance of giving and taking. If you are constantly giving, then the balance gets disrupted. I am trying to fix that a little bit these days.

She highlighted that in her relationship with her family, she is the one who always conforms to her family's rules, instructions, or will. She basically keeps in the background, waiting for her family to decide on things while she has no say in the family council. In other words, without notice, she became the one who made the self-sacrifice every time by putting her own will in the back corner. Therefore, essentially, while her family is unable to accept her individuality, she also fails to do that, which is something she questions and tries to fix.

#### **3.1.3.1.2.1.1.4 Taking too much responsibility**

In contrast to the previous factor, in which the solo-dwellers as the children of the family are still treated as if they are not adults but children, this time, the solo-dwellers may have to take too much responsibility for their families while already taking responsibility for their own living by themselves. To exemplify, Aylin (Female, 37 years old, never married) expressed that:

... When there is a problem with our family,... even though I am the little child, I am like the father of the house. That situation also puts a lot of responsibility on me, in other words, when I contact them, these responsibilities come to the fore first. For example, when I go to my mother's house on the weekends, even though I would normally want to spend all of this time with my parent, I fulfill the responsibilities first... I take many of their normal responsibilities related to life instead of them. Let me give an example for my other sister. She takes on the responsibilities of her children during the day, but for example, one of them needs a study program, their father is unfortunately very uninterested. These are not subjects that her mother has a grasp of. I have to sit down and research that study program. Or something needs to be provided from outside. I have to provide it... Or the kids need to be taken somewhere; most of the time, I have to take them. What I mean by responsibility is actually these. In other words, I have many responsibilities that are not included in my social role, so since these come to the fore when it comes to spending time with my family, I prioritize my friends socially.

So, the respondent explains in detail that she has many responsibilities related to her family. As she indicated, when she comes together with her family members, the main topic is about these responsibilities; therefore, she primarily prefers to socialize with her friends rather than her family.

### **3.1.3.1.2.1.2 Providing support mechanisms**

In the data, we can see that the relationship with the family is associated by the family's ability to provide certain support mechanisms needed by the solo-living person. For instance, Suna (Female, 62 years old, widow with a child) indicated that she sacrificed for her family a lot and tried to support them as much as possible; however, she was never able to get such support in return despite not expecting much regarding the issue. The lack of such a support network between her and her family has deteriorated her relationship with them. On the contrary, her relationship with her friends became much stronger as her friends mainly provided these support mechanisms.

As long as the family maintains a supportive role, especially in the case of more extraordinary situations, they can keep their primary place in the lives of the child. For instance, Aslan (Male, 27 years old, never married) is economically dependent

on his family as a student and living in his parent's apartment right now in a big city where he cannot possibly afford to live by his own means. However, at the time he had lived alone, he was economically independent as a working sports coach. Comparing these two periods, even if he underlined that it is the physical distance mostly affected his relationship with his family in the two years period he was living alone in a different city, being away from his family as an independent person enabled him to know himself and make some decisions related to his future. He actually enjoyed his experience of living alone as such an independent person who can make his own living. When he returned back to the city where his family resides, he had no means to afford living alone yet his family gave him the opportunity for that and let him live in their other house located in the city. In this context, he possibly appreciates this allowance coming from his family, and accordingly, this strengthens their bonds.

Providing support mechanisms can also contribute to the durability of relationships between solo-living persons and their friends. This is the case for Suna, as she emphasized in the above-mentioned statement. In addition, for those participants who do not voluntarily choose to live alone, the discomfort that they experience as solo-dwellers leads them to have some kind of a special support network with their other solo-living friends. In this respect, the hardships that they encountered while living alone possibly make them sympathize with others in the same situation and discuss this with others as some kind of coping mechanism so that they can continue to live like that. Their roles in these networks are mainly defined by their experience, that is, according to the length of time, they have been living alone. Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married), Suna and Kevin (Male, 39 years old, never married) who have a relatively longer duration of living alone, are in supportive roles in which they try to comfort their less-experienced friends and give them recommendations concerning the issue. Alva (Female, 57 years old, divorced with 2 children) is in a role she is supported by her more experienced friend who lived alone nearly her whole life, and when she needs advice, she calls her. To illustrate, Nur specified that:

I have a friend who lives alone. She just started living alone... She's having a hard time. I see her more often... I mean, I talk to her for hours so that she can get through the process, even though I have work to do. I mean, when something

happens, when she's scared, she calls me right away, I don't know. She also has a mother and father, she doesn't call them, she calls me directly. If I have something to do during that time, I stop doing it to support her.

### **3.1.3.1.2.1.3 Family by birth or family by choice**

While for some respondents, the relationship that should be prioritized in their lives is more decisive and apparent, for others it is really hard to make a decision between the two. For instance, Suna (Female, 62 years old, widow with a child) expressed that:

... I have friends who take their (her family) place, and of course, this bond is inevitably stronger with them... For example, I have a Turkish girlfriend. If my sister had a traffic accident and my Turkish girlfriend had a traffic accident, and if my blood matched them both, I would give my blood to my Turkish girlfriend first, and then if it still left, I would give it to my own sister. Because the roles that those people play in my life are significant. I mean, we can be siblings with my sister, but the meaning and importance of the other in my life are much greater.

Her friends have mainly filled the gap opened up by her family members, and relatedly, her relationship with her friends consolidated. In other words, she prioritizes her friends over her family. Likewise, Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated her cohabiting partner) state that:

... I have the closest connections with my closest friends. But then I think my relationship with my family is alright. I meet up with my mom once per week and have coffee with her and my father perhaps one for every other week and have coffee with him because they were separated. And sometimes I get to my father and his new wife into dinner. It's not like we do things as a family very closely, but it's more like socializing. And I find that's quite nice just to have this more like, almost a friendly relationship. Yeah. So my brother is very occupied with his small children. So it's like he's really into that life now... I think I was like this with my former partner. So he was the kind of the closest friend and the closest family thing. And then now my friends have been kind of taking his place. And that is also why perhaps I don't want to really cohabit again, because I want to have my friends as my chosen family to keep them as that. Because I always think it's a matter of kind of negotiation between the coupledom and the friendships. Who is going to take the primary place in your life?

Again, for Ida, her friends as her chosen family come first. But this time, rather than making the comparison between her family by birth and her friends, she actually identified the relationship she had with her former cohabiting partner as a family-like setting and compared this relationship with the ones she has with her friends. Indeed, how she characterizes her relationship with her family is interesting since while they become the ones she socializes with in a friend-like manner, her friends become the main provider of intimacy, which is expected to be the romantic partner in coupledom as part of having an affectionate relationship.

In the case of Ida, she specified that since she felt like being understood by her friends as all researchers with similar passions, she was able to establish this intimate relationship with them while her family is mainly a stranger to her lifestyle. In her words:

... They (her friends) are researchers too. Both are my closest friends but they are also part of my research community. But my family, they are not academics, they are more into other lifestyles. So they find it a little bit sometimes hard to relate to my researcher lifestyle.

On the one hand, the feeling of being understood by people who more or less share a similar life course and accordingly getting support from them can be significant elements for the consolidation of friendships, while it may make one prioritize their friend relationships over their family relationships. On the other hand, experiencing the loss of a loved family member can make one put his or her family in the center of his or her life, which is the case for Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married). She said that:

... I lost my older brother when I was 20. So, after my older brother passed away, I turned completely to my family. So, (who comes first) family or friends? Together with the loss, it is my family. Of course, it was friends before, which is something related to adolescence.

She accentuated that when she was more of a teen, she certainly prioritized her friends and made sacrifices for them with teenage psychology, possibly seeking to be accepted by her peers. Nevertheless, when she experienced the loss of her brother, she also experienced a breakthrough, and she decided to give priority to her family.

As opposed to Suna, Ida and NUR who are clearer about their priority rankings, Gizem remarked that:

I am not very close with my family... I'm close with my friends... So I think my friends generally do me good. If I have a problem, I call my friends. I think they will understand me better. As I said, maybe it's because of me, because I share very little with my family. But on the other hand, the presence of my family makes me feel safe, of course. I can't imagine a world without them. So, I think they both have a special place.

Accordingly, when Eva (Female, 65 years old, never married) was asked whether she could rank her family and friends in order of importance, she expressed that:

I have a brother and sister that are really important to me. We also share friends. So, I think that it's a very hard question to answer. Because my friends are also very much my family. I have many friends instead of a big family. So, that's how it is. I cannot answer this. If now you have to choose, friends or your family, what do you do? Sophie's choice? No. It's really hard. My friends are my way of making a family instead of a husband and three children.

Her answer exhibits she has no such separation between her friends and family in terms of their importance, similar to Gizem. Since her characterization of family includes both her friends and her relatives, it can be argued that there is no such differentiation between them, according to Eva.

Oya (Female, 64 years old, divorced with a child) made a similar comment related the issue and stated that:

... There are things for both family and friends that need to be listed internally. I mix them like this. For example, number one is my mother, father, and my sibling, and number two is my friends one, two, three, and four from there. Then one of the relatives can come in third. I'm talking about such a mix. In other words, it's not just family and friends. It's not friends in the first place and family in the second place or vice versa. But if you ask me, mother, father and sibling, daughter or grandchildren or friends, of course, it's mother, father and the rest. Because the connection with them is not just about blood ties. Their closeness, experiences, and the love network you've created are something else. Not the other, because it's not like that. Indeed,

responsibilities are also brought along with the family. At least, the responsibility of love comes into it.

What Oya tries to accentuate is that a simple separation between family and friends while ranking one of them as being in the primary place would be misleading when characterizing the sensation of these relationships for one. Besides, putting the family in the first place does not mean that one is exempt from making any efforts to sustain these relationships; on the contrary, such love connection among the family members generates conscientious responsibilities. Nevertheless, unlike Eva, Oya ascribes a different meaning to her close familial circle, including her mother, father, daughter, and grandchildren, that their relationship was formulated more by all the memories, sharing, and love ties instead of blood ties.

In a similar vein, Canan (Female, 28 years old, never married) also specified that as she left her family house at a relatively young age while staying in the dormitories since she was a high school student and then has been living alone, she was able to establish very intimate relationships with her friends thenceforth, whom she described as members of her family as well.

I started living alone at a young age. But I think if I had continued living with my family, my friendships wouldn't have been so close. I put my family first on the list, but I have friends that I grew up with in high school. They are like family, too. My own family considers them family as well. If I hadn't been away, if I hadn't lived in a dorm or on my own, I probably wouldn't have had such close friendships.

In this context, Jamieson and Simpson emphasized in their study that while their respondents gave primacy to their familial relationships, close friendships and family can give similar feelings of affinity; however, still, one does not simply replace the other (Jamieson & Simpson, 2013: 183). Rather both relationships with family and close friends are significant, which they conceptualized as "social suffusion" (Jamieson & Simpson, 2013: 183). In this context, social suffusion is also valid for these cases since both family and friends are important for mainly all of the participants while they had difficulty making a ranking of primacy between the two.

### **3.1.3.1.2.2 Living alone and working life**

As mentioned above, while living alone, solo-living people may not socialize as easily as they want to, especially if they mainly prefer and rely on face-to-face socialization. There is mostly a need for a prior arrangement if they want to meet face-to-face with the people from their social circle. This can be specifically valid for those working people who want to spend time with their social circles in their free time. Therefore, it can be argued that their socialization opportunities are relatively limited or socialization requires more effort for them since they possibly should be the one who create different socialization opportunities. On the other hand, working life itself can create these socialization opportunities since it provides an environment where one should more or less interact with other people to handle the job.

For working people, work takes up most of their time in their everyday life. Therefore, their work life and their social life are connected and possibly intertwine with each other. By looking at the data, we can derive specific categories related to the work life of the participants. These categories include “attitudes towards work,” attitudes towards the work environment,” and “levels of interaction with co-workers.” It is also possible to talk about several subcategories under these. In this respect, attitudes towards work can be divided into two main subcategories: “feeling satisfied due to having a purpose” and “feeling tired due to being busy” which will be examined in the below section of “Resting and Relaxing.” Attitudes toward the work environment also have two main subcategories, which are “a place for socialization and a place for working.” Finally, levels of interaction with co-workers include three subcategories which are “part of the social circle both within and outside of work environment,” “part of a social circle within the work environment,” and “limited social interaction within the work environment.”

#### **3.1.3.1.2.2.1 Attitudes towards work**

Attitudes towards work refer to how working people perceive and characterize their work in terms of its role in their lives. The related subcategory, “feeling satisfied due to having a purpose” is elaborated below.

### **3.1.3.1.2.2.1.1 Feeling satisfied due to having a purpose**

This subcategory refers to the participants who are feeling satisfied with their works and mainly enjoy working in this job due to having a purpose. According to the participants' perspective, one's work can give a purpose and meaning to life. This purpose can be related to one's political views, one's desire to serve his or her community, one's self-developmental projects or basically one's wish to regulate his or her life. Indeed, it can be also the combination of two or more.

For instance, Alva (Female, 57 years old, separated with two children) expressed that:

I think I cannot live without working. I have to have some schedule in my life. I have to have times to get up and go and have some purpose, do some good stuff for the other people or the environment or something like this.

Her statement shows that having some kind of a routine and being able to serve society through her job is valuable. In other words, her work makes her live an orderly life while contributing to society in line with her ideals like environmental issues. In a similar fashion, Suna (Female, 62 years old, widow with a child) said that she derived "great pleasure and enthusiasm" from working as language teacher. In her case, her occupation enables her to serve for the maintenance of her ethnic heritage by transferring her mother tongue language to the next generations. Doing good to people, being of help to somebody, and making some kind of contribution through one's occupation can be considered as one of the important aspects of having a purpose.

Some participants specifically enjoy feeling useful because of that and accordingly feel satisfied. For example, Alva (Female, 57 years old, divorced with two children) remarked that: "I think I want to contribute to society. For me it's important that I have a position that I can do something". Suna also expressed that: "I'm not just a teacher for these kids here. I tell them, first of all, I am your aunt, your sister, and then your teacher. I also prevent them from going astray, by touching their lives." Similarly, Derya (Female, 45 years old, divorced with two children) indicated that: "I

am in the most hardworking, busiest and most functional department of the ministry. This gives me great satisfaction, first of all, I feel that I am useful, I realize myself ... helping someone, touching their lives so my work highly satisfies me.”

All these statements display that the feeling of having a positive effect on somebody and making some kind of a difference in one's life through the social status provided by their occupation bring them this feeling of occupational satisfaction. Another satisfying aspect of this can be considered its enablement of self-development. When the occupation gives the working people the opportunity to add value to themselves by requiring them to adapt themselves with frequent updates and enhancement in the area, it can bring the feeling of satisfaction. In this context, it keeps the working people dynamic by demanding continuous attention to follow all these alterations. This dynamism possibly arouse excitement and makes it easier for the working people to maintain their interest to the subject they are working on.

To illustrate, Koray (Male, 29 years old, never married) remarked that:

You have to renew yourself. You meet different people all the time and you learn from them all the time. And you have to improve yourself in order to add something to them. As I said before, what we do is tax inspectorate. There are constant changes in tax legislation. You will follow it anyway. Although you don't want to and you want to stay out of the subject, you have to learn this thing when it comes to you because your job is based on taxpayers. And you have to know that better than anyone. As such, it is inevitably satisfying.

Essentially, all of these participants reiterated that the interaction they have with people through their work satisfies them when they feel like they can make a difference in someone else's life or in their own life. In this sense, socialization here serves a specific purpose for them.

### **3.1.3.1.2.2.2 Attitudes towards work environment**

Attitudes towards work environment refer to how the working people perceive their work environment. In this respect, it is possible to talk about two subcategories under this category. These are “a place for socialization and a place for working.”

### **3.1.3.1.2.2.1 A place for socialization**

Work environment can be considered as a place for socialization. Therefore, the opportunities provided by the work environment in terms of socialization can affect the understanding of the working people while evaluating their work. For instance, Peter (Male, 36 years old, never married) indicated that “I have very nice colleagues and very nice office actually with the movie theater and pool table”. His office environment enables him and his co-workers to socialize while having fun and enjoying each other’s company. Similarly, Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated from her cohabiting partner) pointed out that “... It’s more like I go there (her office environment in the university) and I’m social and when I really need to work, I work here (her home). It’s much more efficient unfortunately.”

Moreover, Onur (Male, 31 years old, never married) told that:

Our team is divided into two parts in our directorate. One side is really a very quiet place where you can rest your head. I’m on that side too. The opposite room is where there are business conversations, and meetings. Sometimes I even say, is this a call center as the sound and the noise are never missing. That’s where there is more fun. I go there when I’m bored of resting my head. So whatever I want, whatever I search for, is at hand, so I’m happy.

According to his statement, his work environment provides both opportunities for socialization whenever he feels like it, and for cooling off and taking a rest.

### **3.1.3.1.2.2.2 A place for working**

Work environment can also be considered as a place where the work can be done efficiently and where the work ought to be done. Peter (Male, 36 years old, never married) signified that:

I would prefer to work from the office. I think both to get to the social life but also I think you are a better co-worker if you are in place and the work get so much easier when you can ask people things without having to write them messages.

According to him, besides being a place for socialization, the work environment enables him and his co-workers to work more effectively since they can interact swiftly through face-to-face contact and, as a result, handle issues more easily. Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married) expressed that “I usually try not to work at home. In the pandemic process, I’m so sick of working from home. Now, I want a physical separation between home and work in my life.” This statement of hers shows that the place of work is the office but not home; thus, the work should be done in the work environment.

### **3.1.3.1.2.2.3 Levels of interaction with co-workers**

Levels of interaction with co-workers refer to how working people position their co-workers in their social circle. These levels include three subcategories, which are “being part of the social circle both within and outside of the work environment,” “being part of the social circle mainly within the work environment,” and “having limited social interaction within the work environment.”

#### **3.1.3.1.2.2.3.1 Being part of the social circle both within and outside of the work environment**

Working people mainly spend a lot of time at work with their co-workers. Therefore, it is not surprising that at some point co-workers who can get along become part of each other’s social circles not only within the work environment but also outside of work. This can be traced in the data as well. To illustrate, Aslan (Male, 27 years old, never married) remarked that even if he left his job as a sports coach, he still maintained his friendship with some of his former co-workers, so they became part of his social circle. He told that:

So of course, it wasn't very good as working environment because it was hierarchical. But I worked with football players, physiotherapists or goalkeeper trainers. I had different colleagues. Of course, I made a lot of

friends among them. I still have friends from the time I've worked there and I am very happy about that.

Similarly, Arda (Male, 43 years old, never married), who is an academic at a university in Turkey, indicated that "...We (he and his colleagues) also meet frequently outside of work. In fact, after a while, friends from the university also begin to become a part of social life." Furthermore, as an academic in Sweden Kevin (Male, 39 years old, never married) expressed that "... We do have after works, picnics, grilling such things."

Oya (Female, 64 years old, divorced with a child) also specified that as a school teacher she meet with her colleagues outside of school.

I meet with most of my colleagues also privately; I mean, we meet as a household. Because we work in small groups. The afternoon group is the fritids group. Before noon, you (the children) are with the teachers, the teachers have a different culture than us. In other words, they are in a different culture than the fritids culture. The afternoon activities are activities based on the happiness of the children... We are more close to the people in the fritids culture, we meet more. For example, I created a new rummikub group; I play rummikub with the Swedes. We have such a rummikub group that we play rummikub once a week on Thursdays.

Her statements show that as a teacher adopting different kind of teaching methodology under a certain teaching culture, she is closer with the teachers from the same circle of this culture since possibly they share a lot more and understand each other much more easily in terms of the issues regarding their occupation that gathers them under the roof of same cultural values.

### **3.1.3.1.2.2.3.2 Being part of the social circle mainly within the work environment**

Working people who have a busy schedule and a heavy workload have also limited time to spare for their private life outside of work. Thus, they possibly either do not prefer to hang out with their co-workers outside of work or could not find time to do

that often since they have other priorities in their private life like their families. In this regard, Aylin (Female, 37 years old, never married) highlighted that:

We don't see each other very often, but I have a friendship with many of them in a social sense. You know, the reason why we don't meet outside is not a private matter. Everyone is really busy at work and outside of work, they have enough time to spare first for their family and maybe for their friends from of old. If we had more time, I definitely have friends that I can spend time outside in my business life. Even though it is very rare, we get together or if we finish a little early, there are times when we say let's have a drink in the evening, chat for an hour or two, and spend time outside of work. But I can't say we do it very often as we all don't have much time for it.

Whereas Aylin wants to meet with her co-workers outside of the workplace but cannot do it due to not having enough free time they can spare for each other, Derya (Female, 45 years old, divorced with two children) underlined that she doesn't want to allocate more time to her co-workers since they are already spending time together at work. Moreover, she has many friends other than her co-workers that she wants to meet in her free time; thus, she chooses to spare her out of office time to these friends of her. She said that:

I don't prefer it much because I'm already together with these people until the evening so I get bored. For example, they would love to spend time with me on the weekend. But, I already have so many friends outside of work that I can barely spare time for them. There is also this, I take care of my business with them in the working environment. Spending time with them again doesn't make much sense to me.

In the case of Derya, she is the one who does not specifically prefer to spend time with her colleagues outside of the workplace; however, this can be the case because one's co-workers are not his or her peers as well as having various other responsibilities related to being more advanced in their life course. In this respect, Lucas (Male, 30 years old, never married) specified that:

... When I actually go to work and see my colleagues, chat a bit, all of these are important things for me... Most of them are a bit older than I am. They are maybe 40 to 60 years old range and I am 30. So most of them had their families, different priorities. There is one of my colleague from the place before. He lives just around the corner. We meet sometimes, go eat or drink.

Other than not being in similar life stages, one may not find any kind of common thing to share with his or her co-workers requiring to be socialized outside of the office or a common interest to carry out together, which is the case for Berk (Male, 33 years old, divorced). He underlined that:

Common interests are related to this. In other words, it is related to perspective, the way of looking at the world. Of course, I do not see the world in the same way as my friends I meet directly, but they need to be multi-faceted. In order for me to spend more time with a person, they need to be a bit more multi-faceted. Their perspective needs to be very broad. Frankly, there are a few people who can provide this (within his colleagues) ... I do not meet with them because there is no common ground to talk or discuss. And I used to try to meet with them. The university I came from is -Name- University. I came here from there. There was more intense communication at least among the research assistants there. We could do things together on the weekends. Picnics, for example, to put it simply. I tried to do it here too, but there was no one with such intention. When that happens, you start not communicating.

Indeed, one can simply appreciate having in-office socialization where s/he can socialize in a more spontaneous manner, rather than questioning the reasons why they are not meeting outside. Relatedly, Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married) accentuated that:

There are 3 of us using this office. One of them is -Name-, one of my close friends. When we find each other here, we immediately become so happy, and we say let's go get our tea, smoke our cigarettes. It's enjoyable in that way. I like that aspect of coming to the office, for example. Then I know that when I come, I will find -Name-. With the other friend, we don't have any intimacy, just hello, hello. It's very limited, and that's the same with -Name- as well. We don't have much conversation. But still that aspect of the office is nice. When I come here, at least I have someone to chat with.

His statement shows that while he is sharing the same office with his close friend and another co-worker with whom he is not very intimate, what he seeks for this in-office socialization is more of a small interaction with another person in contrast to a more loaded and lengthy communication.

In a similar vein, Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married) also highlighted that she is looking for this in-office socialization as a way of fulfilling her needs for

interacting with people as a form of a looser attachment rather than being interested in establishing deeper connections.

I normally live alone, but when I went to school, for example, I could meet my social needs. Even if you weren't friends, having two small talks with a colleague met that need for socialization. Of course, that didn't happen when you worked from home, and when you lived alone.

In this regard, her social contact with her colleagues is mainly based on having a quick word. She does not intend to establish strong bonds with them, specifically during the pandemic process while she was working at home. During this process, she said she felt the need for this kind of socialization with her colleagues. Such socialization can be more or less considered spontaneous, which does not require a prior effort as planning a meeting.

### **3.1.3.1.2.2.3.3 Having limited social interaction within the work environment**

It is also possible to talk about a limited social interaction between working people and their co-workers. The former subcategory, as the co-workers being part of a social circle mainly within the work environment, can be considered to include more friend-like and/or intimate relationships with the co-workers rather than more official and distant relationships. On the other hand, this subcategory mainly refers to more formal and work-related interactions that have no specific concern about being friendly or social. For instance, Alva (Female, 57 years old, separated with two children) shared her experience as a school teacher and a former researcher and made a comparison between her former and current co-workers. She expressed that:

I have been working on research for 25 years and researchers are different than school teachers. So, they talk about different stuff when we were researchers and you have like breaks and you talk about important stuff. You always have PhD students or Erasmus students which do not have any network at all and need to have social activities and you go out with colleagues several times a week. But here we go out like once per semester or two times in a year or three times per year. Everyone go to their families or they go to their homes after school, have other friends. That's very very different.

In this context, when she was a researcher she has common interests with her co-workers so she could have enjoyable conversations with them. They also frequently spent time and socialized together outside of work environment. However, her current co-workers, other school teachers, mainly do not share her interests and do not have a concern about getting socialized outside. Therefore, they have a limited social interaction mainly due to lack of common interests and the co-workers' reluctance to cultivate a friendship.

A similar experience is shared by Lale (Female, 54 years old, divorced with a child), who is also working in a school by aiding the class teacher, but this time as an immigrant in a host country without having a stable job, she highlighted a different dimension of the issue.

We don't even see each other much at work... The employees never see you, you are not there... For example, I experienced something like this the other day, two of the teachers were unwell, there was one of them. So they called other teachers from freekids, that is, from free area activities, and the woman was telling that man: "You are here, I am here - and she was pointing to the other friend next to us, the intern teacher - and she is there too." I immediately intervened and said, you are not counting me. Her face got a little red, "oh yes, you are here too," she said. I mean, they tend not to see me like that. Because you are not permanent there. Like, they are the landlords but we are the tenants. In other words, she is saying that she will leave here in a few months anyway. They don't get too close, they don't give too many details about their lives. They chat among themselves. Of course, this also has an effect on, I mean my speech is a bit different than theirs. My language is not very good, after all. When they are telling something, they talk very fast in their daily lives. Then, we are also different in terms of culture, but we share from time to time. But we don't see each other outside of work. In the workplace, for example, when the workday is over, they get up and go in their cars. I used to use something like a walking stick for a while. When I was going to school in the snow and ice, none of them offered me anything, they didn't say "we are going by car, should we take you with us?" No. But what I do is, for example, we have planning on Mondays at school, I make a dessert and take it that day. Or for example, I learn that it is one of my friends' birthdays that day, I make a dessert or do something else. I brought Turkish coffee, I brought a machine, I offered them Turkish coffee for a week, to the principals and so on. I did these kinds of things, but they were not very effective in communicating. They only see your good intentions.

In her statement, contrary to Alva, who is, other than being a teacher, also a researcher, Lale stressed that as a person who cannot speak the host country's language fluently as well as working in a precarious position, she is not very well welcomed by her colleagues. While in the case of Alva, having different interests and the reluctance of her co-workers play a part in terms of their limited interaction, in the case of Lale, not being accepted and recognized can be considered the reasons for this type of interaction. It can be argued that there is a covert hierarchy between Lale as a precarious employee and her colleagues with stable positions. Moreover, as mentioned above, Oya, who also has an immigrant background but has been living in the country for a much longer time, indicated her co-workers are actually part of her social circle while she engages in certain leisure activities with them; on the other hand, Lale addressed to an opposite situation that she is mainly treated as more of an outsider, which is especially related to her inability to express herself in the country's native language.

Indeed, other than a covert one, the limited social interaction within the work environment can be the result of an overt hierarchical order. In this sense, Bahar (Female, 37 years old, never married) expressed since she is in a superior position in her workplace, she prefers to maintain more formal and distant relationship with her co-workers rather than being more intimate. Furthermore, one can again intentionally keep distance from his or her co-workers not because of being in a superior position but because of concentrating on work rather than entertaining a relationship with people one does not choose to be friends with but interacting out of necessity to carry out work-related duties. To illustrate, Sarp (Male, 31 years old, never married) remarked that:

My communication with people is very superficial in the office. I usually focus on work and I don't have any desire to go out for a beer or coffee with any of my colleagues. And after a while, it gets to the point that you have to do it because they want you to, and you talk about things like what your plans are this weekend, where you want to go on vacation this summer. You waste yourself in conversations that mean nothing to me and are a complete waste of time. I would rather share that beautiful moment with my friends or talk with them in a different social environment. I'm at work all day anyway.

Other than concentration on work, one may be dissatisfied with the general working atmosphere where s/he does not have any stimulating conservations boosting the potential of the work one is doing (in the case of Gaye who is a professor at a university, it is the academic work) with his or her co-workers. In addition, one can think that in an institutional setting, this relationship among co-workers is doomed to be depreciated; therefore, it would be preferable to leave these within the workplace and rather see other people instead of one's colleagues. In this respect, Gaye (Female, 52 years old, never married) pointed out that:

The office environment is a place that I am not saturated with. It's the smallest university I've ever worked at. I'm not satisfied.... Sometimes the relationships inside wear out. You don't want to take it outside. Being with different people outside gives you different perspectives. Also, outside you always talk about what's happening here when you go there. You don't talk about anything else; you become blunt.

On the other hand, the depreciation of relationships among co-workers can be related to one's thinking ill of his or her colleagues, specifically his or her superiors.

Accordingly, Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married) expressed that:

I never see them. I don't even follow them on social media. I don't want to see them after 5 if possible. I want to close the school page (the university she is working). I can meet with research assistant friends but I never want to meet with the upper echelons except for a few people. You don't want to see them; you've been tolerating them for years. The temperament doesn't match; the character doesn't match. I don't think they have the qualifications to be professors. At least that's how I see it. I've known a lot of professors. There are two people I have to deal with all the time. I never want to see them. The less I see them, the better, for my mental health. I meet as I see fit. Limited.

In a way, Gaye and Nur represent the opposite sides of a superior-subordinate relationship since while Gaye as a professor underscored her dissatisfaction concerning her relationship with her colleagues in general, including her relationship with her subordinates, Nur as a research assistant indicated that the professors she is working with who can be considered her superiors do not have the required qualities and/or skills to be in that position, and possibly for this reason she could not respect them and does not want to see them after the working hours. It can be argued that on the one hand, for Gaye as a professor, the university she is working at does not

provide her a motivating working environment due to being a relatively small university and possibly having cadres who are also thinking small and having rather limited perspectives; on the other hand, for Nur as a research assistant, there is a certain ideal of being a professor, and she feels like the professors she is working with actually damage this image while being incompetent academics and to some degree makes her resent to this situation.

Finally, this limited interaction among co-workers can be related to not having a stable office environment to interact with more or less the same people or working remotely, which does not require one to show up in the office. To illustrate, Bartu (Male, 31 years old, never married) expressed that:

I don't have an office environment, I have many office environments, many work environments. The company I work for is a wholesale company. It has nearly 5000 customers all over Sweden. It mostly consists of restaurants. My company has restaurants and a restaurant floor in a shopping mall. I am there right now. I am also the manager of this floor. I also have a title here. For example, today I am the chief here or the manager or I am the responsible. The people working here, for example, my colleagues today. They do not satisfy me at all. The same goes for the people in the office. I don't have any conversations with the people there anyway, you can't because everyone works and then leaves. You have lunch together. Things you talk about: the dollar went up, the euro went up, this or that happened in Turkey, which city were you from again, oh Istanbul is beautiful, we want to go, okay come, let me know if you go, if there is anything I can help with, etc. You have the same conversation for weeks. Always superficial, nonsensical conversations that never go deep.

His statement shows that, on the one hand, he has to juggle around different offices in the scope of his job description, and as a result, he does not have a stable work environment as well as co-workers; on the other hand, he finds these interactions with his colleagues very unsatisfactory due to mainly having dull and fluffy conversations with them. In addition, Canan (Female, 28 years old, never married) who works home-office specified that:

... Almost the entire office works remotely... The office is in Istanbul, but even those who live in Istanbul don't go. There is such a remote working. I met the people I worked with face to face for the first time 6 months after I started working. Then I went to the office for a few days, and we only worked

with one person there; the office was empty, and so on. So, I didn't develop much of a bond with my office or my colleagues.

Since she does not have to go to the main office which is located in a different city other than the one she currently lives, she is deprived of this opportunity to socialize with her co-workers.

### **3.1.3.1.2.3 Neighbors and neighborhood**

In addition to family and friend relationships and working life, the neighborhood in which one resides can also provide certain socialization opportunities in terms of its location and/or the other residents living in the area, namely the neighbors. In this respect, in the data, the significance of the location or the neighbors is mainly differentiated based on the respondents' age. While the older respondents (as well as women) are the ones underlining their appreciation for having good relations with their neighbors, those young and middle-aged respondents emphasized the importance of the location of their neighborhood, including both good and bad aspects related to its effect on their experience of living alone.

To illustrate, Mehtap (Female, 65 years old, divorced with two children) expressed that "I am very close with my upstairs neighbor. She comes to me and I go to her house... I have neighbors and friends in my close circle. I mingle with them."

Relatedly, Emel (Female, 68 years old, widow with two children) indicated that:

There is usually a neighborly relationship in the apartment building. There are fifteen of us. We have coffee meetings once or twice a week. We go to each other's houses for coffee in the mornings. We dress very nicely; we all take care of ourselves. We go and chat. The garden of the apartment building is beautiful. When I am in Ankara in the summer, we go down to the garden with the neighbors. We make tea, something to eat, and take them down. There are ten or fifteen of us there. We have a good time together.

When we look at the two statements, we can see that in the former case, one of the neighbors of the respondent became a close friend of hers whom they frequently met in a more intimate setting, in the latter case, there is a crowded neighbor group in the building the respondent resides, and they regularly meet and socialize with each other as a group. Indeed, Emel also mentioned that she has been living there for a

long time; however, Mehtap is a relatively new resident in the neighborhood and the building compared to Emel. In this context, being an older resident who has lived there for a long time certainly has an effect in terms of cultivating neighborly relations since once people live somewhere long enough, this can enable them to establish bonds with their immediate surroundings, including neighbors and accordingly, the advantage of being spatially close and accessible to one another possibly facilitates people to maintain these relationships. In this sense, Oya (Female, 64 years old, divorced with a child) specified that:

I mean, I like living alone, but I am not lonely. I have a daughter that I can reach whenever I want, I have a grandchild, I have friends, and this place is like a small neighborhood. There are 31 flats in this complex. I mean, everyone moved here at the same time. Then, over the years, I moved here in 1991, everyone left, and only four families remained from 31 flats. We, these four families, are very close to each other. Plus, those who came later and lived here for 20 years now see themselves as locals of this complex as well. We are very close with them too. Now what is more interesting is that when my grandchildren come, I have very young neighbors, neighbors who have children the same age as my grandchildren, neighbors who are the same age as my daughter, for example, I am very good with them too... I have those Swedish neighbors who buy a bottle of wine and say, "Let's have a drink here" or say, "Come over for dinner." ... This does not make me feel lonely at all. I can leave the key and go to my neighbor. When I go to Turkey in the summer, I have neighbors who will look after my flowers and pick up my mail.

In her statement, Oya points out that since she can easily socialize face-to-face in her neighborhood due to her friendly relationship with her neighbors, she does not feel lonely because of living alone. In other words, even if she is physically alone in her immediate living space, she can easily access other people with whom she feels close without making too much effort; therefore, this aloneness does not bring along the feeling of loneliness in her case. In his study, in which he investigated the solo-living elderly deaths in a heatwave in Chicago, USA, Klinenberg (2001: 513) argued that although spatial proximity is not a requirement for social contact anymore, this can result in vulnerability for older adults who cannot reach to their friends and/or families in case of need due to spatial distance. In effect, it can be asserted that spatial proximity still has an essential role in the relationships older adults formulate since, in their case, having someone to reach out to when they have an emergency situation, which can be much more likely due to their deteriorating health with their

advancing age, or when they feel vulnerable can be more prioritized as a solo-living person who is alone at home.

In contrast to the older respondents, the younger respondents mainly addressed the location of their neighborhood as an aspect they value rather than their neighbors. On the one hand, the neighborhood can be located in a very accessible area where one can reach any place or meet any of his/her needs, including both work-related and personal needs in the immediate environment, or being located close to the city center where again one can find various activity opportunities, or close to the nature that motivates one to engage in more outdoor activities. On the other hand, the location of the neighborhood can only be advantageous in terms of being an affordable option, but at the same time, it can make one feel bothered due to not being able to fit into the social circle of the neighborhood. For instance, Bartu (Male, 31 years old, never married) remarked that:

I love it so much, I adore my neighborhood. It is the most advantageous location where I can live in -City-, as if everything was put there for me. It is magnificent. I have 28 customers on that street alone. It is a very serious advantage. When you go somewhere, you go right away and come back without wasting any time. If you are going somewhere, if you have a nightlife, if you are going to drink, everything is there for the taking anyway. Now I have to move, let's see how I will do that... I mean, in Sweden, you don't choose the house. The house usually chooses you. So I can say it was a great chance and it was a good thing it was in that location. That's why I jumped at the opportunity to rent the house. I didn't even think about whether the house was a bit old, there were missing things, there would be noise here, there would be that, etc. I saw the disadvantages; I didn't care at all. Because it was in a very advantageous location. That was the most important thing.

In a similar vein, Sarp (Male, 31 years old, never married) accentuated that:

The place I live is close to the city, it's a 5-minute walk to the city center. So that's an advantage for me, I'm in the city. I can go wherever I want as I want. First of all, I don't have a driver's license here, so I can't live in a remote area, I have to take a lot of buses. For example, that could be a problem. If I lived in a suburban area 25-30 minutes away from the city, loneliness would affect me a lot. Because it's something that limits the activities I can do by myself when I go out.

In effect, they both think that the location of their houses is very advantageous since it enables them to access easily the opportunities provided by their city in line with their needs and wants. Aside from the accessibility, a neighborhood can be close to

the nature, which is something one specifically desires or one appreciates and benefits from when it is the case. To illustrate, Peter (Male, 36 years old, never married) indicated that:

I'm fortunate enough to live very close to a very nice forest, just outside the window. So I enjoy running and I have been doing that for my whole life. So it's really fortunate. I have never lived so close to forest so that I can run with my forest shoes from my door step.

Similarly, Irmak (Female, 29 years old, never married) highlighted that by living close to nature as well as close to her friends from university during the pandemic process, she was able to develop specific methods like having lunch with her friends or going for a walk along the lake in her neighborhood. In her case, both location and being spatially proximate to her social circle are important aspects in terms of her neighborhood. Relatedly, she said that:

We were working from home (during the pandemic process) ... For example, I have two or three friends from university who live in the same neighborhood as me, and if we could find somewhere open to have lunch, which we usually did, we would eat there, or if the weather was nice, we would have a picnic outside and walk during the lunch. Also, where I live, there is such a big lake within walking distance, and we go there very often. Since the beginning of the pandemic, or since I moved to -City-... maybe something that can be included in my weekly routine is going to the forest or the lake as a way to be charged up.

While the above-mentioned respondents mainly put an emphasis on their ability to access certain opportunities thanks to the location of their living area, Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married) pointed out that even if he appreciates the silence and the affordability of his living area, he is still disturbed by the social environment of his neighborhood since he feels he does not belong there as a member of a lower class family according to his characterization. He expressed that:

So -Name- (student lodging provided by the university) is not bad. It is quieter; I like it compared to my old neighborhood. My old neighborhood was pretty awful, and it might have affected my move from there. At least here, it is quiet. I don't have any noise issues. The thing I look for the most is no noise, so it is good in that way... But other than that, I don't know; the social circle here reminds me of my class. I am uncomfortable in that way... So my income level is insufficient, for example, here. The simplest example of this: Now, this semester, I have to go to the east campus to instruct courses. That going and coming is difficult since the shuttle services do not run regularly... Then I look and see that 18-year-old kids who have just started university have been given a car. I am 30 years old, and when I turned 18, my family had to sell our car. We went bankrupt and were in debt. We had to sell the

car, and we haven't been able to buy one since then... When I see these things, I get annoyed and angry. Because they seem to remind me that I am poor. And I find them all spoiled like that anyway... In that respect, the neighborhood bothers me. I like its silence, but the economic aspect bothers me. And there is also the matter of eating here, for example, and again, I feel this income level issue because everything is incredibly expensive here... It was more affordable, because if you are not working somewhere, they offer a 50% discount to PhD students, that was my biggest reason for choosing here. Otherwise, the house itself didn't appeal to me that much. It was a single-room studio. Okay, it was nice inside, and it was new, but a single room really didn't appeal to me. I didn't like it that much. I only came for economic reasons. Because it was becoming difficult for me to stay in the city center... Even if my rent didn't increase too much, the dues were increasing a lot... I said, I can pay the rent for this place with my scholarship, I will have money left over and I won't have to ask my family for money anymore. That was one of the biggest factors.

As a PhD student in a foundation university in which students mostly come from upper-class families with relatively good financial conditions, the respondent has to interact with these students on the university campus where he lives. Seemingly, this interaction bothers him, possibly because he feels inferior due to his lack of financial means at a much older age while working as an instructor to those students. Therefore, despite the other advantages, including an economic one, the location of his house does not specifically make him enjoy living in such a neighborhood; on the contrary, it makes him feel alienated and question his way of living while identifying himself a lower-class person who has to interact with people from the upper-class.

### **3.2 Independence**

Independence is one of the most commonly expressed types of experience of living alone by solo dwellers both in the literature and also in our own data. Indeed, independence can mean different things to each solo-living person with different demographical qualities, including the elderly, young adults, women, and so on. In this part, those subthemes derived from the data and corresponding to the experience of independence will be categorized and elaborated below to reflect multilayered or multidimensional characteristic which incorporates all those meanings within itself.

In this context, before elaborating on these subthemes, it needs to be put forward that while solo-dwellers give meaning to what they experience by living alone, they adopt certain self-practices, mostly aiming to cope with the situation. Accordingly, as an

analytical toolkit, Karakayali's (2015) tripartite conceptual framework for self-practices, namely adaptive, defensive, and transformative approaches used by individuals to shape themselves in relation to their social environment will be addressed here while trying to set forth how solo-living people react and make sense of their living arrangement and current situation in general. If we briefly introduce these conceptualizations, Karakayali (2015: 107) first specifies that adaptive self-practices mainly target self-discipline by gaining a "mastery over egoistic impulses," while defensive self-practices are related to defending one's individuality and self-identity by distancing oneself from society. Finally, transformative self-practices aim to transform the self by gaining autonomy from oneself while exploring new forms of existence. Whereas adaptive and defensive practices can be characterized as coping mechanisms that one uses in order to maintain and preserve one's existence in society by reproducing oneself, transformative practices are about reinventing oneself to exist within a new self-form.

In terms of identifying living alone as independence, it is possible to observe the adoption of these different self-practices by solo dwellers. Accordingly, based on the data, five subcategories reflecting the experience of living alone as independence are formulated, including "taking a step into adulthood," "liberation from traditional gender roles," "enjoying spatiotemporal control," "resting and relaxing," and "enjoying solitude." These subcategories will be examined below while taking into account the particular self-practices adopted by respondents.

### **3.2.1 Taking A Step into Adulthood**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, pathways leading to living alone, young adults who have left the family house for the first time mainly experience an in-between period, which is called stepping into adulthood before they start to live alone. This in-between period basically refers to their cohabitation experience while they are mostly a student, including either living in a dormitory or a shared apartment. After they started to live alone, it became the continuation of this process and the independence is sensed as taking a step into adulthood through being self-reliant and taking their own responsibility while also being accountable to themselves.

There are several studies revealing these young adults' experience of living alone. For instance, in his study, Klinenberg (2012: 31) states that among young people, living alone is perceived as a big step for the transition to adulthood and some kind of a mark of distinction while taking a poor view of living with parents or roommates. The interviews he conducted with young adults living in the USA show that by living alone, they can make time for themselves for their personal and professional improvement, which is perceived as something necessary since both contemporary families and jobs can be precarious, they have to rely upon themselves rather than anybody else (Klinenberg, 2012: 58-59). In their study, which focuses on the experiences of those who live alone between the ages of 25 and 44 in Scotland, UK, Jamieson and Simpson (2013: 60) indicate that the respondents mainly see this process of leaving the family house and getting a place to live as natural when they reach a certain age which requires independence from their parents to achieve some self-development and to gain self-respect. In other words, to become an adult and to be independent, the experience of living alone is something rather seen as necessary; nevertheless, it is not considered a mark of distinction, which is the case in Klinenberg's study but more of a normal process that most of the young adults should experience at one point or another.

In our study, a similar perspective can be found in the data related to making this connection between independence and one's taking responsibility for oneself and, accordingly, experiencing independence as part of adulthood. To illustrate, Defne (Female, 24 years old, never married) expressed that;

Until three years ago, I did not know what electricity and water bills were. Okay, I think this is an opportunity my family provided for me, thank God, but I still have a lot of friends who still don't know these things right now. They do not know how to use a washing machine. For example, my sister used to tidy the house for me. Even if I left it like that, she would get angry but still tidy it up. But there is no such thing right now. I must do it myself. In fact, this was the thing that I found most difficult. I was so used to it; someone is tidying up after me. But then I realized that no one was washing my laundry. Nobody cleans my dishes. That was the process that I found most difficult.

She is the youngest respondent in our study, and she indicated in her statement that even if the process of taking responsibility for yourself is handwringing, she still appreciates learning how to be self-dependent. Furthermore, Onur (Male, 33 years old, never married) also underlined this relationship between independence and taking responsibility for oneself by saying: “I define living alone as taking all the responsibilities for the house... I should do the cleaning that day, but if I don't feel like doing it, then I don't.” His statement shows that not being accountable to anyone regarding handling domestic duties is a relief while being solely in charge of such responsibilities.

Irmak (Female, 29 years old, never married) also expressed a similar concern related to taking all responsibility solely by oneself. She indicated that:

Sometimes I think people want to delegate responsibility. Sometimes, especially if I am working very hard or in a stressful period of my PhD, I want to have food at home, for example. You know, I don't want to come home and cook. Like this week, for example, I'm here for 5-6 days now, I have to clean when I get back. I wish I could go to a clean house, I mean, I couldn't delegate responsibility like that. Sometimes it's something more mental. I want to get that responsibility out of my mind. It's not the physical labor that bothers me, maybe I can do that cleaning, I have that energy inside me, but I don't want to think about it. I think this is the most challenging thing for me. I mean, sometimes, especially if I'm busy and stressed, it becomes too much, so even thinking about whether today is the rent day, let me transfer it. Even small things like this can be too much of a burden sometimes.

At this point, what needs to be highlighted concerning all of these statements is that in the context of living alone, there is actually conditional independence. There is the cost of taking on all the domestic responsibilities, most of which are once possibly handled by others or shared in a family house and/or cohabited house. Taking responsibility for yourself can be a challenge for young adults to overcome in the process other than being a self-developmental process; therefore, for them, the experience itself does not include a smooth transition, which is possibly overlooked.

In the above-mentioned examples related to taking a step into adulthood, the respondents can be considered to adopt more of adaptive and defensive self-practices

rather than transformative ones. In all these statements, what we can observe is that the respondents talked about certain domestic duties or responsibilities that need to be handled by themselves as part of being an adult while living alone. In other words, there are certain accepted or prescribed practices to be followed when one characterizes oneself as an adult. Indeed, when we look at these statements more closely, it can be argued that these self-practices have both adaptive and defensive characteristics since while they all indicated these prescribed duties and responsibilities that they should also fulfill at some point, as a solo-dweller who is not accountable to anyone in their house environment benefitted from this independence as a way of defending their individuality by bending the rules rather than simply following them. Indeed, it also needs to be stressed that these self-practices should not be perceived as mutually exclusive categorizations; there is a rather more dynamic relationship among them, enabling us to make more fluid characterizations while identifying these self-practices.

### **3.2.2 Liberation from Traditional Gender Roles**

In the existing studies on the experiences of solo-dwelling elderly, it is observed that for the older generations traditional gender roles are very much in effect and, for most of these elderly people, living alone means being able to live outside of the traditional gender roles, specifically for women (Eshbaugh, 2008; Gangopadhyay, 2020; Izuhara, 2000; Russell, 2007). This is observed in this study as well. Moreover, in addition to the elderly, young and middle-aged adults have also indicated similar experiences.

In this context, those who mainly enjoy refraining from traditional gender roles, including being someone's wife or husband, mother or father, at least for a certain period, describe living alone as an experience of independence. They also can prefer to be single or not to be in a serious romantic relationship and arrange their lives more or less by their own needs and wants. In other words, they put themselves into the center and shape their life accordingly. Thus, it can be argued that by not being accountable to anyone and only being responsible for your own acts in a place you have sole control over, this feeling of freedom and independence can flourish.

For example, Suna (Female, 62 years old, widow with a child) directly defined living alone as “freedom”. This freedom she described is based on not giving an account to anybody so you are free to do whatever you want without getting any second opinion. Indeed, it should also be highlighted that she had a life in which she had to survive various hardships. She had to battle for her own independence as a woman both when she was single and when she became a widow. She had to prove herself many times to earn a place in society as an independent woman but at the same time as a respected member.

Indeed, it should also be noted that liberation from socially imposed traditional gender roles might be an issue quite independent of cultural contexts, since the interviews from both Sweden and Turkey show similarities in this respect. To illustrate, Eva (Female, 65 years old, never married) specified that:

I am a single person; I don't have any children. I am arranging my life very much for me. So, I am working through the pandemic. I am also working a lot at home... I am doing my exercises. I am arranging my life in the way that I can. I exercise my voice, I am training, I am planning my work, and so on. So that's because I don't have to take responsibility.

In a society where living alone is considered as a social norm, traditional gender roles can still be a concern for one, and living outside of these limits determined by these roles can still be something to be appreciated or enjoyed. In this respect, it may not be surprising that Eva who has the longest experience of living alone (nearly 40 years) identified it as freedom as well.

### **3.2.2.1 The role of cultural norms**

As in the above-mentioned Eva example, freeing oneself from adopting traditional gender roles or having a traditional family may not be valid only for the participants from Turkey; however, the pressure of adopting these traditional gender roles and

thus the effect of these roles can be argued to be much greater for participants from Turkey, in comparison of the participants from Sweden<sup>5</sup>.

The empowering experience in which the participants from Turkey feel independent and self-reliant because of living alone can be stated as a country-specific experience. This feeling of independence can be associated with surpassing the pressures of following a traditional way of living in line with these traditional gender roles. Therefore, by living alone they are challenging the social norm that they are expected to comply with it even if they do not necessarily acknowledge that. Indeed, it should be highlighted that they can perceive this experience as a transitory period in which they prepare themselves for another cohabitation experience with a romantic partner (Hughes, 2015). In this prospective relationship, they can adopt traditional gender roles again. In other words, even if they challenge these traditional gender roles and enjoy the freedom and independence provided by living alone, they may not intend to maintain this more unconventional way of life as a permanent one while searching for a suitable cohabiting partner. It can be pointed out that while mostly the female participants from Turkey, specifically those who formerly had a more traditional marriage life, underlined such characteristics of living alone, most of the male participants from Turkey also echoed similar characterization of living alone as freedom and independence.

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<sup>5</sup> According to some researchers, in the early 1960s when the country experienced worker shortage, rather than exporting workers outside, they preferred to find a solution in the domestic labor market by targeting women as the potential labor force (Trost, 2008: 48). Bringing women into the labor force meant challenging the traditional gender roles as they could not simply engage in domestic duties while working outside. In this context, by the inclusion of women in the labor force, housewives as a social institution mainly disappeared during the 1970s (Trost, 2008: 48). In the late 1960s while the marriage rates were dropping, the cohabitation with one's couple was increasing in the country (Trost, 2016: 20). Cohabitation became another social institution apart from marriage while marriage still maintains its existence yet in a much more modest way. In this regard, deciding to have children has no particular effect on couples' decision to get married (Trost, 2008: 52). It is possible to argue that since there are no specific rules when the cohabiting couples separated compared to a divorce, which has financial enforcements for the married couples, separation in the case of cohabitation is much easier; therefore, cohabitation as a social institution is much more prone to bring along living alone. In a country where cohabitation became widespread within a relatively earlier and longer period of time, it may not be surprising to see the highest number of people who are living alone while the living arrangement turned into a social norm. Regarding traditional gender norms, Trost (2008: 59) underlines that in Sweden equity between women and men is an important issue that is tried to be embraced and implemented in every sphere of life. Accordingly, equality inside the house, in which men and women share domestic responsibilities and take care of children together rather than women's shouldering all of these, is tried to be widely adopted in the country.

At this point, it can be illuminating to draw attention to the gender aspect of the issue discussed in the literature. Gender-based differentiation becomes mainly apparent in how independence is sensed in the scope of sensing house space. For the males, especially for older generation widowers, house space left its specific meaning after their spouse had died while the females can sense independence through being in control of the house space by themselves without all the domestic responsibilities dictated by those traditional gender roles (Russell, 2007; van den Hoonaard, 2009). In this respect, women living alone can now define their living spaces through pleasure rather than a sense of mission after being released from those duties. To illustrate, in her study, Eshbaugh found out that small pleasures, including “having control of the remote and TV, being able to eat when one wants, having the bed to one’s self and not having to cook” are all appreciated by solo-living elderly women (Eshbaugh, 2008: 133). Correspondingly, Yetter (2010: 415) put forward that the solo-living elderly men feel more independent in terms of arranging their lives the way they want to in line with their own activities and lifestyle since now they have no responsibilities towards a spouse or a family. Indeed, the gender difference is noticeable as women specifically emphasized independence within the house space while men underlined independence in general due to being discharged from familial responsibilities.

In our study, Derya (Female, 45 years old, divorced with two children) marked that:

I'm so tired of family rituals, and not getting spousal support, living with such a challenging spouse. Also, my ex-husband was such a meticulous man. He always put a lot of pressure on me regarding the order of the house. I like eating very much. So, I was also very particular about food. You know, everyday fresh food should be cooked, I don't slack and cook whatever I want. That's why I'm so tired of these conversations about domestic duties. That's why this freedom has been so good to me. So not cooking when you feel like it is a great luxury. It's such a luxury to say that I won't cook.

Her statement exhibits that living alone means independence at home by relieving from her former domestic duties. Moreover, Mehtap (Female, 65 years old, divorced with two children) also expressed that:

I'm used to being alone. I'm used to freedom. I mean, it's hard for me to be under someone else's orders. I don't plan to get married, but its fate, if I get married, of course, I will string along with him, he will string along with me. Indeed, an order will be set up. But it also seems a bit difficult to me. Impossible.

Her expression of “being under someone else’s orders” refers to male domination. If she decides to remarry with someone, she should accept this domination and let go of the independence provided by her living arrangement. She formulates a relationship between being alone at home and independence by being the sole controller of the house space. However, when a husband gets involved in this picture, she mainly becomes the practitioner but not the decision-maker anymore.

Another aspect of this gender-based reading of the relationship between independence and the use of house space is about how solo-living women feel empowered by carrying out certain domestic duties which are traditionally perceived as male tasks while solo-living men do not attribute such meaning to handling those domestic responsibilities traditionally shouldered by women (van den Hoonaard, 2009). Russell (2007: 187) pointed out that nearly all domestic tasks are identified as ‘women’s work’ such as cleaning, cooking and shopping while only a small proportion of these are identified as traditionally male tasks like home maintenance and transport.

In another study focusing on the solo-living experience of widows and widowers after losing their partners, van den Hoonaard (2009) found out that, for widows, after losing their spouse, being able to stay at home and also carry out tasks that are identified traditionally as the male's responsibilities are considered a success and give them a sense of self-confidence while enabling them to appreciate independence in their homes. On the other hand, for widowers, fulfilling domestic tasks like cooking and cleaning are not perceived as achievements, and they mainly prefer to perform these tasks at the bare minimum, which is necessary to maintain their lives rather than trying to keep up their deceased spouses’ standards (van den Hoonaard, 2009). In the study, the widowers indicated that their houses mainly ceased to be sensed as a

home for them after their wives died and, in contrast to the widows, the widowers considered going outside during the day as an improvement (van den Hoonaard, 2009: 750). In other words, independence is not associated with house space in their case; on the contrary, being alone at home is something mostly they could not tolerate (Davidson, 1998: 161).

In our data, it is also possible to see the example of this aspect of independence that women are satisfied and enjoy carrying out traditionally male tasks. To illustrate, Derya (Female, 45 years old, divorced with two children) said that:

Once you live alone, you see how many life skills you have. So, for example, I now have to do many of the things my husband used to do. Men usually go out to do their duties, but I do those duties now. When I started living alone, I realized that I had so many life skills. I achieved these, too, thank God.

Her statement displays that after starting living alone, she discovers she can actually manage to take care of these traditional male tasks, and it gives her a sense of achievement. It can be argued that in the literature, traditional gender roles are discussed mainly from a limited angle for the Turkish context. The main matter of concern is generally the sexual and spatial divisions between men and women in which women are the ones restricted regarding both their sexual activities and their spatial area of influence. However, these roles can cover more from that. To illustrate, even if the domestic responsibilities are attributed to women within their gender role definition, certain domestic chores like fixing the faucet or changing the bulb can still be regarded as male duty, rather than something expected to be handled by females, which are also discussed in the above-mentioned literature focusing on the gender aspect in the Western context. Therefore, a simple inside-outside division while identifying the roles of men and women cannot be effectively illuminating for such cases.

In general, for older generation women, as part of traditional gender roles, they were expected to nurture others in most parts of their lives, yet when they start living alone, it becomes all about nurturing themselves. Now, they can focus on and realize

their own wishes and wants thanks to the independence provided by their living arrangement. Therefore, they possibly enjoy and appreciate living alone more than the older men.

When we take into account the adoption of these traditional gender roles in Turkish society, because of the attached importance to women's sexuality and using this as a motivation to dominate women while realizing traditional gender roles<sup>6</sup>, the women's self-dependency is probably discouraged rather than being encouraged in the country. While the definition of both male and female respondents from Turkey for living alone is basically freedom, the female participants much more directly made the connection between these traditional gender roles and their feeling of freedom and independence due to living alone. In this respect, it is possible to trace this kind of understanding of gender roles in the data, specifically in terms of locating women in society.

For instance, Suna (Female, 62 years old, widow with a child) who was born and raised in the Eastern part of the country talked about how she had to struggle with the independent women stereotype and she had to prove that she can both protect her integrity and honor while being independent and self-reliant. She had clashed against the traditional gender roles as a woman who was born and raised in a traditional family and in a place where the society mostly embraced such traditional values and norms. She expressed that:

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<sup>6</sup> If we look at the literature on Turkish cultural values related to gender, it is indicated that when the country where the citizens have been mostly Muslim adopted a secular Civil Code, equal rights to women and men in different matters related to the family were granted (Ilkkaracan, 1998: 66). Nevertheless, even if officially a secular way of life is depicted, certain customary and religious practices have been still very much valid in everyday life of the people, specifically those who are living in the eastern part of the country (Ilkkaracan, 1998: 66). In this respect, it is possible to trace these practices manifesting in gender relations in the society. Honor is such a concept that has this kind of connotation. In Turkish culture, it has been argued that honor is valued significantly, which is specifically the case in Eastern culture (Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2001: 971-972). Concerning the gender aspect, honor refers to certain qualities that a woman should possess and is expected to protect. The concept is related to the purity of a woman before the marriage and her faithfulness to her husband after the marriage. In this context, the purity is equated with the virginity of women. That is, an unmarried woman should be a virgin until she gets married. Accordingly, the value of a woman is assessed on her ability to protect her honor. Those women who are suspected of having pre- or extramarital sexual affairs can be punished by death under the name of honor killings (Cindoglu et al., 2008: 245).

As a girl in -City-, going to school required a heavy price, and I paid a heavy price for it all. But I don't regret any of them. I didn't laugh; I didn't wear make-up; I didn't smile; I've never had a boyfriend. Because I had to break this down, I had to nullify the sentence "girls going to school are prostitutes". And what a pity, I am ashamed to say that all the boys who went to school with me were beaten by me even without doing anything. Why? Because I became more masculine when I heard people around me saying that I was worth 100 men or something. But I do not regret it because after me, my whole family... their daughters started to go to school at the age of 6 and a half and 7. After me, now we have civil engineer girls, there are geography teachers, there are physics teachers, there are dentists. After me, a lot of girls went to school and then entered business life, and they had the opportunity to do that. But I suffered for it. I fought for this.

So, her statement shows that she had to prove she was worthy to take education as much as a man does by basically wrapping herself up in masculinity. She even became "more man than man" as she exhibited a violent attitude towards men to prove that she was not a woman to be approached with certain sexual intentions while she was studying as a student. She pointed out several times that although the consequences of such a battle she gave at the time were very heavy, she thinks that it's worth it as she paved the way for other women in the family to have an education and a career.

While she was a teacher in Turkey, she worked in different places including both small villages and relatively big cities. She lived alone during that time and again had to put up with the solo-living single woman image which was defined by men living in those places. She was faced with judgmental reactions specifically by the prominent male figures of the area with a traditional conservative outlook. When she became a single parent after the loss of her husband, she encountered again such a traditional conservative outlook in Sweden this time as being a widow from the same community. In other words, her life mainly passed with these battles in which she resisted being a sitting target as an independent woman who has no husband while she was both single and a widow. She was tested against all these encounters throughout her life as a woman and probably such an approach made her close her mind to the thought of sharing her life with a romantic partner so she preferred to remain single.

In the case of Suna, we see a life-long struggle against cultural norms, which affected her decisions and her way of thinking and handling issues. She firstly resisted the woman image equated with domestic roles, then the single woman image as a sexual object, and then the image of a widow who is considered in search of a man and accordingly trying to steal other's husbands. At the same time, she noted that, as a school teacher, she was very motivated about teaching the younger generations her mother tongue. She tried to pursue these ideals all together. When she lost her husband, she entered a grieving process and she possibly idealized the short period of time she spent with her husband and became nostalgic. She has a daughter and she chose to raise her by herself since she experienced all these prejudiced and wearing attitudes as a woman and she probably wanted to somehow shield her daughter from these. In this respect, her relationships with her family and friends took shape accordingly.

It is argued that marriage is attributed importance by the traditional norms in Turkish society; specifically for women, it means that their sexual as well as social status change by marrying (Sancar, 2012). While an unmarried woman is still dependent upon her family/parents and has no dominance over the house, a married woman gains some kind of a dominance at the house by being in charge of domestic responsibilities. If we look at the discussions related to the marital relationships of the spouses in the literature, it is remarked that traditional gender roles are mainly accepted as the norms of the marriage. Study of Sakallı-Uğurlu et al. (2021) shows that the traditional gender roles in the marriage and also the approach towards single women based on sexual purity expectation are still accepted cultural norms of society. According to their study, both married men and women are expected to be in line with the traditional gender roles within the marriage. While man is the breadwinner, head and protector of the family, father and decision maker; woman is the mother, wife, homemaker and care-giver of children (Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2021).

In other words, in traditional marriages, women are mainly expected to accept and recognize male domination and act accordingly. In a similar vein, Oya (Female, 64

years old, divorced with one child) pointed out that her ex-husband did not treat her as his equal but as if she was subject to him while they were still married. She addressed that her mother and her aunts, as the female figures in her life, mainly embraced and internalized the traditional gender roles and male domination rather than giving a battle by raising their voices against their husbands. In this regard, even if she felt like she was also like them most of the time in her former marriage, she still tried to resist her ex-husband's attitude towards her. The position her ex-husband used to locate her is an inferior one compared to his place, and the respondent was furious about being positioned like that. When she asked about how she characterizes living alone in general, she specified that: "Freedom. I seriously define it as freedom. So I don't understand people who are afraid of loneliness. What are people actually afraid of? They are not afraid of being alone, they are afraid of getting rid of their habits."

For Oya, leaving behind her former marriage actually emancipated her while she defined this marriage as more of a habit that she appreciates outgrowing. In addition, Irmak (Female, 29 years old, never married), who has no such former marriage experience in which she embraced traditional gender roles, underlined that living alone makes her feel free and resilient due to relying on herself rather than anyone else. When she was asked whether she gives some kind of a social message to people around her and challenges traditional norms, she expressed that:

A little. Because living alone claims to be single at many points. A single 29-year-old woman is not far from the stigma, even here (in Sweden). So people question when one says she lives alone. Do you have a partner or not? If so, why do you live alone? I mean, as you know, many people see it as a transition period, living alone until they find someone, but it's not like that. Since it's not like that, I sometimes feel like I'm challenging some norms when talking about it, especially when talking to people who have adopted traditional norms.

She pointed out that her living arrangement is actually a manifestation of her marital and/or relationship status as a woman. Therefore, even speaking of her living arrangement, specifically with those who more or less embrace traditional gender roles, enables her to maintain a stance against these roles. While living in Sweden

does not mean she would not face stigmatization due to not being a fit for such traditional gender roles, still, her attentiveness related to the issue can be argued to be associated with cultural factors.

A similar experience is shared by Lale, who is a middle-aged divorced woman living alone. She emphasized that she tries to defy all those people who question her way of living and insistently advise her to find someone and have a relationship. She said:

I used to think like this: Middle Eastern people I know around me, namely Turks, Arabs, Kurds, these types of people, had these types of questions, like “Don’t you want someone in your life? or there is someone I know you can meet”. I used to encounter these types of things. I gave them my answer but I used to say that this is probably specific to Middle Eastern societies. But I am very surprised when I am with Swedish people, they ask me the same question as well. I tell them too but they don’t understand... Of course, I accept that people have difficulty understanding, especially married people. I mean sometimes I even snap at them. Think about it: marriage is usually like this in my circle; for example, if a woman’s husband has gone somewhere for a day, I say to the woman where is your husband, she says, “he left and better him gone, and never come back.” Living in such a relationship is no different than hell. I was married for 15 years too. I came to these points from time to time. In other words, at the point I have reached, I realize this. I was married and I had a child. I am lucky in that sense. In other words, I have experienced it. I don’t want to have a relationship where a person gets tired of his or her partner but is forced to maintain it. And it seems to me that many of them have such relationships. The Swede I went to today asked the same thing. Every time I go, she says “Do you have a boyfriend?” I say I don’t want it, but is it something that needs to be asked every time I go? When I told this to a friend of mine, she said, tell those who ask like this, “Do you have someone in mind for me? Why are you asking so persistently?” I don’t know why they are asking. So, even though I don’t want to give such a message, they get a message.

Like Irmak, Lale also underscored that living alone is perceived as a declaration of one’s relationship status and despite being a much more common practice in Sweden compared to a country like Turkey, for a certain age group, it can still be stigmatized, which pinpoints that cohabiting couple relationships have the central place in the identification of romantic relationships in line with Hughes’ findings (2015). Indeed, what she highlighted in her statement is very critical related to the gender aspect of the issue. In this statement, she actually puts forward the stereotype of the solo-living woman formulated by society, to some degree regardless of its cultural values,

through the reactions she gets from all the people around her including people from both Sweden and Turkey. There is this equation that if a woman lives alone and is single, she is most likely in a miserable position, while even if a woman has a relationship with a man she cannot bear, it's still better than being alone. So, she reacts to this distorted image of a solo living woman while criticizing those who idealize having a partner and being married, which, in most cases, do not bring along happiness, according to her. She criticized a friend of hers in Sweden, whom she initially liked and found her close in character to herself, with the following words:

... But the woman had a strange desire to attract someone into her life. At first, I thought, was it a hormonal desire? She is the same age as me. No, it is not like that. That is why she got into relationships with very wrong people. She experienced very negative things. She was sad, devastated; I mean, just to have someone in her life, she got into a relationship with the wrong man. Then with someone else, and then again with someone else. In the end, she got married, but the man she married never came here. And because she got married to the man, she had surgeries. She had her breasts enlarged, her face lifted, etc., but the man never came here. So when I say he did not come, it does not mean he could not come. Her relationship with him ended before it even started. She got married in Turkey but couldn't make him come here. So, I'm a little hesitant about forming relationships. I have that fear a little bit... Let there be someone in my life, but not the wrong person. I'm a little cautious, I guess.

She compares her situation with a woman she thinks is very similar to herself and again criticizes her due to desperately searching for a partner so as not to be alone and involved in men who she thinks are not fit for her while in the period and afterward when she eventually got married to a guy, she became much more miserable than ever. Lale indicated that even if she also wishes to have a partner, she gets frightened because of all those bad relationship trials she observed in her current social circle in which people ended up with the wrong person just for the sake of having a relationship and questioned this effort to find a partner. Accordingly, among those bad examples, her choice of being prudent despite all the social pressure she faces becomes more meaningful for her and makes her feel like a brave and unyielding warrior.

Living alone can also be an experience of independence for those who are content with adopting traditional gender roles in their former family relationships and seek a traditional family life as their future expectation. To illustrate, Tolga (Male, 67 years old, divorced with three children) who indicated that living alone is really difficult for him after his 30-35 years of marriage life. Nevertheless, he also pointed out that living alone is a freeing experience. He said:

No one can interfere with anything that belongs to me. I feel like a bird right now. So there is this side of living alone. I feel so comfortable. For example, if you say to me, let's go to a cafe and drink coffee, there is no problem... That's how comfortable I am.

His statement shows that even if he still pays attention to the boundaries set by traditional values while trying to clarify his experience of freedom and independence, he appreciates this feeling of comfort coming from this experience. Drinking coffee with a young woman while he was married was an act that can be problematic for him since he possibly should report it and explain the reasons for this meeting to his wife, and maybe he had to cancel it due to not getting his wife's consent. He used this as a criterion to compare his former and the latter living arrangements.

Challenging traditional gender roles by living alone embodies mainly defensive and transformative self-practices. In this respect, getting free from traditional gender roles enables the respondents to experience independence, which makes them to preserve their individuality rather than following the rules and ways of living specifically and traditionally prescribed for their gender. Moreover, after experiencing this kind of freedom, one may easily enter into a questioning period in which a self-interrogation can bring forth certain self-transformations. For example, Nehir (Female, 60 years old, divorced with a child) expressed that:

Of course, there is a more structured life in marriage, a life more dependent on others. But of course, there were also disagreements that he (her ex-husband) brought. So, if these disagreements did not exist, I would still be continuing my family life. The elimination of those disagreements was a great relief for me and I think it relieved my daughter. I made such a decision on her behalf. That's why I regained my mental health. So, I healed myself in this

process of living alone. So, it was good for me to move from a challenging environment to a life where I could manage my own life.

Her statement shows that living alone after her divorce is a healing process for her, in which she can be herself again and conserve her mental well-being after being freed from marital responsibilities and accountabilities towards her ex-husband. Indeed, while being able to defend herself against the disputes she had with her ex-husband by making the decision to separate and start a new life, which she could now design the way she needed or willed, she possibly also had to transform herself to some degree in order to formulate her new way of living after being a solo-living empty-nester who should open a new chapter in her life.

### **3.2.3 Enjoying Spatiotemporal Control**

Those who specifically have a former cohabitation experience or have lived in student housing enjoy the spatiotemporal control made possible by their living arrangement as the sole decision-maker in their house. For example, both Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married) and Peter (Male, 36 years old, never married) enjoy this spatiotemporal control and utilize it in different terms. Peter likes to do outdoor activities such as running in the forest, rather than spending time at home, and the times he runs in the forest, he can get dirty in the mud; therefore, when he comes home, there is nobody that he can disturb with the smell and the dirt. Gizem likes to have her own routine in her house without being tied to anyone. This means she can wash the dishes whenever she finds the right time for herself, can eat whenever and whatever she wants, and so on. While for Peter the freedom provided by his living arrangement enables him to pursue his outside engagements, for Gizem it enables her to establish her inside order at home. In this context, Peter attaches importance to the location of his house, rather than the interior as he indicated that he specifically looking for apartments in his current neighborhood since he likes them there mainly due to easy access to the forest. In other words, Peter has a loose attachment to his house but more attachment to his neighborhood due to enjoying being outdoors. On the contrary, Gizem has a high attachment to her house.

In this context, those respondents who highlighted this aspect as part of their solo living experience mainly pointed out that since they are the solo controller in their house, they can formulate an order, including doing things they want to do at their own pace while only concerning to satisfy themselves. To illustrate, Arda (Male, 43 years old, never married) indicated that: "In general, I think living alone is a good thing. When I say a good thing, I mean it's freedom. After all, as I said, everything is under your control, everything in the house." Similarly, Berk (Male, 33 years old, divorced) underlined the importance of having spatiotemporal control and appreciates this kind of independence provided by his living arrangement. He told that:

... (Living alone is) Quiet, calm, serene, being able to watch what I want, listen to what I want, listen to the music at the level I want, be able to roam around the house as I want, clean when I want, cook when I want and not have to ask anyone. In other words, sometimes I want to clean and if I don't want to do it, then I don't. But for example, if my girlfriend comes and finds the house messy and she doesn't like it, then I don't like her reaction. What's it to you? I'm not doing it today but I'll do it tomorrow or the next day. That's my plan. Since I see these, living alone is still a situation I prefer.

He specified the intervention in his living space by another person is something that bothers him and makes him maintain his living arrangement rather than cohabit. Moreover, Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married) indicated a similar spatial enjoyment based on not being interrupted by anyone in his house space and expressed that:

It (living alone) is the most enjoyable thing for me. I am alone, no one is there, no one says anything to me, no one interferes with me. Everything, the inside of the house, is completely mine. All areas are mine. That's freedom for me. It is complete freedom for me to have that house to myself and to be on my own.

Finally, Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married) accentuated her spatiotemporal enjoyment as follows:

There are many things you can do. There is no obstacle for you. You get angrier when you can't do them. You can do many things. You have the opportunity at home. For example, if you live with your family and have a certain order, if there is a cleaning to be done one day, it will be done that day. Now, if I have something to do, there is no one at home. Sometimes, I

put something down, and it stays there for days. No one tells me to take it away. In other words, you can determine your own priorities. In a collective life, no matter even if they are your mother and father, you have to respect their priorities and since you live together, you have to take care of certain things together. For example, you skip the meal. Now, if I lived with my parents, I would definitely help out, and this would continue in an orderly manner. Sometimes you don't eat, you have work to do, you do that.

In contrast to Selim, Berk and Nur are more interested in all the opportunities provided to one due to having this spatiotemporal control as a solo-dweller, while for the former respondent, the absence of another human being in the place he lives, and spending time alone are much more important. In addition to the above-mentioned sensations of enjoyment, being in control over the house area can make one feel more powerful against the feeling of ineffectualness due to not being at the wheel they experienced in the outside world and accordingly comforts him or her mentally. For instance, Victor (Male, 69 years old, separated) who has a living apart together relationship with his current partner highlighted that:

I don't think it's feeling of loneliness. It's more like a sadness around the fact that you need to be alone. So it's not that I'm sad because of lonel[iness]. It's quite the other way around. I'm sad because I can't relax together with other people and I don't know if it is about the fact that she (his romantic partner) enjoys radio on and having the TV on. I hate that. When she leaves the TV on, she wasn't even watching the program. I don't even want to have classical music on if I'm not listening to actively. That's the way she normally has it when she's home. The radio is on.

So, not being able to control his partner's house environment while she has certain actions that bother him, being alone at his own home, and more accurately, being in control of his own house space makes him feel relaxed and enables him to reproduce himself by preserving his unique self.

All of these respondents have a former cohabitation experience either in a dormitory or in a shared house with one's family whereas Selim specifically underlined that after staying in rather crowded and constricted dormitory rooms, which he had to share with other people, such spatiotemporal control made him appreciate his living arrangement. He said that:

The rooms were quite small, and we were staying in those rooms with 4 people. They put two desks. You need to share the desk with someone else. You are very close to each other; your elbows are bumping. We had very small closets. We had separate cabinets, one for clothes and one for the table. It's a tiny room, and where we sleep and where we work are the same. Study rooms are on every floor of the dormitory, but they have limited space and capacity... I usually worked in the room. We were setting 3-5 rules in the room. Everyone will wear headphones at all times. You should be as slow as possible when opening or closing the door because at any time, someone may fall asleep, something may happen, or someone may be sick. Accordingly, we had a few rules. But of course, someone new is coming, you say from start pay attention to this, pay attention to that, then someone new is coming again. I haven't changed my room in 6 years. So a lot of people came and went. I saw all kinds of people in that dormitory.

So, after sharing such a small room with three people, having an apartment of your own that you do not have to share with anyone is something very much enjoyed by Selim, as he indicated in his statement. Canan (Female, 28 years old, never married) also lived through a similar dormitory experience with similar conditions, leading her to live alone. She stated that:

Our dorm rooms were not very big rooms; they were close enough to almost share the sleeping area, with two beds close by. That's why there was no feeling of personal space in the dormitory. That bothered me a little bit. When I moved into an apartment, I wanted to be alone and I said I didn't want a housemate. Because you share your bathroom, your beds are so close to each other, as are your wardrobe and refrigerator. I felt like I was sharing my space with so many people. The floor had a common kitchen; 20 people shared the same kitchen. I didn't feel like I belonged in the dormitory; it was a bit bad.

Therefore, in both cases, their former dormitory experiences have an effect on their experience of living alone and even on the pathway leading to living alone for the latter case. Indeed, the dormitory experience does not have to specifically bring along this feeling of the need to have your own place that you do not share after living in such a crowded space. This is the case for Berk (Male, 33 years old, divorced). He expressed that:

... I was in the dormitory for four or five years during my university life and therefore I was always with someone and I never felt uncomfortable about it while I was in university. I really liked it. Because I still continue the hobbies I started back then. I have friends from the dormitory, my roommates, who were also engaged in those hobbies. So we were doing our hobbies together

on the weekends, we were going to the cafeteria together, we were going to classes together. I don't have any problems at all. When I started working, I started going to the academy, I couldn't go out that easily anymore because you have to stay at home because of homework, theses etc. When I started not being able to go out, maybe I got used to spending time at home. That could be the case too. After that, I didn't go out much anyway, I spent time at home. It turned into, instead of going out for nothing, I would read a book at home, watch my series etc. Or, while I used to be able to tolerate and spend time with a person whose conversation I didn't enjoy, now I can't stand it. Therefore, I can say that it's better to not spend time with him at all and just sit at home alone. I wasn't like this when I was a student, though. My profession might have an effect.

He stressed that while he was a student, staying in a dormitory did not make him feel disturbed due to sharing his living space with his fellow roommates, with whom he also shared the same interests and engaged in the same leisure activities. On the other hand, he remarked that once he started to work in the academy, he started to spend more time alone to fulfill his work-related duties while his wish for doing activities by himself prevailed rather than interacting with people he thought were not worth allocating his time to.

By looking at these statements, it can be argued that enjoying spatiotemporal control can be considered as a rather defensive self-practice, which can also bring along transformative self-practices since once solo-dwellers have the opportunity to preserve an autonomous self-existence in the absence of others, they can reflect on themselves more easily and have the opportunity to transform themselves. In this respect, all the respondents possibly had to embrace more adaptive self-practices while they were cohabiting since they needed to act together and/or exist harmoniously with other people in shared spaces. On the other hand, once they start to live alone, they can be themselves without having any interruption from another person. In effect, it can be claimed that these self-practices tend to be adopted in a process and context-dependent manner, in which one may start with adaptive self-practices while in the process with altering life course. And, then, these self-practices can change their form parallel to the changes in the person's conditions and experiences.

### 3.2.3.1 Developing routines

Having spatiotemporal control enables the solo-dwellers to adopt certain routines that they can, in a way, use to structure their lives. For working people, their jobs provide some routine, at least on the weekdays; on the other hand, for those older adults who are retired and/or do not work, formulating these routines for oneself can become much more important since it can also serve as a coping mechanism for fighting with mental vulnerabilities (Bergland et al. 2016; Charpentier & Kirovac 2022; Yetter 2010).

In this regard, these routines for a working person can be related to certain after-work activities, such as engaging in leisure activities at home or outside, while for non-working persons, the range of these activities is much broader since simply their time in a day only belongs to them and they can arrange it in line with their wishes and needs, which means these activities can be related to their needs or their wants including those leisure activities as well. These can include developing a hobby such as making music- playing an instrument and/or singing- (Gaye and Nur), carrying out self-developmental activities at home such as taking online courses related to one's intellectual interests (Aylin) or doing readings for developing oneself in work-related subjects (Koray), reading books and/or newspapers (Aylin, Emel), doing sports (Peter, Eva, Emel, Nehir), performing prayers (Mehtap, Emel and Nur), meeting with one's social circle on a regular basis (Ida), keeping a pet (Mehtap and Lale) and so on.

In our data, following the findings of the literature that formulating these routines in the absence of a more intense working life and/or social interaction can be attributed much more significance by the older adults, those respondents who are relatively older are the ones underlining the essential role of these routines in their lives, which actually add meaning to their way of living. To illustrate, Mehtap (Female, 65 years old, divorced with two children) expressed the role of religion and its positive effect on her life when she became a devotee while attending a Quran course regularly:

Now I go to Quran course. I went to Quran course for 3-4 years. Since there was no face-to-face education due to the pandemic, we attended online

education. Face-to-face education opened again this year. I will start Quran course again. Then I am very happy. It has been 5-6 years since I started wearing a headscarf. So, I've recently covered my head. When I read Quran, I am very happy, I feel peaceful. I feel close to Allah. I learned many prayers. I learned many things. My perspective on life has changed... Now I understand living. I understand the meaning of life. I understand that life is beautiful. This is really a very different feeling. Quran course is until noon.

The role of religion and its positive effect in terms of battling against mental vulnerabilities is also underlined in the relevant literature (Moon & Kim, 2013). Relatedly, Emel (Female, 68 years old, widow with two children) addressed that she is attentive to following her prayers and sports routines: "I don't give up on my sports and my prayers. But I especially try not to give up on sports." The importance of doing sports in order to formulate a routine is also accentuated by Nehir (Female, 60 years old, divorced with a child):

... So I started doing yoga. Before that I was doing Pilates. Now I've just turned to yoga. For example, it creates a good routine in a person's life. I mean, you need a routine in some way. A sport or a cultural activity is fixed thing for me. I used to love dancing. It can be dancing. After that, it can be Pilates, it can be yoga. These are the activities I do two days a week.

Finally, having and taking care of a pet as another living being in a house can help one formulate routines accordingly, while it can play a crucial role in one's life as a coping mechanism if s/he is especially struggling with a feeling of loneliness (Stanley et al., 2014). In this regard, Lale (Female, 54 years old, divorced with a child) indicated that while living alone she was able to establish a deeper connection with her cat and told that:

... I have always had a pet throughout my life; I mean, I had a pet at home; I had a cat. But for the first time in Sweden, I was able to empathize this much (with her cat). I can understand what my cat wants and thinks from its gaze. I mean, I know what it means when it looks at you with curiosity, what it is curious about, why it is surprised, all of these things. This is due to living alone.

### **3.2.3.2 Preserving personal space**

It is also possible to argue that those who give importance to having a personal space and preserving it are enjoying this spatiotemporal control. Since while living alone, all your living space becomes your personal space, you can easily arrange your life by prioritizing yourself. In this regard, Sarp (Male, 31 years old, never married) identified that:

Living alone is a way of life in which you can create your own space and offer yourself a little freedom. I like to have my own space. For example, when I share my life with someone, I should absolutely have a room.

Sarp cares about his personal space and living alone by providing this spatiotemporal control over his living space makes him attain this. In a similar vein, Lucas (Male, 30 years old, never married) attached importance to his personal space. When he was asked to characterize living alone in general, he marked that:

I feel very free. I have a lot of personal freedom and personal space. Occasionally, it can feel a bit lonely. But since I usually pretty fine with being alone, I don't mind that much. It would bother me more to live together with someone and sort of being anxious around the other person, not feeling like I have my personal space.

His statement shows that he feels free because of having his own personal space and not being bothered by anybody else. Even if this has a consequence of feeling lonely from time to time, he does not mind feeling that way as long as he has his personal space.

Defne (Female, 24 years old, never married) also indicated that even if she is very close to her mother and her sister and sees them frequently, after spending time with them, she still wishes to get back to her house where she lives alone, which she identifies as her personal space. She expressed that:

Even though I was sick, after staying with my mother for three days, I said, let me go home. I said we spent a lot of time together and I went back to my home. That's why, even if I'm with my mother and my sister, after a while I long for my own personal space... In fact, I broke my foot last year. In a year and a half or two, I got so used to being alone that I said I could handle this situation by myself. My mother would come in the morning, and my family in

general would take care of me. But I even went through that process by myself (at her home).

In other words, she appreciates that as a solo-dweller, her living arrangement provides her with a personal space where she can be alone while she can control her living area on her own in the absence of another person. She is even so accustomed to living like this; when she became physically vulnerable due to breaking her foot while she was living alone, she did not want to give up on her personal space, so rather than staying at her parents' house in the process, she received their help while living in her house.

### **3.2.4 Resting and Relaxing**

For those who have busy, stressful, and tiring work, home becomes a place where they can rest and relax by isolating themselves from the outside world and human contact (Hughes, 2013). In this regard, as a school teacher, Alva (Female, 57 years old, divorced with two children) has continual human contact during her working hours. Accordingly, she indicated that since she has all this contact with her students during the day, she needs alone time to get rest even if she tries to limit the times she is spending alone at home. In other words, her home becomes a relaxing place for her when she gets tired of all the human contact she has.

Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married) can also be considered to see her house as a place for resting and relaxing. She identified living alone as comfort. She does not have to worry about anything she does at home specifically in terms of using the space the way she wants. She expressed that:

When I separate work and home, of course, I choose to be at home. But when it comes to working from home, I don't like home from that point of view. I mean, I don't like where I work, but as long as I'm not working, I definitely choose to be at home. So let me stay at home for 10 days, it's not a problem.

Her statement shows that by making this distinction between her working place and her living space, she tries to limit her working hours to the time she spends in the

office. She underlined that she does not like where she works but likes to spend time at home when she does not have to work. She also stated that her work was busy and tiring. For this reason, it is possible to argue that she considers her house a place for resting and relaxing. Similarly, Sarp (Male, 30 years old, never married) as a solo-dweller who minds his personal space underscored that:

For example, when I lived in a dorm, the part that bothered me the most was never being alone. Never being alone is a huge problem for me. I recover my energy a little when I am alone. Not being able to create that comfort zone has always been a huge problem for me... Specifically living in a very narrow space makes you spend much less time in your room or living space. What happens when you spend less time in your living space, then you try to create an alternative to that outside. You go to the library; you spend time in the cafeterias. You can't actively rest.

His statement shows that physical aloneness is something he requires to regain his energy through resting and relaxing in an isolated space where he is not bothered; thus, by living alone, he can also have this opportunity.

Indeed, the experience of resting and relaxing does not necessarily stem from the need to isolate oneself due to having busy and tiring work. It can also be simply related to one's wish to decide the time when s/he will socialize or interact with others while, in between times, resting his or her head by shutting himself or herself off from human contact becomes the main concern. Koray (Male, 29 years old, never married) expressed this aspect that:

I think living alone is great. You can relax whenever you want. You can see your family whenever you want. It all depends on you. If you don't want to see anyone for a month, you don't. But that's not what happens when you live in the same house with someone. In other words, people want some individual time for themselves. When they can't find this individual time, they see that their nerves and psychology are getting worse after a certain point. And there's nothing they can do about it. Because they have their family with them, they can't leave them and go somewhere. They have to stay. But now, at least you live alone. You can go and see them whenever you want. Maybe you miss them a lot over time, maybe you can't see them for a while. But when you go there, everything picks up where it left off. For example, I got there (to visit and stay with his family), and after a certain point I want to go back to this solitude. For example, when you stay with your family for ten days, you say enough is enough. You want to go and relax a little, you want to be alone. I think living alone is really a great advantage in this respect.

So, in his statement, he underscored that by living alone, he has the opportunity to choose the time he will interact with people, while when he is alone at home, he can rest and relax without being subject to any external stimuli brought along by the existence of another human being in his living space.

Resting and relaxing as an experience mainly includes more adaptive and defensive self-practices. In this regard, while resting and relaxing, one can either gather strength in isolation for future interaction in order to function as a member of society or aim to conserve one's individuality at a distance from everybody else s/he in such isolation that the house space acts as a sanctuary for the solo-dweller to find refuge when s/he has a break with his or her adaptive self and cannot continue to be a harmonious member. At this point, what needs to be underlined is that these established associations between experiences and certain self-practices should not be conceived as determinate and exclusionary to other ones but more of a display in which self-practice becomes more prevailing in the related experience while paving the way for others.

### **3.2.4.1 Solo-living and attitudes towards work-life**

As indicated above those who consider their house a place to rest and relax mostly have busy work schedules which makes them feel tired. In this sense, their attitudes toward their occupation can be asserted as a variable affecting this experience of resting and relaxing.

#### **3.2.4.1.1 Feeling tired due to being busy**

This subcategory refers to those who mainly have heavy workloads but do not necessarily have a negative connotation since some participants seem not to be disturbed by it. In this regard, Aylin (Female, 37 years old, never married) stated about her occupation that:

It has a very intense and tiring pace because I have a lot of responsibility. I am looking at a very large area. In my opinion, this requires me to provide

much more information than a normal person can handle most of the time. This part makes me very tired from time to time.

She emphasized being that busy makes her get tired, which is something she complains about even if she is normally satisfied with her job. On the other hand, Derya (Female, 45 years old, divorced with two children) expressed that: "My work is busy from time to time, but I never complain about it. In fact, I enjoy it more when it's busy, I don't notice how time passes". She likes being busy since while doing her job, she can forget how time goes by, possibly not getting bored and not counting time to finish a workday.

In this context, the two respondents focus on the different aspects of being busy and feeling tired. For the former one, it is something that challenges her and possibly affects her opinion about her work negatively. For the latter one, it is motivating since she can complete a workday much easier thanks to it. On the other hand, Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married), as a researcher who is doing her PhD in Sweden, specified that the process can contain both challenges and motivating features while working on a specific subject, which is, in her case, her doctoral study. In this sense, she expressed that:

I mean, it's intense and tiring, I guess. Especially, I am in 4th grade right now, so I'm really stressed. For example, it was very busy in the first year but we were taking classes in the first year. There was a certain material that I had to learn. There were exams, there were assignments and so on. You know, this independent research part is really pushing me right now. I'm actually in a very stressful period. On the one hand, there is work to be done. On the other hand, there are some limitations. Honestly, I can't say that I'm enjoying the work right now. But there can be a lot of such ups and downs in the doctorate or academia. I think I'm in down part at the moment, but I think it's worth it. I hope I will see an up very soon and I think that it will make me forget everything about the downs left in the past.

She specified that since she is in her last year to complete her Ph.D., she is very stressed while she has also other responsibilities making her busy and tired. However, she considers this process a temporary one, which will eventually bring a

brighter period. Therefore, she tries to define her work as accommodating both negative and positive characteristics.

Other than being busy to the nature of the work they are doing, Onur (Male, 31 years old, never married) underlined that he has an ability to create a workload that makes him busy. He said that:

In general, I always work intensely and tiringly. You know, even if my work is at a level that I can get through my daily work life more comfortably, I find enough work to do to put myself under that intensity, that stress. I mean, it's very rare, sometimes I have a brain fade, and I don't want to throw myself into that intensity anymore. Whatever work I have to do that day, I do it calmly and comfortably. But usually, my routine is always intense. Even if there isn't any intensity, I create an intensity for myself.

This is something he chooses for himself even if he is doubtful about the benefits of such a situation.

### **3.2.5 Enjoying Solitude**

Those people who appreciate self-company or want to allocate time specifically for themselves or engage in creative projects alone can enjoy the solitude provided by their living arrangement at home. In this respect, Canan (Female, 28 years old, never married) marked that:

Living alone is a very comfortable and beautiful space for people who can spend time by themselves. For example, I don't need anyone else to have fun or spend time with, I don't feel that need. I can have fun and spend time when I'm alone. It would probably be a bad situation for someone who can't do this or who wants to be in a relationship constantly, who always wants to spend time with someone else.

She underlines that spending time alone is something she enjoys, and she does not need the company of others, more specifically, the company of a boyfriend with whom she can spend time together and cohabit. In a similar fashion, Gizem (Female, 30 years old, never married) highlighted that she enjoys such solitude. Meanwhile,

she also emphasized that this solitude can enable one to familiarize oneself.

Accordingly, she expressed that:

I guess the difference of living alone is being on your own and getting to know yourself. I think it's very important. Because I think that if a person is not happy with himself or herself, he or she cannot be happy with anyone else.

Her statement shows that one should be able to spend time alone and be happy about it while giving the chance to know herself or himself. This self-acquaintance process also enables one to establish much healthier relationships with other people. Aylin (Female, 37 years old, never married) also holds a similar view and indicated:

In general, it feels like it makes people lonely from time to time, but I think a healthy adult should be able to live alone. I think every adult should experience living alone, even for a short period of time in their life...One should learn to spend time alone and experience that this is an enjoyable thing... Because even though being alone and living alone is sometimes what circumstances bring, I think it makes it easier for a person to get to know oneself. So, when you are in society, it does not matter if it is your family or friends, you do not know yourself well enough when you are with them all the time. So we need to be alone to realize what kind of person we are individually.

According to Aylin, it is actually a need for one to familiarize oneself by being alone, and it is a healthy practice. In other words, even if one may have to put up with some level of loneliness, he or she should not refrain from experiencing living alone in order to know himself or herself. In contrast to Aylin, Canan (Female, 28 years old, never married) does not characterize living alone as a process that one should necessarily experience at one point in his or her life but still, she considers it enabling one to reach this self-acquaintance process much more rapidly:

As I said, most things are about character anyway, but it would be better if they experienced it (living alone), at least to get to know themselves. What do you do when you are alone, can you live alone, can you take responsibility? It would be useful, not necessary, but I feel like it creates an environment where people can get to know themselves much faster.

While the above-mentioned respondents focused more on the positive aspect of it, Derya (Female, 45 years old, divorced with two children) underscored a two-tier

characteristic of living alone in terms of this self-familiarization process by underlining that:

Well, living alone, of course, coincided with my mature age, the period when a person tries to get to know oneself. Living alone does not allow one to get lost in the shuffle like this. It always makes you confront yourself. I think one either hates oneself, or one loves oneself. So, if you are someone who always looks at yourself negatively, you are living with someone you always hate. But if you are someone who loves yourself, accepts yourself, and can give in to yourself, you live more positively.

Her statement shows that she approaches this process of self-acquaintance more cautiously since this can also end up badly due to being related to one's relationship with oneself. It should not be assumed as an inherently positively loaded process in which one always appreciates and enjoys this self-knowledge. On the contrary, one may easily be disappointed by what s/he learned about himself or herself in the process. Therefore, according to the respondent, it should be treated carefully. In other words, living alone may not automatically produce a desirable outcome for a solo-dweller after this self-familiarization process in which one hopes to appreciate oneself.

Nevertheless, for some, this self-acquaintance process can actually make them question their former way of living and how they constructed a self-image that does not represent or manifest their true selves, and accordingly brings along this appreciation of the self and being content with their current living arrangement. To illustrate, Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated from her cohabiting partner), who had nearly ten years of cohabitation experience with her ex-partner before they separated, expressed that:

I think I was so fed up with trying to become someone else. It's not a feminist thing, but it's similar to a feminist thing that you suddenly don't want to be someone else. And then, when the first year I was living alone, I started like to explore myself. And then I fell in love with myself. It's like I like to be in my own space. I like to be social, and I like to meet friends and lovers, but I want to have my own space. When I was living with my ex-partner, I was more into perhaps not the family but the kind of couplehood living. But then suddenly I felt no, I don't... So I've been very much of a person who enjoys cohabitating life. And then suddenly in my final Sambo relationship, I don't need it. Earlier I thought maybe I needed that kind of structure because it's

part of living life, you are together with a person, you get to everyday structure around you and I avoided it as I wouldn't be able to make that for myself. And then I realized well it's actually quite fine.

So, after this process of getting to know oneself, she realized that she does not have to live a prescribed life, which can be, in some respects, an easy and familiar option. She thought she actually enjoyed cohabitation when she was cohabiting with her ex-partner, yet she was simply stuck with the more mainstream way of living while not being very familiar with herself.

Of course, such a self-acquaintance process can be the reflection of a clash between the identity formulated in line with one's cultural background and the identity characterized by one for oneself, especially in the case of those respondents with immigrant backgrounds. Relatedly, Aslan (Male, 27 years old, never married) addressed how cultural pressure imposed upon him by his family prevented him from embracing a self-identity he defines for himself. He moved to a small town from a big city where his family house is located and started to live alone there. In this context, for him, living alone meant being free and independent as he was away from his family. He expressed that:

When I say freedom because there is always a cultural pressure from the family, that freedom came to me as a very good thing. Because I was born here, because I entered the education system here, because I have Swedish friends, I always looked at them. How do they live, why can they do things that maybe I can't? They have parties at home, they go out with girls, and so on. Such things happened. That's why, when I started living alone, that was the first thing that came to my mind, freedom. You know, now I am my own person, I live here, I was educated here, I grew up here, I got to know the culture of this place. Who am I now? Will I leave or keep Turkish culture? Such thoughts came to my mind during these 2 years. And still to this day, there is such a camp inside me.

His statement clearly indicates he had a dilemma such that at home he is expected to realize certain cultural values of Turkish society but as a person who was raised in Sweden, he wants to adopt Swedish culture as part of his self-identity. Therefore, when he had the chance to live alone while being away from his family, he was able

to elude these pressures and feel free to adopt a self-identification of his own choice rather than a prescribed one.

### **3.2.5.1 Creative use of alone time**

Self-accompany and self-acquaintance are often complemented with activities with creative or productive purposes. The need for solitude in order to carry out creative projects has already been recognized and legitimized for those engaging in intellectual production, including artists, writers, musicians, etc. (Burger, 1995; Storr, 1988). This can also be traced in our data. Serhat (Male, 46 years old, never married) who is a sculptor pointed out that:

Spatially, I think people always need to be alone. Because sometimes, when I go on some visits, I see that there are three rooms, but there are five people in the house. For example, I am very curious about what people did during this pandemic period. Because I was always alone. I was very comfortable, very happy. I can do whatever I want. I make coffee, I can walk around the house naked when there is no one else around, etc. But on the other hand, sometimes you have a fight, and even when you fight, you have to be in the same house. So, you can't walk away. You couldn't go out during the pandemic, either. There is a person whose face you see even when you fight... hatred grows larger inside you. But a spatial distance causes those feelings to rest in you. You are slowly relaxing. Maybe distance is the same in art anyway; you are alone and keep that distance from what you produce, and they say to step back and look at what you produced for a bit. Everything looks clearer. But when you're in the same house, you can't look away, you are stuck nose to nose, etc. That's why solitude is necessary... As a subject, you are in a constant state of becoming. And I think you can't get into that state of being when there are people around. It's about concentration. As soon as I enter my workshop and close the doors, I am in my own world. I can make leaps within my own world, I need to be alone to make these leaps. You become heavier with someone else. So you jump alone, it's a necessity in that sense.

His statement addresses the need for solitude both as a requirement for artistic production and also for reproducing oneself. Indeed, a separation between workplace and home can weaken this connection between the need for solitude and living alone in an artistic production process since an artist can easily do that in his or her studio while cohabiting with someone at home, which was the case before for one of our respondents who is an artist as well (Nehir). But still, for the artists, artistic production is possibly an overarching and continuous process. This separation

between the workplace and home for them refers to a physical separation only, while mentally, artists continues to be occupied with the creative process when they are at home.

Other than the artists who actually embrace this creative use of alone time as a way of living, there are also those who use this time creatively by simply engaging in self-developmental projects and doing certain activities related to their interests and hobbies. In this sense, Kevin (Male, 39 years old, never married) said that:

Living alone could be depressing sometimes ...but it also makes you develop other sides. Maybe you read more, you do more art. Sometimes it also makes you challenge yourself. I mean when you are younger, it could be good that you do everything by yourself or that you have the experience, that you can do these things. You need to make decisions and such things.

He addressed that even if it can be depressive, living alone can make a difference in your character by providing the time you need to spend with yourself so that you can pursue your own projects to invest in yourself. Thus, you would use this alone time creatively through obtaining personal gains.

If we evaluate the case of enjoying solitude, we can argue that this can ultimately be featured as a transformative practice, while it may also incorporate certain characteristics of adaptive and defensive self-practices, specifically in the beginning of the process of getting to know oneself. As mentioned above, in many cases this process begins with increased self-acquaintance, which can be followed by a self-interrogation process in which one confronts oneself and questions who one is. In this respect, enjoyment of solitude has a creative capacity, which can bring along a self-transformation if people realize they want to change their current way of existence and identity.

### **3.3 Discussion and Conclusion**

In this chapter, the two main experience categories of living alone, vulnerability and independence, are elaborated, and their multidimensional characteristics, which are mostly undermined in existing studies are discussed. In the beginning of the chapter, two types of vulnerabilities namely “physical and mental vulnerabilities” are analyzed. In this regard, when we look at the data, we can see that older respondents who experience physical vulnerability are more concerned and attentive to their condition since they can experience such physical vulnerabilities more acutely in the future due to their advancing age. Indeed, this finding is in line with the discussions in the related literature that focuses specifically on the solo-living elderly by characterizing them as the most vulnerable group among all the solo-dwellers and drawing attention to their condition.

On the other hand, mental vulnerabilities among respondents do not appear to differ based on demographic characteristics. However, their pathways leading to living alone significantly influenced the occurrence of vulnerability. Respondents who felt they had no other option but to live alone were more likely to experience loneliness. This suggests that, because living alone was not a deliberate choice or within their control, they may have a higher tendency to develop mental vulnerabilities and feelings of loneliness.

Another important factor affecting the occurrence of mental vulnerability is the resources that one has, including those social, economic and psychological ones. In this respect, those respondents who have more limited social networks and socialization opportunities are the ones more likely to become mentally vulnerable, which is again in line with the previously mentioned literature highlighting the role of one’s social network. For instance, Defne and Alva have mainly a family-based social network, while Defne currently does not work, and Alva has limited interaction with her co-workers; therefore, they also have limited socialization opportunities. Moreover, both Gözde and Lale moved into new locations, either a new city in the case of the former or a new country in the case of the latter, and they underlined that they have no social circle there; therefore, as a consequence, they started to live alone. They left behind their existing social circles in their hometowns

to settle in places where they had no connections. Accordingly, the association between the pathway leading to living alone and the experience becomes more apparent in these cases.

In addition to those respondents who have limited social networks and socialization opportunities, there are those respondents who characterize themselves with more negative self-concepts. Both Selim and Alva identified themselves as shy persons with more of a negative connotation. For Selim, being shy brings along social anxiety that prevents him from socializing easily, even with the people he named as friends, while for Alva, shyness makes her remain in the background and unnoticed in different social environments.

Other than the factors affecting social life and the socialization practices negatively, one can feel insecure due to not having enough financial means to deal with their vulnerability. In this sense, both Selim and Lale accentuated that due to their social class, they do not live a life in which they have a certain level of welfare to tackle vulnerabilities. Indeed, these situations are described in the literature as social vulnerabilities solo-living people encounter. However, these studies have mostly a limited scope in terms of investigating and framing the effect of these limitations on solo-dwellers' mental status. In this study, resources that are assumed to be the enabling factors for solo-dwellers to cope with their mental vulnerabilities are examined in a more detailed manner.

At this point, it can be stated that while having relatively limited resources can increase the likelihood of one experiencing physical and/or mental vulnerabilities, they can still develop effective methods to cope with their situation, which may even make them more strong-willed to change it and accordingly more creative due to being more reflexive and questioning about their condition. This can be framed as the intersection of vulnerability and independence.

When evaluating the experience of independence, we can also observe demographic differences among respondents. Additionally, there is an association between the pathways leading to living alone and the way independence is experienced (See also: Table 2 for a summary of experience of living alone). In this respect, the first subcategory, “taking a step into adulthood” is more common among young adults. This is more likely to be valued by young people eager to become self-reliant in their earlier stages of life. In contrast, the second subcategory, “liberation from traditional gender roles,” is more common among late middle-aged and older respondents associated with the involuntary decision to live alone. Indeed, except for being more common among older respondents, it also has a gendered aspect with a cultural connotation. As an experience of independence, it is mostly shared by female respondents from Turkey, where traditional marriages are widespread and still a norm for co-residential coupledom.

This specific demographic distinction can also be observed in the following subcategories: “enjoying spatiotemporal control,” and “resting and relaxing.” The latter is again primarily more common among young and middle-aged respondents since, as an experience, it mostly reflects a reaction one gives against a busy working life. Therefore, it is an experience shared by the working population who tries to deal with this intensive tempo in their working schedule. Even if people are now getting retired at relatively older ages, these busy working schedules are mainly followed by younger people to pursue a career while being more ambitious and passionate about it. In the former case, this demographic distinction is more apparent in the properties of the subcategories, “developing routines” and “preserving personal space.” In this regard, while the former is more of a coping mechanism adopted by older adults who try to structure their everyday lives in the absence of structures provided by either a family life based on cohabitation of the partners or a working life, the latter is more of a continuation of becoming an adult with the desire to cultivate one’s individuality through preserving his or her personal space.

If we specifically focus on the respondents’ pathways leading them to live alone, for the subcategory “enjoying spatiotemporal control,” the number of those respondents

who either voluntarily decide or prefer to live alone is higher, which makes sense since in most cases, this independence experience is mostly associated with former cohabitation experiences other than co-residential coupledom that have more of a negatively loaded meaning for the respondent. Thus, they can be motivated to either voluntarily decide on or prefer to live alone. For the “resting and relaxing” subcategory, the number of those who voluntarily decided to live alone is greater, which is more common among young adults. This association can be argued to signify that for those younger adults, self-development includes an emphasis on formulating a career path for oneself that one is passionate about.

In the final subcategory, “enjoying solitude”, it can be stated that as an experience of independence, it is more common among young and middle-aged respondents. However, it should be highlighted that it is not possible to talk about a visible association between the pathways leading to living alone and this subcategory. In effect, to some degree, this can be explained by the characteristics of the self-practices embraced by the respondents under this subcategory. Accordingly, it can be argued that, especially in this form of independence experience, the respondents are more likely to adopt transformative self-practices, which can bring about a transformation in their self-identity. In this context, for those respondents who voluntarily decide to live alone, a certain amount of self-knowledge has possibly already been attained, and once they start to live alone, the process of self-discovery can continue while enjoying the solitude provided by their living arrangement. On the other hand, for those who started to live alone as a consequence or after an involuntary decision, one can still make a self-interrogation, gain self-knowledge, and discover different aspects of one’s self-identity as part of this experience. In other words, in terms of their starting points, these respondents who enjoy solitude may differentiate, once they experience it they can similarly appreciate all the possibilities that open up for gathering self-knowledge and discovering more about themselves.

As also indicated within the chapter, these adaptive, defensive, and transformative approaches are not mutually exclusive categories. They can change form with the

changing situation, and they reflect the methods and attitudes that the solo dwellers develop while living alone. The key point worth highlighting is that solo-dwellers do not passively name and own their experience of both vulnerability and independence, but they actively tackle the situation while embracing self-practices. Indeed, as discussed here, the resources they have are essential factors, which are examined in detail in the chapter. In conclusion, the two main categories, vulnerability and independence, should be approached with caution since they both accommodate multilayered experiences.



Table 2: Experience of Living Alone

Vulnerability	Definition	Key Characteristics
<b>Physical Vulnerabilities</b>	- Including: Dementia, chronic illnesses like high blood pressure, inflammation, heart diseases, lower life expectancy and premature death, sickness (such as COVID-19), having disability, unhealthy weight, bodily injuries	- Older adults are more attentive in the case of experiencing physical vulnerabilities due to their deteriorating health with their advancing age.
<b>Mental Vulnerabilities</b>	- Including: Depression, anxiety, addiction tendencies including drug addictions and alcoholism, feeling of loneliness	- Associated with the pathways that those who think they have no option but to live alone  - Social, psychological and economic resources as important factors affecting these methods
<b>Independence</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Key Characteristics</b>
<b>Taking A Step into Adulthood</b>	- Independence is sensed as taking a step to adulthood through being self-reliant and taking their own responsibility while also being accountable to themselves.	- Age aspect: Young adult phenomenon  - Adoption of adaptive and defensive self-practices is more apparent.
<b>Getting Free from Traditional Gender Roles</b>	- Those who mainly enjoy refraining from traditional roles, including being someone's wife or husband, mother or father, at least for a certain period, describe living alone as an experience of independence.	- Former co-residential partnership experience  - Age aspect: Late middle-aged and older adult phenomenon  - Gender aspect: More common among female respondents  - Cultural aspect: Mostly valid for Turkish respondents  - Adoption of defensive self-practices is more apparent.
<b>Enjoying Spatiotemporal</b>	- Those who specifically have a former cohabitation	- Former cohabitation experience

<b>Control</b>	experience or have lived in student housing mainly enjoy the provided spatiotemporal control by their living arrangement as the sole decision-maker in their house.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Age aspect: Developing certain routines – older adult phenomenon vs. Preserving personal space – young adult phenomenon</li> <li>- Adoption of defensive self-practices is more apparent.</li> </ul>
<b>Resting and Relaxing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For those who have busy, stressful, and tiring work, home becomes a place where they can rest and relax by isolating themselves from the outside world and human contact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Busy working schedule</li> <li>- Age aspect: Young and middle-aged adult phenomenon</li> <li>- Adoption of adaptive and defensive self-practices is more apparent.</li> </ul>
<b>Enjoying Solitude</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Those people who appreciate self-company or want to allocate time specifically for themselves in order to familiarize themselves or engage in creative projects alone can enjoy the solitude provided by their living arrangement at home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Age aspect: Young and middle-aged adult phenomenon</li> <li>- Adoption of transformative self-practices is more apparent.</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FUTURE EXPECTATIONS**

This chapter focuses on the questions of what solo-dwellers expect from the future, whether they consider maintaining their living arrangement or changing it, and if they plan to change it, which type of living arrangement they would like to have. In this context, available options for future living arrangements will be revealed based on the expectations addressed by the respondents. The chapter is divided into three main sections: the first section covers the “factors affecting possible future scenarios of the solo-dwellers,” the second section presents different “types of future expectations and profiles of solo-dwellers,” and the final section introduces a discussion related to “the futures of living alone.”

In the former section, factors including “housing opportunities,” “career-related plans,” “health conditions” and “finding a suitable romantic partner to cohabit or to marry” will be elaborated as the indicators of possible future resources of the respondents that have an impact on their related future expectations. In the second section, the future expectations regarding one’s living arrangement derived from the data will be introduced, and the different profiles of those who can adopt these living arrangements will be revealed and examined. These different types of future expectations include “living alone,” “cohabiting with a romantic partner and/or spouse,” “cohabiting with a friend,” “cohabiting with a housemate,” “living in an assisted living facility,” and “living in communal housing.”

In the third section, “The Futures of Living Alone,” a discussion will be introduced based on whether solo-dwellers consider living alone a temporary phase or a permanent lifestyle.

#### **4.1 Factors affecting possible future scenarios of the solo-dwellers**

Factors affecting possible future scenarios of the solo-dwellers regarding their living arrangements refer to the available future opportunities and/or circumstances that a solo-living person should take into consideration while making a decision about their living arrangement. These factors, which will be examined below, can lead to a change or a reformulation in the future expectations of a solo living person.

##### **4.1.1 Housing opportunities**

Even if the solo-living person desires to cohabit with someone in the future, the housing opportunities this person can have access to are important since the current housing may only enable him or her to live alone rather than to cohabit. This is the case for Kevin (Male, 39 years old, never married). He expressed that:

Yes, I am checking for a bigger flat but you can't just take one for at any price. You don't want to take one in a very bad neighborhood in case you want kids. You know you have to like going there every day. It's not like that easy.

He emphasized that if the housing opportunities are not satisfactory enough to persuade him to leave his current smaller apartment, then he will choose not to change it. In other words, for him, these housing opportunities, including the size, the neighborhood, and the affordability of housing, are all the factors that should be fulfilled in line with his expectations so that he can be convinced to make this change in his living arrangement.

##### **4.1.2 Career-related plans**

While solo-dwellers’ career-related plans may not directly influence their future expectations related to their living arrangements, still, as a starting point, focusing on career-related plans can be considered as the indication of one’s priorities and, consequently, the settlement of these priorities can affect their secondary plans and expectations including the future scenarios they imagine regarding their living

arrangements. For instance, Alva (Female, 57 years old, separated with two children) said:

... Now I don't have any particular plans like this. Maybe I have a plan to change my job, and then I will have a new job, and I will focus on that. Then I will maybe see what I will do with my living situation or maybe I will live here until I die.

Her statement shows that her career change can affect her future expectations related to her living arrangement. While her current house is very close to the school where she is working, so she can walk there from her home, changing her job can bring along the decision to change her living arrangement as well. She may reconsider the available options in relation to the opportunities provided by her new job, including the wage she will earn or whether they provide an accommodation option to their employees or the location of the workplace, etc.

Accordingly, most of the respondents who have a working life initially talked about their future plans related to their careers when they were asked to explain their future expectations. This actually coincides with the findings that more and more young and middle-aged adults prioritized their careers while postponing finding a suitable partner to have a romantic relationship (Hall & Ogden, 2003). Those respondents who can be specifically categorized under this subcategory are Aylin, Onur, Berk, Selim, Gözde, Nur, Aslan, Gizem, Sarp, Irmak, Lale, Bartu, Alva, Peter and Lucas. The mean age of this group is 34,3.

In this respect, Aylin (Female, 37 years old, never married) expressed that:

I don't plan on getting married, I will live alone in the near future, but there are things I want to do related to my work. There is also a training I have planned regarding writing, a professional training. I think that maybe I would like to develop this aspect of mine a little more after this training. Because it makes me curious about what it will bring to me. Plus, I am currently trying to do something for business development within the company as much as my daily busyness allows. I have been looking for a position where I could maybe get away from sales and work on this subject for a while now, about a year. This is how I plan to evolve the business side. But other than that, my plans for the next five years may be a little more advanced than my current routine. And I have a plan like this: If I stay in Ankara, I plan to do a Master's degree. It doesn't exactly match my job, but it could be sociology or philosophy masters.

Her statement shows that she channels her energy to her self-development, which is in line with her planned career path and serves her aim to progress in her business life. Her career certainly comes first, so she is not interested in changing her living arrangement, at least in the near future, by switching to a co-residential arrangement with her partner. In a similar vein, Lucas (Male, 30 years old, never married) stated that:

All of my future plans are pretty much as of right now, they are related to work, getting further in my work. In my work I want to [become] either more of a specialist or moving into maybe some sort of manager position. I spend a lot of time learning more about IT and making progress at work.

He also explicitly underlines that his priority is his career, and he focuses on progressing in his career by investing time in his education to develop his work-related skills and abilities. Indeed, not all career-related plans are based on more self-developmental projects, which enable one to proceed in his or her career. One may wish to end his or her current working position and tread a different path both related to one's career and one's expectation of living. In this context, Bartu (Male, 31 years old, never married) specified that:

I will retire at the age of 33 if fate allows. I would love to buy a summer house in Portugal or Athens, or maybe in Turkey. A window seat, wine... I want to live like a bit of a bohemian, go out in my pajamas, and buy bread from the grocery store. I want to be a bit of a free man. I don't want to have any goals, I don't want to go anywhere, I don't want to have any concerns about time. The only thing I want to buy in the future is time. I don't have any other plans. But that requires a solid economic and social network. So, we'll see.

In his statement, it becomes apparent that as normally an intensely working employee who undertakes lots of work-related responsibilities, which was discussed in the previous chapter, Bartu is possibly overwhelmed by his working life and wishes to end his career since it is not something sustainable for him in its current flow. Thus, he wants a very early retirement in order to liberate himself from his current responsibilities while having the time to live as he imagined. Similarly, Onur (Male, 31 years old, never married) indicated that:

I would like to live with my friends... In my future plans, there is nothing like continuing to work as a white-collar worker. I want to do this until a certain age. When we were at university, we would have fun and work with our group of friends. There was a cafe, a bar, we would run it, we took responsibility for it, we would all work together and have a great time. This is

our common desire for the future. In the future, we said, let's open our own place; even if we have to work harder, let's do what we love and enjoy doing together. So, when can this happen? We had set a (time) limit for ourselves, we want to realize this dream when we are 45.

His prospect about his career change is associated with his expectations regarding changing his living arrangement. While he does not want to maintain working in similar white-collar positions, his future plan is more like a package covering a change in both his career by opening a place to manage together with his friends and in his living arrangement by starting to live with them.

#### **4.1.2.1 Being an artist**

It can be illuminating to place particular focus on being an artist under this subcategory of 'career-related plans' since artists mainly dedicate their life to their artistic production; in other words, their career has no retirement date, but it's an ongoing journey lasting until they stop defining themselves as an artist. In her study, Hughes (2013) found that for those who pursue "creative vocations in music, art, and writing," living alone is a deliberate decision so that they can cut themselves off from the distractions of social life to focus on their vocation. Moreover, she pointed out that in these cases, the 'work' they prioritize is closely linked to their identity. So, living alone is related to sparing time for and nurturing oneself rather than reacting to external pressures, specifically economic ones; therefore, it turns into "the project of the self" for them (Hughes, 2013). So, it is not just a means of making time for work.

In this regard, Serhat, Beril, and Nehir, who all define themselves as artists, can be considered under this subcategory. Accordingly, Beril (Female, 84 years old, never married) addressed that:

My life has some shortcomings. So, for example, marriage can be considered as a threshold that must be crossed in one's personal life. But it's not like that for me. Because it is a creation and what I want to do is also a creation (her artistic production). So there is no difference.

So, she made a choice between marriage and art, and she chose her art. She also underlined that while her friends at her age started to move into nursing homes, she was mostly occupied by her art-related works and expressed that:

Some of our friends are going to the nursing home. Now I don't think of such a thing. [My workplace is] keeping my mind busy. Because there is still work

to be done there. I need to finish them. I need to arrange this lecture series. Books will be published for the 100th anniversary. Next year, there is a festival... There is a competition in it, this should be done as well. The workshop will be opened. There is an art street, they will give workshops there. We'll organize it and open it. There will be sales at the sales store there... I have all the notes, books and works of my teacher (a famous Turkish artist) ... It's a big project in itself. So if they show me a place, I will do it because I have prepared 22 folders of documents. After that, I want to publish a book about my own color paintings.

#### **4.1.3 Health conditions**

Health conditions which can deteriorate with advancing age makes the solo-living people, especially those who have already passed the middle-ages, think about their later elderly years in which they possibly will not be self-sufficient to be able to live alone. In this respect, sickness or physical incapability to look after oneself due to advancing age can be identified as a reason why those solo-living people do not want to live alone in the future. For instance, Alva (Female, 57 years old, separated with two children) said that: "I think when you are really old, then you go to some kind of hospital, not to live alone. I don't think it's good to live alone like that in the long run." She is open to the possibility to live in an assisted living facility in case of not being able to take care of herself when she will be too old. Eva (Female, 65 years old, never married) also expressed that:

In ten years, I should live with people because of aging ... and also [maybe] with my friends... We cannot live like this so we have to arrange something. And that's quite a big decision. Also, maybe I have to leave my beautiful apartment. Because I live in third floor without an elevator. No problem for me now. But it can be problem in 15 years. It can be a problem in 3 years. You never know. So that's the aspect I have to be concerned about. It's a new aspect.

She pointed out that in the following years she may not be self-sufficient and may not look after herself due to her advancing age; thus, she thinks she should cohabit with other people who can help her. She even also reluctantly considers to change her apartment because of her age since her health possibly will not let her to climb up the stairs in the near future. Other than the relatively older respondents, those middle-aged respondents who consider themselves as future elderly candidates also talked about their concerns related to advancing age and how this can actually affect their

future expectations. To illustrate, Serhat (Male, 46 years old, never married) indicated that: “They always say that when you get old, you lose your strength, you die while screaming. There are those who say [this], you know, for health reasons. Sometimes I am concerned about that, [I] think about starting a family.”

In effect, as an artist, even if he characterizes living alone as his lifestyle and a necessary part of his production process, when health-related issues come to the forefront, he starts to question his way of living due to the vulnerabilities resulting from these health conditions. Since he is already experiencing a physical vulnerability due to his chronic illness, this possibly makes him more alert related to the issue.

#### **4.1.3.1 Pandemic Process**

COVID-19 pandemic is an extraordinary circumstance, which as a health hazard affected both the experience of living alone and the future expectations of solo-dwellers in the data. With the spread of the COVID-19 virus worldwide, many countries enforced strict social distancing measures aiming to limit physical contact, like lockdowns. While the virus was declared as a “global public health problem,” its effect on health goes beyond a mere physical phenomenon, and it became a risk factor for the mental well-being of the public as well (Banerjee, 2020). Specifically, these enforced social distancing measures are argued to increase the feeling of loneliness and accordingly damage mental and physical well-being (Berg-Weger & Morley, 2020).

In this respect, various factors, including having a high degree of anxiety about the course of the pandemic, and experiencing shifts in daily routines are reported to be associated with a rise in experiences of loneliness (Savage et al., 2021: 4-5). Similar patterns of behaviors and reactions were narrated by the respondents in this research. In this context, Tolga (Male, 67 years old, divorced with 3 children) indicated that:

I was really scared. So, if you ask why, I couldn't even go to my children, partly because of my age. You know, usually here, the old people were caught right away. Many of my friends [in]my age died in front of my eyes. There were people who threw themselves over to the hospital. I was so scared

that I couldn't go to my children's house. This was a very painful thing for me... I got through it, but I got through it at home. I was so stunned.

This elderly male respondent expressed his concern and fear related to the pandemic and how he reacted by changing his regular activities, like visiting his children, to follow social isolation measures. In a similar vein, Mehtap (Female, 65 years old, divorced with 2 children) expressed that:

This disease will not go away; it seems like it will never end. We will always stay away from people, stay distant. I love hugging and touching people. Everything will be done remotely and I will be anxious at any moment with the fear of getting sick or my family will get sick. It seems to me that it will never be the same again. So, we are in a difficult period. It won't go away.

In her statement, like Tolga, Mehtap also mentioned her worries, underscoring that everything would be different from now on, which is something that frightens her.

In the data, other than these concerns related to the process, it is also possible to trace more visible effects of pandemic on the future expectations of the respondents. To illustrate, Peter (Male, 36 years old, never married) indicated that he did not feel lonely because of living alone until he was forced to isolate himself at home during the pandemic process. In the process, since his ability to freely arrange his life outside of home space was limited, as a person who enjoys spending time outside rather than at home, he had difficulty adjusting to the situation. He remarked that since he had to work at home during the pandemic process, he felt lonely and missed human contact. He normally enjoys his work environment and also regularly socializes with his co-workers. Therefore, being away from the office environment he lost one of his main channels of socialization. He also underlined that he was offended by the official authorities' attention to solo living elderly as the main vulnerable group during the time:

... (It) has become clear of course now during the pandemic you're ... like alone, on your own... Well I think during the first time of the pandemic I felt a little bit like left over from the government when they were talking about old people living alone and that it was so bad for them. But I think it's actually the same for all people living alone... I think it (pandemic) has

affected me as a person in some ways. I think it's a little bit too early to say whether you will completely go back to who you were before or not.

His statement shows that all solo living people are actually in a vulnerable position, not only the elderly, since, at the time, he experienced the feeling of loneliness intensely. Moreover, he said that this process changed something about him, even if he did not know at this early stage whether he could be the same person he was before the pandemic. This vulnerability he experienced possibly made him question his way of living as a solo-dweller who can be vulnerable at such times of crisis, even if he is a younger person who has not experienced such physical and/or mental vulnerabilities before. Accordingly, he may think more about changing his living arrangement in the future, which is possibly something he did not do before the pandemic.

Another example can be the case of Arda (Male, 43 years old, never married). He was also affected by the process negatively while questioning his current living arrangement. He expressed that:

My social life has been greatly affected because, as I said, I am a person who prefers to spend his free time socializing. I guess I can say the pandemic push me into depression in that sense. For example, there are some people around me, my friends who spend a lot of time at home, play musical instruments, play the piano, watch TV shows, drink at home and so on. They already have such a lifestyle. Their time outside is limited. But mine is the opposite. My time at home is limited. In my normal daily routine, home is like a hotel for me... That pandemic was probably one of the times I thought about getting married the most. Because when you're really alone at home, you get really bored. When things started to get back to normal, I went back to being a social person. So, I guess it didn't cause a long-term change.

His statement shows that spending that much time at home without being able to socialize outside, the pandemic process challenged his ability to maintain his living arrangement. He also underlined that the pandemic process had been the period when he considered getting married the most. Besides, at the time, when the heavy restrictions were enforced to ensure social isolation, he stayed at his parents' house for a while to ease the negative effects of the process on himself. He stated that when

things turned back to the pre-pandemic condition, he also turned back to his former routine and self. Still, it can be argued that he possibly became more attentive and critical about his living arrangement while acting more questioning about his future expectations after experiencing such vulnerabilities.

At this point, we can conclude that during the pandemic, respondents who did not enjoy spending time alone at home and primarily used their living space for practical purposes while investing mostly in activities outside their home were the most affected. This impact is also reflected in their future expectations.

#### **4.1.4 Finding a suitable romantic partner to cohabit or to marry**

Another important factor that influences the future expectations of solo-dwellers is the possibility of finding a suitable romantic partner. Indeed, the relationship expectations in general can be argued to affect the solo-dwellers' future expectations about their living arrangement. In what follows, the details of such relationship expectations will be elaborated on.

##### **4.1.4.1 Relationship expectations**

A person's living arrangement can be considered as an indicator of his or her relationship status. In the most general sense, living with a partner implies being married or being a cohabiting couple, whereas living alone is associated with being a single person. In other words, while coupledom is identified with cohabitation, singlehood or not being in a serious couple relationship is equated with not living together. Sasha Roseneil (2006) focuses on this aspect in her study with the aim of deconstructing the category of 'single' by stripping the concept from its association with not sharing the living space with an assumed partner. Roseneil (2006: 1) argues that social researchers mainly adopted a tripartite model while investigating the relationship status of people, which includes those married and cohabiting couples, and those who are singles; that is, people who do not live with their partners. Roseneil (2006: 3) highlights that traditionally single refers to marital status, which means not being married to someone. On the other hand, with the increasing number of cohabiting couples out of wedlock, co-residence has become the determinant of

partnership, rather than the marriage. In this context, as the opposite of partnership, singleness is defined with “not living with a partner” (Roseneil, 2006: 3). However, she argues that living alone should not be seen as synonymous with singleness, nor should co-residential couple relationships be the primary lens for understanding solo dwellers’ lifestyles and their perceptions of romantic relationships.

In this context, as Roseneil argued, living alone could not be automatically equated with being single, but needs to be thought in the light of how solo-dwellers define a romantic relationship. Solo-dwellers’ definition of romantic relationships can be argued to affect and, to some degree, shape their future expectations related to their living arrangements. In the data, it is possible to divide the respondents into two groups in terms of their romantic relationship characterizations, which are “romantic relationship based on cohabitation” and “romantic relationship based on non-cohabitation.” Those who identify romantic relationships based on cohabitation can be further categorized as the ones who are “open to the partnership without making an effort,” who want to “marry for love,” and who are “pessimistic about having a partner.”

#### **4.1.4.1.1 Relationship characterizations**

##### **4.1.4.1.1.1 Romantic relationship based on cohabitation**

Those respondents who define a romantic relationship based on the co-residence of the couple, either in the form of marriage or in the form of cohabitation without wedlock, are classified under this subcategory. In general, most of the respondents (30 of them) characterized a romantic relationship based on cohabitation. Moreover, many of them were open to the possibility of having this type of romantic relationship in the future.

This actually corresponds with Hughes’ (2015) arguments. In her study, Hughes (2015) focused on the experiences of solo-living men and women in their 20s and 30s, which are characterized as ages when decisions are made about whether living alone is a temporary living arrangement or a permanent one, specifically in accordance with one’s relationship preferences. Hughes focused on the relationship expectations and experiences and their association with the experience of living

alone, and she wanted to understand whether the participants in her study decenter sexual-couple relationships (Hughes, 2015: 710). Hughes underlined that in the literature there is a discussion that with modernization and globalization, individuals have become more and more disembedded from traditional types of support and constraints while being encouraged to be independent (Hughes, 2015: 708). In this context, it is argued that individuals today have more freedom and choice in how they construct their lives and identities, as opposed to being subject to rigid social norms, positions, or roles; that is, today, not everyone seeks or is willing to be in a couple-relationship and therefore theoretically this has become less important compared to the past (Hughes, 2015: 708).

Hughes remarked that while the increase in the number of those living alone is perceived as an evidence of this couple-relationship decentering, few studies were conducted which examine experiences and relationships of solo dwellers. Hughes cited Roseneil's research, which reveals that solo dwellers challenge the heterosexual relationship order, including "co-residence, romantic love, monogamy, and the primacy of the conjugal couple" (Hughes, 2015: 709). Hughes indicated that Roseneil conducted her study on adults who are mostly solo-living and "living outside normative heterosexual couple relationships" aged between 25 and 60 in the UK (Hughes, 2015: 709). The author specified that what Roseneil found after examining her participants' lives in terms of the significance of relationships they had, the participants mainly decenter sexual couple relationships by preferring not to focus on this type of relationship merely and rather making room for different types of relationships, specifically friendships (Hughes, 2015: 709). On the other hand, the author underlined that another study again conducted in UK targeting specifically working-age solo-living people displayed that most of them actually does not have an unconventional lifestyle, consider their living arrangement as a temporary phase and plan to switch to co-residence with their partner at some point in their lives (Hughes, 2015: 709). Consequently, Hughes stated there is no clear evidence that solo living brings along sexual-couple relationship decentering.

Hughes noted that a more extensive literature review shows although today there are more diverse living arrangement choices for people, including living alone, and attitudes towards relationships are less traditional, finding a life-long partner with a

romantic love ideal is still a very strong expectation, even for long-time singletons (Hughes, 2015: 709). In this respect, Hughes collected her data by making interviews with 28 young adults aged between 21 to 39 years living alone in Australia (Hughes, 2015: 710). She separated the participants into three groups related to their attitudes to relationships and their understanding of living alone.

The first group, which was named “desire for conventional relationship” consists of those solo-dwellers who wanted to have a committed, long-term, monogamous, and co-residential relationship at some point in their lives (Hughes, 2015: 712). Most of the participants are within this group. Hughes expressed that those who have been already in a relationship in this group wanted to live with their partners, yet they could not do that due to certain obstacles (Hughes, 2015: 712). Moreover, the author noted that in this group, many of the participants wished to be married in the future, while those others who did not see marriage as a necessity still want to have a marriage-like relationship (Hughes, 2015: 712).

The second group consists of those who are “ambivalent about partnering” (Hughes, 2015: 716). The participants in this group do not totally reject the idea of having a sexual-couple relationship yet they question whether they want to fulfill all the relationship-related expectations, including co-residence, marriage, and having children, and whether it is suitable for them (Hughes, 2015: 716). They are worried about losing their current lifestyle. The third group is the ones who choose to have “living apart together” relationships (Hughes, 2015: 717). These participants chose to maintain their living arrangements and live separately from their partners. In this regard, there is still a need for committed relationship with a partner, but at the same time, there is also a wish to maintain independence and autonomy provided by living alone. Furthermore, if the person has different interests and especially wants to take time for themselves, which means maintaining an independent living for this group, living alone in this context provides such a space for them, and accordingly they think that they will have a better and more sustainable couple relationship (Hughes, 2015: 718).

Hughes particularly pointed out what she observed in the data is that although living alone can enable one to focus on oneself and one’s life outside of these sexual-couple relationships, in the majority of the cases there is no rejection of the romantic love

and commitment to a single partner who can be ideally a soulmate (Hughes, 2015: 714). For many of them, it is essential to be happy and to live a fulfilling life, either while being on their own or in a couple relationship, and they were able to appreciate living alone since it enabled them to build their independent lives; however, they also considered that being able to spend time alone actually prepares them to a future healthier couple relationship rather than making them decenter the couple relationship (Hughes, 2015: 715). According to the author, spending some time alone before starting a new relationship, especially after a breakup, was desirable for the participants to rebuild themselves as more vigorous and independent individuals (Hughes, 2015: 719). In this respect, even though living alone brings along a temporary decentering of couple relationships, in the long term, it is considered as a future investment to an upcoming relationship one will have so that it can be long-lasting and wholesome. Hughes added that only a few participants were “conscientiously single;” that is, they prefer to focus on themselves and their own lives while deferring a couple-relationship (Hughes, 2015: 718).

Indeed, the findings Hughes put forward can also be traced in the data as, again, most of the respondents in this study also define a romantic relationship in conventional terms. Nevertheless, simply focusing on this definition and their being open to having a romantic relationship based on cohabitation does not reflect their expectations properly. Therefore, a further categorization was made to capture their diverging perceptions regarding the issue, which includes the subcategories of “being open to partnership without making any effort,” “marrying for love,” and “being pessimistic about having a partner.”

#### **4.1.4.1.1.1 Being open to the partnership without making any effort**

Those respondents who are open to the possibility of having a co-residential partner in the future but at the same time does not make a specific effort to find a partner and mainly let things slide are classified under this subcategory. These respondents are Defne, Canan, Gaye and Peter. In this regard, Defne (Female, 24 years old, never married) indicated that:

... I would rather continue my life with a person who is right or good for me than with a wrong person. If he is not there, I continue to live in my individual world anyway, but marriage seems like an important situation to me, to be able to establish a life with someone and take shape accordingly.

That's why I probably want it... For a while, I tried to find someone (a romantic partner). Then I saw that it wasn't coming to a conclusion and was even dragging me into impossible relationships with impossible people. So I said let it flow.

After being unsatisfied with the relationships she had with her ex-partners, who she thinks are not the right persons for her, she decided not to make an effort to find a romantic partner; on the other hand, she still wishes to get married in the future with a person that can make her feel content to have this relationship. Similarly, Gaye (Female, 52 years old, never married) stated that:

Now, if there is a man in my life and he says let's live together, maybe we will live together. Tomorrow [if] I meet someone and I say I want to live in the same house with this man, I will. Or he lives in his own house and I live separately. You decide on a marriage. I don't know. I used to say this and that. I don't say anything now because I don't know what will come my way. Maybe today I'm in this country, tomorrow I'll be in another country. So, I am someone who can act quickly according to the conditions. The words absolutely and never are long gone from my life.

In her statement, we see that she is actually also open to the possibility of having a living apart together relationship (LAT). However, still, her emphasis is that there is uncertainty about how the future will take shape, and even if she does not exert effort to find someone if this someone finds her and convinces her to live together, she will be on board.

#### **4.1.4.1.1.2 Marrying for love**

There are those respondents who particularly indicated that while they approach cautiously to the idea of changing their living arrangement by marrying someone, they highlighted that they can be only open to this idea if they are truly in love with someone. These respondents are Bahar and Arda. In this sense, Bahar (Female, 37 years old, never married) stated that:

Of course, there is some peer pressure. And this is the order. You will find your job, get married, have children, you know. But I don't get married because I don't want to choose to get married just for the sake of getting married. But it might happen if I fall in love or go that direction. But leaving my comfort zone scares me. Right now, I can live alone and do whatever I want comfortably and use the house as I want. Frankly, I'm a little afraid that my routine will be disrupted. So, I should be able to say what I'm afraid of so that I shouldn't think about it, that is, I should marry this person without thinking about whether I can live with this person or whether this man is suitable for me.

Her statement shows that while she is scared to change her living arrangement, the only thing that can persuade her is being in love with that person in order not to question her marriage decision. In a similar vein, Arda (Male, 43 years old, never married) remarked that:

I mean, from time to time I think about getting married. This subject is a bit difficult and deep, and I am confused about it. It is seriously very difficult to make that decision. I guess I generally think that I have to be very much in love to get married. I don't feel anything like that. Then, I think what is the need? I am not a person who would consider getting married just to avoid living alone. Because I am very comfortable living alone right now, but it can be like this: if I meet a person with whom I enjoy spending time and have a lot of feelings, only this can change my decision to live alone. So, I think I can change my decision to live alone, not to avoid living like this, but to spend more time with someone.

He also underlined that right now he enjoys living alone and he can only think of changing it if he fell in love with someone.

#### **4.1.4.1.1.3 Being pessimistic about having a partner**

Those respondents who do not feel hopeful about finding a suitable partner to live with in the future are classified under this subcategory. These respondents are Selim, Gözde, Murat, Lale and Bartu. In this respect, Selim (Male, 28 years old, never married) expressed that:

I say, 100%, I will continue to live alone like this and it will go on like that. I don't think there is any alternative to it. For all I know, I don't think I'll have a partner and live with her in the future. But this is completely independent of my living alone. That's my approach about myself. That's why I'm extremely pessimistic about those matters. I always say that I came alone, I will die alone.

Even if he separates how he feels about himself finding a romantic partner and living alone, his pessimism about having a co-residential romantic partner can be argued to affect his future expectations about his living arrangement. Gözde (Female, 28 years old, never married) also indicated that:

I would like to get married in the distant future. Now, here's the thing: with 90% chance, I will live alone in the future. I'm sure of that. If there is a 10% chance of finding someone with whom I can unite my life, or if the person I am currently in a relationship with is suitable for this, or if I am suitable for him, I have a 10% chance of getting married. I don't plan on living with someone other than getting married.

Gözde is only open to the idea of cohabitation if she will live with her spouse, but other than that, living with someone who is not her romantic partner is not an option for her. On the other hand, her faith in finding this suitable person is very low despite having a boyfriend right now. Murat (Male, 70 years old, widower with 2 children) also has a romantic partner, but he feels like if he cannot manage a relationship with her, he will live alone in the future. He said that:

I cannot marry any woman from Turkey. Because they all want apartments, cars, gold. I am already 70 years old. I'll possibly marry a woman at 55-60 years old. But, instead of marrying her, I'd prefer to marry someone 30-35 years old and die while I'm with her. Everything of mine will be hers... I am already seventy years old. [There are elderly rich people who hang] out with 18, 19, 20-years-old young people and lives his life. Am I going to spend all my wealth on a 65-70-year-old woman? ... I can at least find a young woman to die next to her.

His pessimism is based on his mistrustfulness about future, and because of that, he mainly leaves the door halfway open in terms of having a co-residential relationship by marrying his partner.

#### **4.1.4.1.1.2 Romantic relationship based on non-cohabitation**

Even if the ones who identify a romantic relationship based on cohabitation are in majority in the data, there are also those respondents who characterize it based on non-cohabitation (Living Apart Together). The respondents in this group are Aylin, Serhat, Nehir, Oya, Victor and Ida. The mean age of this group is 53,6. At this point, it can be helpful to briefly discuss the “living apart together” relations. Levin (2004) argues that while the difference attributed to marriage and cohabitation is decreasing, those couples who do not live together are now considered as a new family form under the label of Living Apart Together (LAT). In this sense, Levin remarks that the rising divorce and separation rates among the couples may contribute to the proliferation of LAT relationships in the Western world (Levin, 2004: 226). LAT relationships enable the couples to maintain a relationship without making any major changes in their own life setting.

Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran and Mays (2009) study LAT relationships in the American context. They highlight that LAT relationships may have different motivations for

different couples. To illustrate, for younger couples it can be a result of certain limitations related to their educational or labor market conditions, and for older couples it can be connected to the desire for maintaining contact with their children from their former relationships or desire for privacy and autonomy (Strohm et al., 2009: 178). The number of LAT relationships decreases when the age of couples increases; therefore, the authors argue that it is a common phenomenon among young couples who may deal with certain educational, financial or work-related limitations but still want to be in an intimate relationship (Strohm et al., 2009: 201). Both studies display that it is possible to be involved in an intimate relationship and to maintain solo living at the same time.

As also mentioned above, in her research in which she concentrated on non-residential relationships, Roseneil (2006) introduces a categorization under three headings. These are “the regretfully apart,” “the gladly apart” and “the undecidedly apart.” First category, “the regretfully apart” refers to those who wish to live with their partners but still choose not to. Second category, “the gladly apart” refers to those who prefer and enjoy having a non-residential couple relationship. Final category, “the undecidedly apart” refers to those who do not decide whether they want to live with their partners or not. Accordingly, it is possible to classify the respondents within the group under “the gladly apart” category she introduced.

In this categorization, those “gladly apart” ones, while having a committed relationship with their partners, also have “a strong sense of individual agency, and a determination to be in control of their own lives” (Roseneil, 2006: 8). To illustrate, the author noted that the last group “living apart together” consists of merely women participants who clearly laid stress on autonomy. This determination becomes manifested as a dedication to being in a non-residential relationship. In this context, having a demanding or energy-consuming working life, having spatial control over the house, protecting the relationship from the possible risks that may occur in the case of cohabitation, and being committed to one’s work in the case of choosing either marriage or working (this is the case for an older female respondent who considered this decision as a take it or leave it since, due to her age and generation, the author underlined that there is no in-between option that she could do both in the past, which could be considered similar to the case of Beril) are all addressed as the

motivations for the respondents in this group while making this decision to live apart from their partners (Roseneil, 2006: 8).

In other words, considering home as a place to rest and relax or some kind of a sanctuary in which one deliberately isolates oneself from the tiring social relationships s/he has to maintain in their daily lives due to their working life, having a spatiotemporal control over the home, considering home as a place to heal and self-maintenance and as a female deliberately or unintentionally making statement against traditional gender roles can be all argued to be the meanings of living alone for the related respondents in reference to these motivations respectively. When we look at the statements of the respondents in our study, it is also possible to trace some of these motivations revealed by Roseneil in the data.

In this regard, Serhat (Male, 46 years old, never married) explained that his perception towards how a romantic relationship should be characterized changed over time while initially, he thought having separate personal spaces in the same house can be enough in a co-residential setting, he now believes that partners should live in different homes and have their own house space rather than simply having separate personal spaces in the same dwelling. He said that:

I used to look at relationships like this: If a person is going to live together, the house should actually be big, there should be separate rooms and separate spaces. Later, this changed for me, there had to be separate houses, spatially. Because inside the house... For example, I live in -District-, I have my own house, I have my own order in the kitchen, in my study room, I don't know, my bathroom, my bedroom, etc. I always have my own order. Of course, my girlfriend also has her own order, everyone knows it. She can be messy or more orderly. Everyone is comfortable in their own way. I am comfortable in my own way... Separate houses, even separate cities can be much better after a while.

In his statement, he underscored that living in the same house can bring along conflict between the co-residential partners while he also repeatedly highlighted in his other statements that he is scared of fights or having disputes with others, and sharing a house space certainly does not allow those tense feelings to cool off. Therefore, a spatial separation including in the cases of having a romantic relationship becomes a necessity, according to his opinion. Similarly, Nehir (Female, 60 years old, divorced with a child) underlines that living alone gets someone to

adopt certain habits; therefore, she does not opt for living under the same roof with her partner in the future. She expressed that: “I wouldn't consider living in the same house but I can share a life with someone. I wouldn't prefer to have a shared space. Of course, there are some things that living alone fortifies in people.”

Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated from her long-term cohabiting partner), who really likes living alone, specified that she wants to maintain her living arrangement even if she has a more serious romantic relationship in the future. In this sense, she spoke of her worries in the case of her future romantic partner asking to live with her:

I don't have a stable partner. I just have some lovers... if I meet somebody who it would be kind of more stable with, what is going to happen then because I'm really enjoying living on my own and I suspect that for some people there is some kind of expectations that you are going to live together because that's part of a kind of a career as a couple. My dream or fantasy about my future is more like we keep on living alone but meet up. But I kind of want to keep my space again.

## **4.2 Types of future expectations and profiles of solo-dwellers**

The data exhibits that living alone is considered as an alternative living arrangement in case that one cannot find a chance to cohabit with someone. In this context, the cohabitation expectation has also different forms including the expectation to cohabit with a housemate, the expectation to cohabit with a friend, the expectation to cohabit with a romantic partner and/or to marry, the expectation to cohabit in an assisted living facility and finally cohabiting in a communal house. It is possible to make a differentiation between more traditional ways of cohabitation options and more alternative ones which will be discussed below.

### **4.2.1 Living alone**

Those who consider continuing to live alone in the future are mostly the ones that enjoy solitude and spending time by themselves specifically in their house. They more or less embrace this living arrangement as their lifestyle and do not want to give up on this way of living. Even if they have a romantic relationship, they can still prefer to conserve their current living arrangement, rather than planning to cohabit with their partner in the future. In other words, they prefer to have a “living apart

together" (LAT) relationship in which couples preserve their existing living arrangements instead of living under the same roof. For those solo-dwellers who prefer to maintain their living arrangement in the future and adopt it as their lifestyle, it can be argued that while they decenter the couple relationships, as also discussed by Roseneil (2006), they put themselves into the center, specifically through shaping their daily lives based on their own wishes and needs, and filling these relationships' shoes with their diversified social networks. The statement of Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated from her long-term cohabiting partner), who identified living alone as her lifestyle, can be illuminating in this respect:

... It's like the friends and the lovers are some kind of, I would say, weak structures but... the strong structure is my routines and when I was living together with my ex-partner it was like we had a structure together and that was a strong structure and it could be everything from how we can start a morning as a breakfast to the end of the day... everything was quite, we were in our own rhythm and he had children from his former marriage. We had them every second week. One week we were together with his children; one week we were alone. It was also some kind of strong structure, our living together... Sometimes I feel it's more tiring to live alone because I have to do all the things by myself. And I have to think, how am I going to, for instance, organize anything. I can't rely on another person but then it's also become more clear [sic.] to me that my own rhythm is not only the rhythm in the routines but also "oh! I got to sleep now so I go back to sleep". It sounds a bit egoistic but it's also kind of about following my own natural rhythm.

So, she accentuated that when she was living with her ex-partner, at the center of her life were the routines they formulated together as a couple; on the other hand, when she started living alone, even if it can be frustrating from time to time to think and decide everything, it is now all about finding her own rhythm of life through centering herself. In this context, it can be important to restate that the characterization of living alone as a lifestyle is rather an alternative way of living since these solo-dwellers mainly refrain from traditional ways of co-residential living by adopting alternative relationship forms rather than preferring to have co-residential couple relationships and by prioritizing their spatial freedom and solitude.

#### **4.2.2 Cohabiting with a romantic partner and/or spouse**

Those who are planning to live with their romantic partner in the future are mainly the young or the middle-aged respondents, who are expecting to live in a more traditional setting and order. They are mostly desiring to start a family with their existing or prospective romantic partners; therefore, they are not interested in maintaining their current living arrangement; on the contrary, they prefer to switch to an arrangement they can cohabit in line with more traditional way of life. For example, Derya (Female, 45 years old, divorced with two children) said that she will probably live alone for 2 more years, but then she will plan to change her living arrangement and start to cohabit with her future romantic partner. Since now she can mentally acknowledge her separation from her ex-husband, she is actively searching for someone to be a partner with. She expressed that:

... I want a romantic partner... I mean I can say I'm looking for [one]. I'm looking at the people around me, I'm interested. I'm also weighing up my relationship with my ex-husband, I think about how much I've been able to break off with him, what happened, where I'm going. For example, in the last 1-2 months, my search for a romantic partner has increased, my need for emotional intimacy has also increased. This is probably because I'm entering the psychological divorce process.

#### **4.2.3 Cohabiting with a friend**

Those who are planning to cohabit with a friend are mainly the ones who do not want to maintain their current living arrangement but at the same time are not very hopeful or willing to find a suitable romantic partner to live together. In the data, those who remarked this option as their future expectation are also the ones who consider their friends as part of their families and are very close with them. Therefore, rather than being an alternative to more traditional way of cohabiting, it can be argued that this option can be included within traditional ways of living. In this regard, Suna (Female, 62 years old, widow with a child) indicated that:

... I said before that if my sister and my friend had a traffic accident, I would go to my Turkish girlfriend, she lives in -City- (in Turkey). She has her own house. Most likely, she will come here for 6 months, I will go there for 6 months because we get along very well in every way.

Since she sees her friend as a family member who takes the place of her sister, living with her in the future is a very viable option for her, corresponding to more of a traditional way of living.

#### **4.2.4 Cohabiting with a housemate**

Those who are expecting to cohabit with a housemate in the future are also the ones that do not desire to maintain their current living arrangement. On the other hand, this option can be considered as an alternative to more traditional way of cohabitation since the main objective here is to socialize spontaneously while preserving personal space to some degree and avoiding more intimate type of relationships. In other words, this option offers both more effortless socialization practice and much less intrusion of personal space.

#### **4.2.4 Living in an assisted living facility**

Those who brought up this option as a possible future living arrangement are the ones being concerned about their more elderly years due to their advancing age. Living alone is not a viable option in the future for them since their health possibly will not let them be self-sufficient in such old age. Indeed, it can also be noted that cultural norms can play a part in terms of adoption of this option since for respondents from Sweden, regardless of having children, living in these assisted living facilities at an old age is taken into consideration and included in the future plans of older adults; on the other hand, at least in our data, only one of the older respondents who has no child (Beril) talked about it as an option some of her friends adopted while she is still very much busy with her artistic endeavors. In this regard, specifically in societies where strong family ties prevail, childlessness is considered a vulnerability for the elderly, who mainly derive support from their children in the first degree in these robust familial systems (Reher & Requena, 2017; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2015).

In connection with this, Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated from her long-term cohabiting partner) remarked that:

... that's also some kind of, I would say, feminist freedom. I don't need to care for my parents in that way... I know that person (her mother) also takes care of herself. Because she is 76 now. So, when she needs to move into elderly care in a few years, she has already arranged that for herself. So she knows where she's going to move, which feels very nice. And my father is living with a little bit younger woman, so they are, both of them in some way, cared for; they have been kind of caring themselves that they don't need either me or my brother, which is very nice because otherwise, I think I wouldn't be able to choose this lifestyle.

#### **4.2.6 Living in a communal housing**

Those who consider this living arrangement as an option in the future are also the ones being concerned by their advancing age. On the other hand, this time there is also a concern related to preserving one's personal space while willing to have the opportunity to socialize whenever one chooses to do that in the communal areas of the house they live in. This option can also be perceived as more an alternative way of cohabitation since there is some kind of compromise between having a personal space and having communal areas to socialize spontaneously while one can still preserve his or her autonomy (Törnqvist, 2019). Moreover, sharing responsibilities in the communal spaces disburden the elderly in terms of domestic responsibilities which they have to handle mainly by themselves when they are living alone. This option is only available for those respondents living in Sweden, not for those living in Turkey.

### **4.3 The Futures of Living Alone**

In the literature, whether living alone is a temporary or a permanent stage in one's life is a commonly discussed aspect, especially when it comes to what one expects from the future in terms of his or her relationship status (Hughes, 2015; Jamieson et al., 2003; Jamieson & Simpson, 2013; Roseneil, 2006). Indeed, while the number of solo-living people is increasing all over the world, some studies, which focus on decade-long intervals to track down solo-dwellers' possible changing living arrangements, show that it is much less common to maintain one's living arrangement as a solo-dweller compared to one's being a solo-dweller for a limited period of time (Jamieson, Wasoff & Simpson, 2009; Wasoff et al., 2005). In terms of the expectations and future plans of the solo-dwellers, it is again the ones who

identify their living arrangement as a temporary phase is certainly in the majority (Hughes, 2015; Jamieson et al., 2003; Jamieson & Simpson, 2013). In a similar fashion, in our data, those respondents who characterize their living arrangement as a temporary phase are higher in number, while those who identify it as a lifestyle that they do not consider changing, especially for the sake of having a co-residential relationship, are only a few. In this respect, Aylin (Female, 37 years old, never married) as one of those respondents who identify living alone as a lifestyle expressed that:

This (living alone) has become a lifestyle for me. It is not a temporary process. But most of the people are not like me. They shouldn't be anyway. Otherwise, the human race would not last. Most people have children and get married. Even if not when they are young, they may consider living with their family again after a while, as circumstances require it. But for me it has become more of a lifestyle. So it's part of me now. It's not something brought along by circumstances; it's a choice. Otherwise, my mother's and my house are very close, and I can move there now. The conditions allow this. I only have to go five more km. This may even make it easier for me to fulfill some responsibilities. But then, our lives will become so intertwined that I cannot live individually. That will be a problem for me.

Her statement displays that while she is aware she is adopting an alternative way of living, in a sense, she holds onto her lifestyle and embraces it despite certain advantages brought along if she cohabits with her family. In a similar vein, other respondent defining living alone as a lifestyle, Ida (Female, 46 years old, separated from her long-term cohabiting partner) remarked that:

So I think [living in a big city] also makes it possible not to think that this is a phase. Because I think sometimes, due to ideas of romantic love, it's just a phase, to be a single person. I think this thing when you're an adult person to live alone was supposed to be a phase before you get into another new cohabiting thing. But now I ... think, ... no, it's a lifestyle. And sometimes you have different kinds of relationships and sometimes people are ... here or I'm over there and so on. But still it's a possible lifestyle in itself to live alone.

So, she underlines that for her, living alone is not something she can trade with a co-residential relationship; however, this time, the respondent also emphasizes that what makes living alone an option as an alternative lifestyle is residing in a big city. In other words, according to her who moved into a big city from a relatively small city, living alone as a lifestyle is more of an urban phenomenon. In effect, what is valid for both respondents is that they established a bond with their living arrangement and

attribute a specific meaning to it based on how they experience and practice it. As Aylin expressed, it became part of their self-identity.

On the other hand, this bond does not have to be established in such a direct manner but could be done through one's artistic endeavor, which is one's reason for existence as an artist. Thus, indirectly, living alone can turn into an inseparable element of one's way of living while guaranteeing the sustainability of the production process.

In this regard, Serhat (Male, 46 years old, never married) marked that:

But I don't think of it (living alone) as loneliness either. That's why this is actually my lifestyle... Because my loneliness is related to production, it always comes and goes there for me. Because I love producing. That process of production is lonely, as I said. It's a place to escape, but let's say I have a child in my life and a spouse. Raising that child with my spouse is also important, it has its requirements. My spouse has things to do, I have things to do, and so does the child. But there are also things I have to do for myself. I can never put it on the shelf, I mean I can't even put it on the shelf for a child. If I put it aside for the child, the child himself disappears anyway. When you eliminate my own reason for existence, everything disappears. The real thing is, I eliminate my existence, when I eliminate my loneliness. Because it's not just about making this sculpture for financial gain. In other words, these are not just about buying and selling. At the same time, I see it as necessary in order to be psychologically positive, in other words, in order to have an energetic outlook on life. After all, we are human beings, and we need certain things to make this life more livable spiritually... If I eliminate my own loneliness, I eliminate my motivation for life and production. Yes, I make sculptures as an artist, a writer writes his/her articles, etc. Imagine taking that away from you, what will this person, woman, man or anyone else do?

Different from the Aylin and Ida, Serhat accounts that living alone is a prerequisite for him to produce his art while providing him a mindful space freed from stimulants and tensions arising from the presence of another human being. Therefore, for him, it is not simply about enjoying and appreciating living alone. At this point, it is evident that adopting living alone as a lifestyle is closely associated to how individuals interpret their experiences and practices of living alone, as well as their relationship expectations and perspectives—ranging from romantic and intimate connections to human interaction more broadly. On the other hand, living alone does not have to be identified as a permanent lifestyle for a solo-dweller to embrace a reflexive attitude that brings intelligibility to one's way of living. We can trace this reflexive attitude in most of the data discussed in the previous chapter “Experience of Living Alone” but we can also give further examples.

For instance, Koray (Male, 29 years old, never married), who has a stable girlfriend and wishes to get married in the future while his girlfriend wants to marry sooner, specified that:

... Actually, living together will be like a process. I mean, I need to feel ready for this. Maybe living alone lays a burden on you, but it takes away many of the responsibilities that you have, maybe even ten times the responsibilities that it imposes on you. In other words, you have no responsibilities. You have no responsibilities towards anyone. You only have a responsibility towards your home and yourself; that is, after leaving moral values out of the way. So, of course, now living in the same house with someone again, and if this person is your spouse, you will have certain responsibilities towards her, and there will again be an obligation. First of all, I need to eliminate this, to erase it from my mind.

He points out that since he is accustomed to only fulfilling duties towards himself, in order to be able to live together with his partner in a traditional form of relationship, he needs time to prepare himself by mentally leaving behind his habits, his rituals, and all the practices he carried out while living alone as an autonomous person free from responsibilities of others.

In a similar vein, Nur (Female, 33 years old, never married) who did not start to live alone as a voluntary choice but as a consequence of life-changing events and also expecting to get married in the future indicated that:

Since I don't have any experience, I can only compare my situation with my close friends around me. For example, I go out and I am here at this hour but they (her married friends) can't be. Many things change after marriage. I had friends I couldn't talk after marriage. They said "my husband came and I had to hang up (the phone)." Of course, naturally, the process evolved towards that. This scared me a little, I mean, does it really restrict (your life) that much? Deep down, it (this questioning) must have happened. You know, everyone, your elders, etc. says "hope you will establish your own home." I say amen, but hopefully with someone who won't restrict me, if possible. I say open the way for this kind of prayer. Because it really won't be easy to share a life with someone after living alone for nine years... Your freedom will be restricted. You will do everything together. You have to find common ground.

In her statement, she actually questions normally idealized couple relationships while comparing her situation with her married friends. Indeed, as also mentioned in the former chapters, mainly those solo-dwellers, specifically women, encounter the stigmatization of their living arrangement, which is considered the manifestation of their relationship status as being single. Here, as a solo-dweller, Nur tried to put herself into her married friends' shoes, who should be supposed to be living a happy and fulfilling life with their partners and families; however, what draws her attention is how restricting could be such couple relationships formulated in line with traditional understanding while she is actually living a much more independent life that she enjoys and is satisfied. Moreover, she emphasized that as someone who has been on her own for nine years while shaping her life in her own rhythm, it would be challenging for her to adopt a couple life in which she should meet her partner halfway for every decision she normally takes by herself.

Indeed, the questioning of such stigmatization of solo-living in the cases of women is not an automatic one that a solo-dweller herself can also stigmatize her living arrangement and envision to change it in the future with a co-residential couple life. To illustrate, Defne (Female, 24 years old, never married) said that:

... What I have always seen in (solo-living) women is that they become more ill-tempered in time. In other words, women alone have a more irritable nature. Of course, it is not right to classify them like this. Maybe it (the experience of living alone) will be the same at older ages...

Although she is also reflexive about making such generalizations related to older solo-living women, she still has a stereotyped image of those solo-living women in her mind, which affects her future expectations related to her living arrangement. On the other hand, Irmak (Female, 29 years old, never married), who also specified that she has such an image of older solo-living women in her mind, tries to break down this stereotype and acknowledge that this stigmatized alternative way of living can be very much fulfilling and joyful:

There is such a life and it is not a bad life... Maybe I will grow old alone, that is an option, or maybe there will be someone in my life but I will suddenly get divorced at the age of 60. You never know. Or I will live in the same house with my partner for 40 years and then we will break up or he will die, I don't know, these things can happen. I am constantly trying to prepare myself for this and I am constantly trying to challenge something in my own mind: I am trying to break the image of a lonely, crazy cat lady within myself.

Because some things are really learned. I want to break the stereotype that a woman who lives alone is living badly, especially when she has aged. Therefore, there is another life. In other words, people can choose to live alone. Growing old alone does not have to be a bad thing. We don't all have to turn into crazy cat ladies.

Such self-reflection related to her stereotypical portrayal of solo-living women also echoed in her attitudes while taking a stance against those who question her way of living as an unpartnered solo-living woman. Relatedly, she expressed that:

... I have neighbors who are such classic good Christians and family-oriented people. I think they find it strange that I live alone. They definitely don't see my life as an ideal life; I feel that way. Because we see each other during the holidays. Therefore, when I say that I did this willingly, knowingly, that it was a choice, I feel a little bit better; I feel good, actually.

In this context, defending her way of living by underlining that she voluntarily chose to live alone against those embracing a traditional outlook could be considered a deliberate attempt to make herself believe that this can also be an ideal life she can choose for herself rather than choosing a prescribed traditional way of living.

Essentially, even if solo-living as a lifestyle can still be more of an alternative way of living that most people possibly continue to stigmatize in some ways, with the increasing number of solo-dwellers who live alone for at least some part of their lives, it becomes more or less a commonly shared experience with on and off changes in one's living arrangement, which makes it an indicator of the fragility of traditional ways of livings (Jamieson et al., 2009). This can again be traced in the respondents' statements. As mentioned above, Irmak, who is challenging certain stereotypes in her head related to solo-living women, indicated that actually, this on-and-off situation is something she can adopt rather than being a long-term solo-dweller. She stated that:

I'll probably live alone as long as I can. I think the ideal thing is this on and off situation... Maybe I'll live in a collective for a while, [but] not until I die. Then I'll live alone for another year or two. Then maybe I'll live with my partner, then maybe alone for another year or two. So it can be a little bit on and off. That seems ideal to me.

In addition to Irmak, Kevin (Male, 39 years old, never married) also mentioned that as a solo-dweller, he could visit his friends living away for two or three months or travel for longer times so that he can actually diminish the time he is living alone and

take some break from his aloneness. Nevertheless, in his case, since he does not enjoy living alone but prefers to cohabit with a housemate, this on-and-off situation is also more of a temporary solution that he will abandon for good once he finds a bigger flat to realize his future expectations.

Primarily, what should be stressed and argued in this context is that either embracing it as a temporary phase or as more of a permanent lifestyle, solo-dwellers actually develop a kind of a “philosophy of living alone” while practicing it. This philosophy is related to how they make sense of their living arrangement, which can be about attributing importance to their way of living or basically about being content with how things go and sustaining it until things change or about appreciating the solitude in the way it corresponds to their efficiency expectations from the time until they will change their living arrangements. For example, when she was asked about her future expectations, Canan (Female, 28 years old, never married) expressed that:

I haven't made a long-term plan. As I said, I have a regular life right now, probably because I see that I can live like this; I don't have any plans or dreams in my mind like having a boyfriend, getting married, moving in with him, etc. I am happy with my job now. That's why I don't have any plans to advance my career this way or that way, either. I already feel like it will progress in its own normal flow. I have such an opinion. That's why I haven't set a goal to do this or that. Let me continue to live peacefully and happily, and be satisfied with my life in this way, I want this... It's not like I will continue to live alone or someone will come into my life or not, but if someone does, the order will continue, and if not, I will continue with my current routine anyway. So, I'm already happy like this.

Her statement exhibits that she is already satisfied with her ongoing life-course; therefore, she is not very interested in making future plans in order to change her way of living. On the other hand, she has no intention of prioritizing her current way of living over the other traditional options by featuring living alone as something difficult to give up. Thus, her philosophy is more about being in harmony with whatever direction her life proceeds, while not idealizing any way of living as the only one that can bring the happiness and peacefulness she is seeking.

Nur, who is cited above, accentuated that even if she feels lonely from time to time, she realizes that this loneliness actually nurtures her soul in a different way:

This (loneliness) also makes me feel good sometimes. Because why? It develops you spiritually. Because the owner of man is Allah Almighty. In

other words, if something is solved, it is solved with the permission of Allah. It uses people as a means. When you are alone, it does not use anyone as a means, you are directly in contact with Allah. It strengthened me. I started to like it. I say, look, it wants to directly connect you to itself. It does not bring anyone in between. Something happened, for example, and you need to talk, you can tell your father and you cannot stop, you tell your mother. You expect a solution from them inevitably. You say "Let them say something, and I will do it." But now, there is a direct link. So, you need to develop yourself spiritually. You adapt to Allah Almighty more, you pray better. It also contributes to this sense. I notice it from time to time. Because when I am in trouble, that feeling develops.

She is a devoted Muslim, and although she accentuated that at the beginning, she did not enjoy living alone, in time, she realized that she could actually appreciate this alone time since she could directly get in contact with god and gain the chance to come close to the god. In this regard, how she sensed this loneliness she experienced while living alone become transformed, and it turned into something that she can enjoy since now it is not about loneliness as a vulnerability but about her resilience and her spiritual growth. So now, she can disengage from the worldly troubles and remedies and turn her face to her god as the key source of solution in this isolation provided by her living arrangement.

Consequently, living alone does not simply reflect the household status of solo-dwellers, but in a dynamic manner, it reflects how a solo-dweller makes sense of and followingly practices this way of living. Therefore, their philosophy of living alone can alter in time with the changing meaning of living alone for themselves. As it is discussed in the above chapters, how one starts living alone, how one experiences it, especially in different periods of time, and what one expects from the future regarding his or her life trajectory can all, to some degree, affect how one senses and accordingly practices living alone. In effect, it is not possible to derive direct causal relationships among these like saying that if one started living alone involuntarily and feels lonely because of this, then s/he would certainly expect to change his or her living arrangement, but there are many different dimensions that need to be taken into account while there is no one way of practicing living alone.

#### **4.4 Discussion and Conclusion**

In this chapter, I tried to exhibit that while the future expectations of solo-dwellers are affected by their possible future resources, including various financial, emotional, career-related, and health-related aspects. I discussed how solo-living people characterize a romantic relationship. Their relationship expectations are the essential factors coming to the forefront in the data when the respondents express their future expectations related to their living arrangements. In the literature, the relationship status and living arrangement equation are also addressed and discussed, as mentioned above. In this context, whether one defines a romantic relationship based on a co-residential union or not is important in terms of either changing or maintaining his or her living arrangement (See: Table 3 for a summary of future expectations).

Accordingly, in the data, if we look at those respondents who do not consider changing their living arrangements, they are mainly the ones who either currently have a LAT relationship or are open to having one. However, it should also be highlighted that among the younger respondents, even if they have a LAT relationship and are considering maintaining their living arrangements, they are still open to the idea of having a co-residential partnership. On the other hand, older respondents are much more determined to maintain their living arrangement as well as their LAT relationships if they have one while not thinking of any alternative to it. In other words, for those older adults and specifically for women, unless an extraordinary circumstance occurs, living alone is more of a permanent living arrangement, which is also in line with the demographic studies underlining that women are more likely to live alone at older ages (de Vaus & Richardson, 2009; Demey et al., 2013).

In terms of the associations of future expectations with pathways and experience of living alone, it can be asserted that whereas the pathways' effect is not visible. If they have an impact, possibly it is indirect and covert. However, the effect of experiences can be traceable. In this regard, for those respondents who enjoy spatiotemporal control and/or solitude, the likelihood of maintaining their living arrangement as a permanent way of living increases. The respondents who specifically indicated that

they embrace living alone as a lifestyle are the ones who enjoy solitude. Therefore, it can be argued that as an experience of independence, enjoying solitude has a vital role in one's adoption of his or her living arrangement as a lifestyle. Indeed, it is not possible to argue that by itself, it has a direct effect on one's future expectations, but still, compared to other experience categories, it has a primary effect.

In their study, Jamieson and Simpson (2013) found that for young and middle-aged adults, enjoying spatiotemporal control is the most appreciated aspect of living alone rather than solitude while they also highlighted that it is mainly considered a temporary living arrangement; that is, at some point in the future they expect to have a co-residential partnership. This finding can be associated with the age aspect of the issue in the study. Specifically, older adults who enjoy spatiotemporal control can be more likely to maintain their living arrangements as a permanent way of living. Nevertheless, it should also be underlined that those older respondents who specifically experienced physical vulnerabilities are also the ones who are more attentive regarding whether it is actually an alternative that they have in the future due to their advancing age.

In addition to the above points, it is also possible to talk about a cultural aspect. For the respondents from Turkey, marriage is specified as the most recognized form of co-residential coupledom in the data rather than cohabiting with one's partner, which is also indicated in the existing literature that marriage still has a primary place in terms of formulating co-residential relationships (Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2021). Accordingly, as an experience of independence, liberation from traditional gender roles can play a role in increasing the likelihood of one's embracing living alone as a lifestyle for the solo-dwellers from Turkey, which was also observed in the data.

To conclude, there are multiple factors affecting the future expectations of solo-dwellers concerning their living arrangements, which were examined and revealed in the chapter. These factors are very much related to one's available resources regarding future arrangements. Regarding the associations among the pathways,

experiences, and future expectations, we can observe that whereas pathways do not have a specific traceable effect, certain experience categories have an impact on the respondents' future expectations, especially related to whether they want to continue to live alone or expecting and/or planning to change their living arrangement, which signifies their adoption of living alone as either a temporary phase or a permanent lifestyle.



Table 3: Future Expectations Related to Living Arrangements

Future Expectations	Definition	Key Characteristics
Living alone as a temporary phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Those who expect to change their living arrangement in the future with a living arrangement that they will cohabit (with a romantic partner and/or spouse, a friend, a housemate, in an assisted living facility and in a communal housing).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Higher tendency to embrace traditional ways of living and traditional romantic relationships (like marriage for respondents from Turkey and cohabitation with a romantic partner for respondents from Sweden)</li> <li>- Higher tendency to expect to change their living arrangement among young and middle-aged adults</li> </ul>
Living alone as a permanent lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Those who expect to maintain their living arrangement while embracing it as a permanent lifestyle by adopting a certain understanding and mentality related to their way of living.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being open to alternative romantic relationships (like LAT relationships) and accordingly to alternative ways of living</li> <li>- Higher tendency to attribute importance to one's autonomy and independence.</li> <li>- Higher tendency to continue living alone with the advancing age, specifically among women</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This study aims to reveal and examine the multilayered and multidimensional characteristics of living alone in contrast to the dominant tendency in the existing literature, which conceptualizes it as a status. In this regard, the three objects of inquiry, pathways leading to living alone, experiences of living alone, and future expectations, are respectively analyzed in the previous chapters. In the chapter focusing on the pathways, it is found that specific age groups more commonly follow certain pathways. For instance, while the voluntary decision to live alone is more common among young respondents, the involuntary decision to live alone is more common among older respondents. In the former, there is a reflection of more individualistic tendencies and the motivations of being self-dependent and having personal space. On the other hand, the latter indicates that the transformations in one's intimate relationships are commonly experienced at advancing stages of one's life. These are in line with the demographic discussions in the related studies investigating these pathways. Furthermore, preferring or starting to live alone as a consequence, which are both more common among young and middle-aged adults, are indications of the importance attributed to making a career by younger generations.

In the chapter on the experiences of living alone, it is found that mental vulnerabilities are influenced by pathways where solo dwellers feel they have no choice but to live alone, and have limited social and economic resources. Regarding the experience of independence, "liberation from traditional gender roles" is more

common among older respondents, while "taking a step into adulthood" is typical for younger respondents. Experiences like "resting and relaxing" and "enjoying solitude" are shared by young and middle-aged respondents, whereas "enjoying spatiotemporal control" is a common experience across all age groups. Except for "enjoying solitude," an association can be observed between pathways and experiences, with different age groups adopting distinct patterns.

In the chapter on solo dwellers' future expectations, relationship expectations emerge as key factors influencing their expectations about their living arrangements. While the pathways do not directly affect these expectations, the experiences of "enjoying solitude" and "enjoying spatiotemporal control" shape future outlooks. These experiences encourage the adoption of living alone as a permanent lifestyle rather than a temporary phase. Younger and middle-aged adults are more influenced by the former, while older adults are primarily affected by the latter.

After this brief summary of the study's findings, I want to introduce various scenarios for living alone derived from these findings. It is possible to divide these scenarios into two categories, which are "scenarios for living alone in the long-term" and "scenarios for living alone in the short-term." These are elaborated below.

### *Scenarios for Living Alone in the Long-Term*

While formulating these scenarios, it is important to take into account the potential solo-dweller's life course stage since these scenarios change in accordance with one's age. For young and middle-aged adults, three key scenarios can explain why potential solo-dwellers might choose to live alone as a long-term, permanent arrangement rather than a temporary one. In the first scenario, after a cohabitation experience, including living in a dormitory, in a shared house, or with an ex-partner/spouse, one voluntarily decided to live alone since they think that cohabitation is not a suitable way of living for them and they desire to be alone in their living area. In this respect, once this person starts to live alone, s/he can primarily enjoy solitude and may also enjoy spatiotemporal control.

In this case, the solo-living person is not very affected by either physical or mental vulnerabilities because s/he has different resources to support herself/himself in case of experiencing such vulnerabilities. These resources can change from one person to another. However, the main point is that they provide one the ability to cope with these vulnerabilities. For example, an introverted person who doesn't need or enjoy frequent socializing may find that a small circle of close friends fulfills their social and emotional needs by offering support in times of need. Additionally, they can interact with co-workers at the workplace to satisfy the need for human contact without requiring emotional bonding. In contrast, solo-dweller who are extroverted can enhance their ability to adapt to new social settings and meet new people. This helps them socialize effortlessly across different circles and build a diverse network that includes family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and acquaintances. In other words, their resources take shape in line with their specific needs based on their self-concepts. In addition, they are open to alternative romantic relationship options like "living apart together" relationships while do not make an effort to find a romantic partner. Accordingly, their general satisfaction with their family and friend relations may lead them to feel no need for a romantic partner, as their emotional and social needs are already met by these existing relationships. As a result, under these circumstances, one may live alone for a very long time without feeling the need to change his/her living arrangement.

In the second scenario, one can decide to live alone as a preference. This person is career-focused and ambitious about achieving their professional goals and also prefers to live alone mainly for this sake. For them, living alone primarily means "resting and relaxing," as their home becomes a safe haven to unwind after a busy workday. They satisfy their need for human contact through interactions with co-workers, who may either be part of their social circle at work or remain limited to workplace interactions. However, they rarely feel the need—or have the time—to socialize with colleagues outside the workplace. Crucially, this solo-dweller prioritizes their career above all else, often choosing not to pursue romantic relationships, which require effort, energy, and time they are unwilling to invest. As a result, they may live alone for a long time without feeling the need for a romantic partner.

In the third scenario, a young or middle-aged adult starts to live alone as a consequence of life-changing events. Although they may hope for a traditional co-residential relationship, they feel pessimistic about finding a suitable partner. Initially, viewing solo living as their only option can deepen their sense of pessimism, as they may feel powerless to change their circumstances. However, if they enjoy solitude and spatiotemporal control, then their characterization of the romantic relationships can change over time, making them more open to alternative forms of connection since, while their sense of control strengthens with their spatiotemporal control in their house space, their understanding of intimacy can be transformed with the appreciation of self-company. This can again lead to living alone for a long time.

Finally, for older adults and also for adults in their late middle ages, living alone can be an involuntary decision that they have to make after a separation or divorce from their ex-partners or after losing their partners. In this regard, by separating or divorcing from the ex-cohabiting partner with whom one has a challenging and conflicting relationship, in which the parties embrace traditional gender roles, the solo-dweller can feel liberated from these traditional gender roles and also enjoy spatiotemporal control while living alone. This is more likely the case for women living in a society where strong family ties and traditional gender roles have validity and significance.

Here, resources, especially economic sources, are important since these solo-dwellers need to be financially independent. Moreover, since at this stage of their life, they are possibly retired, having a diversified social circle, including their family, friends, and neighbors, can help them to meet their social and emotional needs by specifically getting support in times of need. Indeed, they are often reluctant to have another traditional co-residential relationship. In the case of widowhood, this can also be the reflection of their grieving process that if they have another romantic partner, they feel like they are replacing their deceased spouse with this person; thus, they refrain from having a relationship. On the other hand, separation or divorce can make one

more open to alternative relationship forms. So, these solo-dwellers can live alone for a long time under these conditions.

### *Scenarios for Living Alone in the Short-Term*

It is also possible to formulate scenarios for living alone as a temporary phase and differentiate them in relation to the age of potential solo-dwellers. For young adults, living alone can again a voluntary decision. However, their experiences of living alone include taking a step into adulthood and enjoying spatiotemporal control by preserving their personal space. In other words, for them, living alone serves a purpose for a certain amount of time. On the other hand, most of them actually wish and expect to have a traditional co-residential relationship in the future. Therefore, when the time comes, they will be ready to cohabit with their future partner while being able to take responsibility as an adult and handle domestic duties.

For middle-aged and older adults, living alone can be an involuntary decision after separation or divorce. They can feel liberated from their traditional gender roles and enjoy spatiotemporal control in the absence of their ex-partners with whom they have frequent disputes and problems. Nevertheless, some of them think this is a healing process in which they can mentally prepare themselves for another traditional co-residential relationship. Moreover, the solo-dweller can make an effort to find a suitable partner. Therefore, again, living alone is considered a temporary phase serving a purpose until one feels ready for another cohabiting relationship.

At this point, it should be highlighted that in these cases, even if one characterizes living alone as a temporary phase, the fragility of romantic relationships might increase the likelihood of those former solo-dwellers becoming future solo-dweller candidates. Once they live alone and enjoy it, it is possible that they will decide to live alone if, in the future, they decide to change their cohabiting living arrangement. As a result, this kind of on-and-off living alone might become a more common phenomenon.

### *Limitations*

There are certain limitations of this study that will be addressed here. First of all, while the grounded theory approach serves as an inspiration for the research methodology, the formulation and introduction of 'a theory of living alone,' beyond presenting different scenarios for living alone cannot be achieved in the scope of this analysis. In addition, the study sample consists of urban middle-class respondents so they mainly have similar socio-economic backgrounds. In the literature, there is a specific emphasis on social vulnerabilities that the lower class solo-dwellers deal with since they have very limited financial resources (Klinenberg, 2001; Portacolone, 2015; Wong & Verbrugge, 2009). In our data while there are those respondents who accentuated their economic concerns, still this aspect does not come to the forefront as a vulnerability that they have to cope with. Therefore, it is not elaborated in the scope of this analysis. Nevertheless, since in this study, the main focus is to reveal the multidimensional and multilayered feature of living alone while addressing that solo-dwellers are a heterogeneous group, not being able to include participants from different socio-economic backgrounds prevented us from exploring and capturing as many different aspects and factors affecting the pathways, experiences and future expectations related to living alone as possible. Furthermore, resources available to solo-dwellers, such as economic resources related to housing opportunities and social security systems in Turkey and Sweden, could not be examined in detail within the scope of this study.

### *Prospects for Future Research*

The presented study can be extended in several ways. As a limitation of this study, future research can focus on a more diversified sample, including participants from different socio-economic backgrounds like upper and lower-class solo-dwellers and/or from different settings like urban and rural areas. Moreover, if the data collection is held in various countries like Turkey and Sweden, this further diversification in the sample can enable the researchers to discover and reveal uncovered aspects of the concept while possibly tracing and capturing more similarities as well as differences in the different cultural settings concerning the pathways, experiences and future expectations about living alone.

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**APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE RESPONDENTS**

<b><u>Respondents from Turkey living in Turkey</u></b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>
First Participant (AYLİN)	Female	37	Being in a romantic relationship	University Graduate	Professional	Living in a big city
Second Participant (BAHAR)	Female	37	Single without a serious romantic relationship	Having Associate's Degree	Professional	Living in a big city
Third Participant (ARDA)	Male	43	Single without a serious romantic relationship	Having Ph.D. degree	Professional	Living in a big city
Fourth Participant (KORAY)	Male	29	Being in a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Civil servant	Living in a big city
Fifth Participant (DEFNE)	Female	24	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Unemployed	Living in a big city
Sixth Participant (MEHTAP)	Female	65	Single without a serious romantic relationship	High School Graduate	House wife	Living in a big city
Seventh Participant (EMEL)	Female	68	Single without a serious romantic relationship	Secondary School Graduate	House wife	Living in a big city
Eight Participant (ONUR)	Male	31	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Professional	Living in a big city
Ninth Participant (DERYA)	Female	45	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Civil servant	Living in a big city
Tenth Participant (BERK)	Male	33	Being in a romantic relationship	Having Ph.D. degree	Professional	Living in a small city

Eleventh Participant (CANAN)	Female	28	Single without a serious romantic relationship	Having Master's degree	Professional	Living in a big city
Twelfth Participant (GAYE)	Female	52	Choosing not to state her relationship status	Having Ph.D. degree	Professional	Living in a small city
Thirteenth Participant (SELİM)	Male	28	Single without a serious romantic relationship	Having Master's degree	Student	Living in a big city
Fourteenth Participant (GÖZDE)	Female	28	Being in a romantic relationship	University Graduate	Professional	Living in a big city
Fifteenth Participant (NUR)	Female	33	Single without a serious romantic relationship	Having Master's degree	Professional	Living in a small city
Sixteenth Participant (SERHAT)	Male	46	Being in a romantic relationship (LAT)	University Graduate	Artist	Living in a big city
Seventeenth Participant (BERİL)	Female	84	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Artist	Living in a big city
Eighteenth Participant (TUNA)	Male	74	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Retired	Living in a big city
Nineteenth Participant (MURAT)	Male	70	Being in a romantic relationship	Primary School Graduate	Worker	Living in a big city
Twentieth Participant (NEHİR)	Female	60	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Artist	Living in a big city

<u>Respondents from Sweden living in</u>	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Occupation	Place of Residence

<b>Sweden</b>						
First Participant (KEVIN)	Male	39	Being in a romantic relationship	Having Ph.D. degree	Professional	Living in a big city
Second Participant (ALVA)	Female	57	Being a romantic relationship	Having Ph.D. degree	Professional	Living in a big city
Third Participant (PETER)	Male	36	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Professional	Living in a big city
Fourth Participant (EVA)	Female	65	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Artist	Living in a big city
Fifth Participant (VICTOR)	Male	69	Being in a romantic relationship	University Graduate	Retired	Living in a big city
Sixth Participant^ (LUCAS)	Male	30	Being in an on and off romantic relationship	University Graduate	Technician	Living in a big city
Seventh Participant (IDA)	Female	46	Single without a serious romantic relationship	Having Ph.D. degree	Professional	Living in a big city

<b>Respondents from Turkey living in Sweden</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>

First Participant* (ASLAN)	Male	27	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Professional	Lived alone in a small city
Second Participant (GİZEM)	Female	30	Single without a serious romantic relationship	Having Master's degree	Student	Living in a small city
Third Participant (SUNA)	Female	62	Single without a serious romantic relationship	High School Graduate	Professional	Living in a small city
Fourth Participant (SARP)	Male	31	Being in a romantic relationship	University Graduate	Professional	Living in a small city
Fifth Participant (TOLGA)	Male	67	Single without a serious romantic relationship	High School Graduate	Retired	Living in a big city
Sixth Participant (IRMAK)	Female	29	Being in a romantic relationship	Having Master degree	Student	Living in a small city
Seventh Participant (LALE)	Female	54	Single without a serious romantic relationship	University Graduate	Worker	Living in a small city
Eight Participant (OYA)	Female	64	Being in a romantic relationship	University Graduate	Professional	Living in a small city
Ninth Participant (BARTU)	Male	31	Not in a serious relationship	University Graduate	Professional	Living in a small city
<p><sup>^</sup> The sixth respondent from Sweden has a Swedish mother and a Turkish father who separated.</p> <p>* The first respondent from Turkey living in Sweden lived alone while he was living in a small city for</p>						

2 years. At the time, he was also single. Currently, he has moved to a big city and is cohabiting with his partner.



## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### 1) Can you tell me about yourself?

- How old are you?
- What is your educational status?
- Are you currently working?
  - (If the answer is yes:) What is your occupation?
  - (If the participant is retired:) What was your occupation?
- Where do you currently reside?

### Part I:

### 2) How did you start to live alone? Can you tell me a little bit about this?

#### Follow-up Questions:

- Was living alone completely your own decision?

#### **[If this is the informant's own decision:]**

- Could you tell me what your former living arrangement was like before you started to live alone?
  - Were there any specific activities that you regularly did with your family/your partner such as eating together (according to the answer of the respondent)?
  - Do you still continue to do these activities with your family/partner or do you have new activities in your current living order?
- If you make a comparison between your former living arrangement and the current one, what comes to your mind as the prominent characteristics and differences of the two living arrangement? What led you to this decision?
- Would you describe the situation that you were in at the time of making this decision?
- Did anyone influence your decision at the time?
- How did s/he/they influence you?
- How did your close social circle (like your family or close friends) react to this decision?
- Did they give any reactions to you after deciding to live alone?

**[If this is not a voluntary choice for the informant:]**

- Could you elaborate a little about your former living arrangement before you started to live alone?
  - Were there any specific activities that you regularly did with your family/your partner such as eating together (according to the answer of the respondent)?
  - Do you still continue to do these activities with your family/partner or do you have new activities in your current living order?
  - If you make a comparison between your former living arrangement and the current one, what comes to your mind as the prominent characteristics and differences of the two living arrangement?
- How would you describe the situation that you were in at the time you started to live alone first?

**POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS FOR SPECIAL GROUPS**

**For widowed/separated elderly who have children (approximately 65 and more)**

- Did you ever think of living with your children?
  - **(If the answer is no:)** Why was this not a viable option for you?

**For divorced/separated women/men (young or middle-aged adults,**

**approximately 25-65)**

- Do you think your experience of separation affected your decision to live alone?
  - **(If the answer is yes:)** How did it affect your decision?
- Did you consider living with your parents?
  - **(If the answer is no:)** Why was this not a viable option for you?

**For those young/middle-aged adults who started to live alone in their university years**

- Could you tell me a little bit about how was your cohabitation experience in

the university years with your roommates/housemates?

- Are there any specific advantages and/or disadvantages that you remember related to this cohabitation experience?
- If you did not study at university in another city distant from your parents' house, would you still consider living alone?
- Do you think that if you did not live alone in the university years, would something be different in your life today?

**For those young/middle-aged adults whose family lives in the same city with them:**

- Does your family live in the same city with you?
  - **(If their families live in the same city)** How did this affect your decision to live alone and your experience of living alone?
- Are you currently in a romantic relationship with someone?

**For those who are in a relationship**

- Did you consider living with your partner before starting to live alone?
  - **(If the answer is no:)** Why was this not a viable option for you?
- Does your living arrangement affect your relationship?

**For those who are single**

- Do you think your current living arrangement affects your relationship status?
- Does living alone make it difficult for you to be romantically involved with someone?

**3) How would you describe one of your ordinary days? What is your daily routine like?**

**Follow-up Questions:**

- What kind of social activities do you normally do?

### **For those who are currently working**

- Where do you normally spend your time most, at home or at work?
- Was this different before the pandemic?
- Did you switch to a home office working arrangement during the process?
- If you need to choose between your home and office in terms of spending time, which one would you choose?
- How do you define your business life? (like, is it too busy or too tiring or satisfactory or enjoyable for you?)
- Do you like your office environment and your co-workers in general?
- Do you often meet your colleagues outside of work?
  - **(If the answer is no:)** Why do you not prefer to socialize with them outside of work?
- Did your work situation have any effect on your decision to live alone?

### **4) How do you usually socialize? Face-to-face or through online channels and social media?**

#### **Follow-up Questions:**

- Are you actively using social media channels?
- Do you prefer to socialize face-to-face or through social media?

#### **If the answer is yes:**

- What kind of an experience is it for you to socialize through digital channels? Could you please tell me a little bit about it?
- What can you tell, if you make a comparison between face-to-face socialization and social media socialization?

#### **If the answer is no:**

- Why do you not prefer to socialize through social media channels?
- Which social media platforms do you prefer to use? Why?
- For what purpose do you use these platforms? For example, do you mostly use it for sharing photos or status, or do you mostly use it for following your social circle and to follow different pages that you are interested in?

**5) How do you define your relationship with your family and your friends in general?**

**Follow-up Questions:**

- Are you close with your family/friends?
- How often do you communicate and meet with your family/friends?
- Do you normally have a harmonious relationship with your family/friends?
  - How often do you have an argument with your family/friends?
  - To what extent do you think these arguments you have affect your relationship with your family/friends?
- If you rank your family and friends in order of importance, which one comes first for you?
- What can you say about your relationship with your family/friends, if you make comparison between the times before and after you started to live alone?
  - Do you think your current living arrangement affected your relationship with your family/friends in this respect?

**For those whose families live in a different city or in a distant place**

- Do you think if you have lived in the same city or lived closer with your family, your communication and your meeting frequency with them would be different?
- Do you think not having frequent face-to-face contact with your family affects your relationship with them?

**6) Do you find your income sufficient enough to maintain your current living condition?**

**Follow-up Questions:**

- What do you mostly spend your money on?
- Do you think that your living expenses caused by living alone create a burden on your budget and prevent you from spending more freely?

## Part II:

### 7) How would you characterize living alone in general?

#### **Follow-up Questions:**

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of living alone, according to you?
- Would you say you enjoy living alone?
- Could you describe me your personal characteristics? What are your most prominent personal traits?
  - Do you think your personal characteristics had an effect on your decision to live alone?
  - Do you think living alone affect your personal characteristics and lead to some changes in your characteristics?
- Would you say you feel lonely because of living alone?
  - In what situations do you usually feel lonely most?
  - Do you experience this feeling of loneliness frequently?
  - Are there any coping mechanisms that you specifically use to overcome this feeling of loneliness?
- Do you think that after a certain age individuals should establish their own house order by leaving their family house?
  - Do you think that in order to take a step to adulthood, they should experience living alone in some part of their lives?
- Do you think that by living alone you are making a social statement? I mean, do you think that by living alone you are challenging some social norms.
  - (**If the answer is yes:**) Do you think challenging these norms have certain consequences for you? For example, have you ever felt isolated from society because of this?
- Could you tell me about the activities that you mainly do by yourself at home in your everyday life?
- Could you also tell me about the activities that you mainly do by yourself outside in your everyday life?
  - Do you generally prefer doing activities like going to the theater, going to the cinema or traveling, by yourself?

- How do you define your mood while doing these activities by yourself?
- Do you generally enjoy doing these activities by yourself?
  - **(If the informant says these things:)** So you mentioned that, in general, you do enjoy/you don't like doing these activities by yourself and also that you feel lonely/socially isolated. Could you elaborate further?
- Do you have any relatives or friends who live alone like you?
  - Do you share with these people about living alone?
- Considering one of your ordinary days, how would you feel if you make a comparison between moments that you spend with friends, family, or acquaintances, and the moments that you spend by yourself? For example, is one more enjoyable than the other? Or would you prefer one over the other?
- Do you like to invite people from your social circle over to your home?
  - If you make a comparison between the time you spend at home with someone from your social circle and the time you spend alone at home, how does this make you feel? For example, is one more enjoyable than the other? Would you prefer one over the other?
- Do you like the neighborhood you are living? Why?
  - Is there a particular reason why you choose to live in this neighborhood?
  - Are there any specific advantages and/or disadvantages of living in this neighborhood?
- Do you find the house you live in adequate and suitable in general for yourself?
  - For example, does the living space of your house, the layout and decor of your house please you?
- Do you attribute any meaning to your house? For instance, do you have a sense of belonging to your house?
- Do you normally prefer to take care of your household responsibilities (such as cleaning, cooking, paying bills) by yourself or do you get help for this?
  - **(If the respondent takes care of them by herself/himself)** How does it make you feel to handle these household chores on your

own?

- (If the respondent gets help for them) How does it make you feel to get help with this?
- Does this affect your views on living alone?
- Do you take care of plants and/or a pet at home?
  - Can you say a little bit more about your relationship with your pet or plants?

**8) Could you tell me whether the pandemic process had any effect on your views about living alone?**

**Follow-up Questions:**

- Were your daily activities affected in the process?
  - For instance, do you have any activities that you abandon in the process or are there any new activities that you started to do in the process?
- How was your social life affected by the pandemic process?
  - For example, do your preferences related to the channels you used to socialize change? Like preferring to use virtual communication channels more often than face to face contact.

**Part III:**

**9) Could you tell me about your future plans a little bit?**

**Follow-up Questions:**

- Do you want to continue living alone in the near future? Why?

**For working people,**

- Do you have any specific career-related plans to realize or goals to achieve in the future? [If yes:] Do you think, these plans and goals might affect your future living arrangement?
- Is there any possible scenario in which you think you will definitely live alone in the future? Could you elaborate it a little?

**10) Is there something else that you think I should know related to the experience of living alone?**

**11) Is there anything you would like to ask me?**

**Thank you.**



## APPENDIX C: A NOTE ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOME INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

It could be illuminating to explain how some of the interview questions are formulated by displaying the process. In this respect, there are specific questions for respondents who study at a university in another city distant from their family house. Among the twelve respondents formerly interviewed, seven of them had studied at a university in a city different from their hometown. Only two of them started to live alone in this period yet they all had a cohabitation experience with roommates or housemates. While some have more positive memories, some have more negative ones. Here, a specific follow-up question was formulated that made them talk about their cohabitation experience in more detail since even if none of them express a particular experience that causes them to decide to live alone, they talked about some difficulties but also some advantages of this cohabitation experience. It is also important since it is the first step to leave the family house and take their own responsibility.

To those who are currently working, a question about whether their jobs affect their decision to live alone was included. There are several respondents who associated their living arrangement with their work in terms of the certain vocational requirements or personal ones caused by their work. For instance, one of the respondent expressed that as a research assistant, his current living arrangement enables him to study at home comfortably. Another respondent said that as he deals with people in stressful work environment, he considers his house as a harbor to shelter in which he can isolate himself from the people. Furthermore, one of the respondents indicated that he realized he was more successful at work while he was living alone and this realization affected his decision to return to living alone. In this regard, more particular questions that underline this relationship made the respondents elaborate the issue further. In addition, it was also asked whether their work also affect their future expectations.

In the social media-related questions under the first part related to their socialization preferences, two of the respondents, a middle-aged female and an older female, expressed that they thought that social media usage is unhealthy while they mainly prefer face-to-face contact. Even if most of the respondents specified that they are actively using social media, most of them do not consider it as a channel for socialization. In this context, further questions were added to examine the reasons for these considerations. Such questions gave a hint about the respondents' socialization practices as well.

Under the section about family and friendship relations of the respondents, follow-up questions were formulated regarding whether they have a compatible and peaceful relationship with their family and friends, how often they come into conflict with them, and whether these relationships are affected by their living arrangement. One respondent indicated that after living alone, he became a calmer and more peaceful person than his former, more aggressive version while he was cohabiting with someone. Therefore, such a question can help us understand whether there is an association between the characterization of social relations and living alone. Indeed, it is also possible that the looseness of these social relations may eventually make this person live alone as if he/she is somehow socially isolated, or as in the example, through living alone, this person can become more harmonious in his/her social relationships. But both of these scenarios can also happen at the same time. Once this person is isolated due to his/her poor social relations and starts to live alone, he/she may decide to be more easygoing by looking at these consequences.

As another follow-up question, the respondents were asked how they define their personal characteristics and also whether they think these personal traits affect their decision to live alone. While some of the respondents talked about several personal characteristics of them that they consider to affect their decision to live alone, some others talked about some personal traits that they developed after mainly they started to live alone in the former interviews. Moreover, some of the respondents expressed that this living arrangement is the suitable for them even if they do not intend to maintain this living arrangement in the future. In this sense, it can be helpful to ask

them to characterize themselves and make them to correlate these with their decision to live alone in order to see what kind of personal traits are specifically associated with this living arrangement by those who experience them.

In the second part, where there are questions related to living alone experiences, a follow-up question was added about the identification of the situations in which the respondents specifically feel lonely. There are certain respondents who dissociated living alone from feeling lonely and did not make a direct connection between them. The aloneness they experience at their home is a consequence of a choice they deliberately made. By asking them the specific conditions that they feel lonely, it can be easier to clarify this differentiation if it exists. Under this part, another question specifically investigates whether living alone is considered a social stance was noted down. Three of the male respondents pointed out that by living alone, they are able to handle domestic responsibilities like cooking and cleaning, which are traditionally regarded as the roles of women. In that sense, they questioned these traditional gender roles, challenged these roles by fulfilling such domestic tasks by themselves, and considered maintaining this attitude if they cohabit with their romantic partner in the future. Other than these male respondents, two of the female respondents who are both divorced from their spouses and embraced a traditional gender role in these relationships emphasized they are now handling by themselves all the responsibilities formerly their male ex-partners were handling, like maintaining their livelihood or providing their own protection against external threats. Therefore, they also challenged their formerly embraced gender roles. While one of these female respondents underlines being powerful in order to live alone, the other underlines its emancipating aspect. Therefore, by asking such questions, we can see whether they associate their living arrangements with exhibiting a critical stance against traditional gender roles.

In the second part, questions related to the activities the respondents are mainly doing by themselves were also included. Here, it aimed to make them differentiate between the indoor and outdoor activities they do by themselves. Accordingly, a follow-up question was added that particularly asks about outdoor activities,

including social events like going to the theatre and cinema or going on travels and vacations. Such a separation of these activities can facilitate us to see whether they mostly prefer to hang out alone at their house since this is already offered by their living arrangement and going out means mainly socializing for them or whether they enjoy spending time by themselves both inside and outside of their house. In other words, this can help us to understand whether the house space is important for them in terms of enabling them to spend time alone.

Another follow-up question related to the characterization of the experience was added to this part. Several of the respondents indicated that after a certain age, it is disturbing to live with somebody, specifically with the family. This certain age refers to adulthood in this context. Therefore, it was asked whether they perceived this living arrangement as some kind of a step taken to adulthood. Moreover, those respondents who left their family house for their university education and had a cohabitation experience in these years were asked whether they associate this cohabitation experience with adulthood and also interrelate the two experiences, cohabitation and living alone, in terms of taking a step to adulthood since all the respondents who indicated the former are among the group who leave their family house for their university education.

In the section where the respondents' general satisfaction with their house was questioned, another follow-up question was added about whether they attribute any meaning to their house and feel any sense of belonging. Two of the respondents addressed that after a certain period of time, their relationship with their house and their perception of it changed. One of them experienced this after a traumatic divorce period, and the other experienced it after living in her current house for a longer period of time compared to her former house she lived. It can be useful to ask a more specific question to understand this transformation in their attitudes towards their house. In this regard, this question can make us see how the respondents perceive and evaluate the space they live in and how it relates to their current living arrangement.

Moreover, under the section that included house-related questions, a follow-up question was added about having a pet or looking after plants at home. Both of the respondents who expressed that they feel lonely from time to time while living alone have pets. Indeed, they are not the only ones having pets yet this desire to have a living creature at the house other than themselves that can respond to them can show their dealing ways of loneliness within such living arrangement.

In terms of the final part, while two of the respondents decidedly expressed that they will continue to live alone in the future, the other respondents mainly left an open door to the possibility of cohabitation in these initial interviews. In this regard, a question of whether there is a possible scenario in which they will certainly continue to maintain their current living arrangement and what the odds of this scenario happening for them were included. This question can facilitate us to see how much the respondents adhere to living alone and how open they are to the idea of cohabitation.