

## Understanding Communication and Support Processes Within Families of Marginalized Groups in Türkiye

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This study aims to identify the communication strategies employed by mothers with LGBTQ+ children in Türkiye on learning about their children's sexual orientation and to evaluate the intrafamily communication process. Through in-depth interviews with 28 mothers of LGBTQ+ children, the study identified the communication strategies used and assessed the intrafamily communication process. Mothers commonly exhibited emotional reactions such as nonacceptance, disappointment, incomprehension, and deep sorrow on learning about their children's orientation, often blaming themselves. LGBTQ+ mothers described their children as being open to communication. Participants highlighted the significance of LGBTQ+ organizations like LISTAG, emphasizing the opportunities for awareness and organization provided by such groups. This study, which is the first to address the coming-out processes of LGBTQ+ children within families in Türkiye, contributes to the literature on LGBTQ+ family communication in the Global South.

*Keywords: communication, LGBTQ+ mothers, intrafamily communication, sexual orientation, emotional reactions, support organizations, Türkiye*

The debates surrounding LGBTQ+ issues not only belong to the discourse of modern society but also possess a historical framework marked by exile, lynching, execution, and severe penalties (Davies, 2012). Throughout history, reactions against nonnormative sexuality have not been limited to public concerns and extremist attitudes. Nonnormative sexuality was considered a serious mental disorder until 1970, requiring electroshock and apomorphine treatment. As stated in the DSM-1 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders), it was regarded as a criminal behavior of sexual deviation and sadism (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1952), characterized as severe pathological sexual deviation behaviors such

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as fetishism, pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism, masochism in the DSM-2 (APA, 1968), and treated as a psychosexual gender identity disorder in the DSM-3 (APA, 1980).

Until 2013, LGBTQ+ was considered a pathological and psychological condition, but in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013), it was redefined under the heading of gender dysphoria, seen not as something to be treated but as a psychological state requiring scientific management. Despite significant political steps, such as the official recognition of same-sex marriages, granting the right to parenthood, and acknowledging the rights of transmen to give birth (Frost, Lehavot, & Meyer, 2015), open and covert stigmatization persists. In particular, socio-psychological stigmas and inadequate social support can render the problems of LGBTQ+ individuals often immeasurable and ambiguous (King & Merchant, 2008). The recent literature suggested that (Carabez, Eliason, & Martinson, 2016; Hancock & Haskin, 2015) homophobia, social isolation, harassment, denial, and psychological violence contribute to increased rates of depression, eating disorders, trauma, substance use, and suicidal tendencies underscore the mitigating effect of parental and family support.

Among LGBTQ+ youth, research on the disclosure of sexual orientation to family members consistently reports widespread occurrences, with studies showing that a significant percentage of LGBTQ+ youth reveal their sexual orientation to at least one parent (Rosario, Scrimshaw, & Hunter, 2009). While positive responses are predominant when disclosure occurs to parents (Butauski & Horstman, 2020), it is crucial to consider potential statistical errors because of limitations in research methodologies, which may lead to an overrepresentation of supportive parental responses (Yüksel, Yanik, & Ayazlar, 2016).

Careful analysis of the factors contributing to negative reactions, such as stigma and rejection of sexual orientations, is essential. Especially in this process, strong family communication facilitates a healthy relationship between parent and child (Batu, Kalamani, Tos, & Subaşı, 2021, p. 39). Communication, values, and cultural systems within the family play an important role in shaping the processes of LGBTQ+ individuals disclosing and accepting their sexual orientation. (Merighi & Grimes, 2000). Research indicates lower parental acceptance in societies adhering to traditional and religious values (Alvarez, Parra, Brummelaar, Avraamidou, & López, 2022; Rivers & Cowie, 2006). Cultural factors, particularly religious references, are cited as significant sources of parental resistance to understanding and accepting the sexual orientation of their children (Yılmaz, 2020).

The acceptance and rejection of LGBTQ+ people by the family are significant factors in understanding the experiences of minority stress, loneliness and depression, and suicidal tendencies (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). However, more studies are needed to determine the proximal risk factors (Franklin et al., 2017) and levels related to LGBTQ+ people, and particularly to reveal the relationship between suicidal tendency and peer and family support. In a study on the parental perception of Generations X and Z in Türkiye (Batu & Tos, 2022), it was seen that mothers played a key role in family communication. Therefore, this study aims to reveal the importance of parental communication in the process of understanding the identity of LGBTQ+ young people, and especially to understand the reactions of mothers.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the communication methods employed by mothers in Türkiye on learning about their children's sexual orientation and to assess the intrafamily communication process. The study, conducted through in-depth interviews with 28 mothers of LGBTQ+

children, revealed a preference for verbal communication during the initial disclosure of sexual orientation. This qualitative study, which is the first to address the coming-out processes of children of LGBTQ+ families in Türkiye, aims to comprehensively explore the previously mentioned issues in the context of a Global South country. This study aims to contribute to the broader field of LGBTQ+ research by providing cultural and geographical context-specific insights that enrich the global understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals and their families in the Global South.

### **Parental Reactions and Origins in Sexual Orientation**

Sexuality, romantic feelings, and sexual fantasies represent an individual's most private domain, subject to distortion and ambiguity once defined and determined by others (Muisse, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009). Sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual, tends to face intervention when brought into discussion, influenced by centuries-old phenomena, such as religious myths like the creation of Eve or the Pandora story. Media portrayal, intertwining sexual orientation concepts with content involving exposure, fetishism, pornography, and sexual sadism, has contributed to legitimizing social, cultural, and state interventions, often leading to the perception of any sexual orientation as a deviant personality disorder (Armstrong, 2006; Vogel, Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011). Consequently, addressing the challenges faced by individuals with nonheteronormative sexual orientations involves navigating complex struggles against societal and cultural norms that have been ingrained for years (Bleakley et al., 2017; Coyne et al., 2019). In this context, support from parents, family, friends, and various institutions is essential (Shah et al., 2022). In particular, parental support has been identified as the most critical factor in several studies (Newcomb, Feinstein, Matson, Macapagal, & Mustanski, 2018; Rivers & Cowie, 2006). While supportive parents reduce many risks associated with rejection (Green, Price-Feeney, & Dorison, 2021), parental support cannot eliminate the risks associated with social rejections and potential legal and state sanctions (Horne, Johnson, Yel, Maroney, & McGinley, 2022). Regardless of the cause, negative parental reactions to transgender identity processes, particularly in adolescents, are highlighted as potentially leading to issues such as seeking social support in risky conditions, engaging in risky sexual encounters, substance use, and suicidal tendencies (Alvarez et al., 2022; Valentine & Shipherd, 2018).

In Türkiye, where nonnormative sexual orientation is still taboo, little is known about parental support and expectations about transgender identities. LGBTQ+ has never been considered a crime in Türkiye's judicial system, and positive awareness activities through TV programs and film content toward LGBTQ+ people are available (Yılmaz & Demirbaş, 2015). Furthermore, key nongovernmental organizations in the country, such as the Sexual Education Treatment and Research Association and the Psychiatric Association of Türkiye, have declared that LGBTQ+ is not a psychological disorder or disease; rather, it is a fact beyond an individual's will (Bıçmen & Bekiroğulları, 2013). However, despite these positive aspects, negative attitudes have been reported by scholars (Demirdizen, Çınar, & Kesici, 2012; Engin, 2015), and there has been no significant decrease in these attitudes over the years (1990: 93%; 2011: 84%; Orta, 2021). Türkiye, which was identified among the countries exhibiting the most pronounced negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals, was positioned 47th of 49 countries in a report published by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe.org, 2018) on LGBTQ+ equality rankings. According to research attempting to underscore the gravity of the subject in terms of population figures, LGBTQ+ people represent 3% to 6.5% of the adult population of countries (Gates, 2011). In a study

on Türkiye, where approximately 3 million LGBTQ+ people are claimed to exist (Yılmaz, 2020), the absence of publicly available data and the lack of cross-sectional analysis make predictions inaccurate. Moreover, studies have suggested that LGBTQ+ communities face various challenges, such as cyberattacks, surveillance, and verbal attacks (Oz & Yanik, 2024; Oz, Yanik, & Batu, 2023).

In studies examining the relationship between negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people and culture in Türkiye, the most noteworthy feedback is that homophobic individuals regard these individuals as mentally ill or sinful (Yılmaz, 2020). Religious sources are fundamental references for members of the heteronormative society who do not naturally accept other sexual orientations (Biçmen & Bekiroğulları, 2013; Engin, 2015), stigmatizing them as immoral. Considering the longstanding influence of religion on Turkish culture, religious references are expected to negatively affect attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people (Biçmen & Bekiroğulları, 2013).

Despite the dissemination of support information about LGBTQ+ people through various channels in today's world and the implementation of serious support projects, significant psychological problems related to family rejection and vital pressures stemming from homophobia persist (Salerno, Devadas, Pease, Nketia, & Fish, 2020). Studies reporting the negative mental health and risks of LGBTQ+ people indicate that young people are 5.9 times more likely to experience depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide, especially in cases of high family rejection (Bouris, Guilamo-Ramos, & Pickard, 2010; Haas et al., 2011; Higa, Hoppe, & Lindhorst, 2014). The literature suggests that parental rejection and misrecognition are the most significant stressors causing negative mental health and suicide attempts (Horton, 2014; Teasdale & Bradley-Engen, 2010). Additionally, as a result of family rejection, young individuals often lack coping skills (Ray, 2006), which can lead to ineffective attempts to manage personal stress (Van Bergen, de Jong, Plakas, Maassen, & van der Leij, 2013). Consequently, individuals may frequently resort to harmful strategies, such as drug use, to cope with stress and bad moods (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006).

This study investigates the parental communication dynamics of young LGBTQ+ individuals in Türkiye, focusing on the critical role of mothers. While various academic studies have been conducted on LGBTQ+ issues in Türkiye, there appears to be a gap in qualitative research specifically addressing the communication between LGBTQ+ individuals and their families. This qualitative research addresses this gap and contributes to the academic understanding of this aspect in Turkish and Global South contexts.

### **Materials and Methods**

In this research, we used a method called phenomenological design, which falls under the umbrella of qualitative analysis. Phenomenology focuses on situations, concepts, experiences, and perceptions that individuals encounter in social life but may not fully comprehend (Koçoğlu, Kalın, & Demir, 2022; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In another definition, phenomenology is the identification of the meaning, structure, and essence of a phenomenon from the perspective of individuals or predetermined groups' experiences (Larry, Johnson, & Turner, 2015). Unlike investigating the cause-and-effect relationships of individual behaviors or the existential causes of phenomena (Yüksel et al., 2016), phenomenology examines methods of understanding and classifying an individual's thoughts or external objects (Güçlü, 2019, p. 248).

Accordingly, this study considers the reactions of mothers with LGBTQ+ children when they learn about their children's orientation as a phenomenon. Thus, this study aims to determine the communication type established by mothers with LGBTQ+ children when they learn about their children's orientation and to evaluate the intrafamily communication process between them. In this context, the answers to the following questions were sought:

*RQ1: What communication type do children choose when disclosing the subject to their mothers/families?*

*RQ2: What was the reaction of mothers when they learned about their children's orientation?*

*RQ3: How do mothers of LGBTQ+ individuals generally evaluate their children's communication?*

*RQ4: How did mothers of LGBTQ+ individuals receive communication support from associations when they learned about their children's sexual identity?*

### ***Population, Sample, and Limitations of the Research***

The research focused on LGBTQ+ mothers in Türkiye who are aware of their children's sexual orientation. Initially, the authors reached the group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex families and relatives in Istanbul (the population of the study consists of lesbian, gay, and bisexual LISTAG)<sup>1</sup>, and contact was established with a volunteer parent from the LISTAG Izmir formation with the recommendation of LISTAG. Subsequently, the snowball sampling method was used, and the interviews were concluded after reaching the 28th parent because of data repetition. The reason for choosing the snowball sampling method is the inability to fully determine the population (Altındış & Ergin, 2018, p. 94) and the absence of a list and accessible open source for the individuals to be sampled (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2015, p. 126). In particular, because of the social and political environment, it is challenging to reach this specific population. After we recruited the participants, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 28 mothers. The interviews took place between February 2, 2023 and May 18, 2023 at the researcher's office at Ege University, İzmir in Türkiye. We have outlined the inclusion and exclusion criteria for individuals to qualify as participants in this study.

### ***Inclusion Criteria:***

- Being a mother aware of her child's sexual orientation.
- Having communicated with their children about their orientation.
- Continued communication about the child's orientation.
- Voluntarily accepting participation after being informed about the study.

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<sup>1</sup> LISTAG is a non-governmental organization consisting mainly of gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer families (primarily parents) and their relatives who feel the need to share the difficulties and experiences they face due to their children or relatives being LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer) (<https://listag.org>).

***Exclusion Criteria:***

- Not wanting to continue the interview for any reason.
- Believing that the questions asked were not suitable for them.
- Not providing enough data for evaluation during the interview process.

***Termination Criteria:***

- Insufficient reach to an adequate number of families (15 families are set as the lower limit).
- Negative reactions from pilot-interviewed mothers about the content of the study.

**Data Analysis**

In this study, an in-depth interview technique was used within the framework of the phenomenological design to obtain detailed data. Thus, we wanted to find communication expressions that mothers might not be aware of or did not think much about when talking to their LGBTQ+ children.

After reviewing the literature, the authors conducted a pilot interview with three mothers of LGBTQ+ individuals. Subsequently, additional questions were formulated by the authors based on the insights gained from the interviews. Later, in-depth interviews were conducted with three mothers for the pilot study, and the final content of the interview questions was determined. The structured question form includes three questions about the characteristics of the families from which the sample is taken, two questions about the period before mothers learned about their children's sexual orientation, five questions about the period when mothers learned about their children's sexual orientation, two questions about the period after mothers learned about their children's sexual orientation, and three questions about the process. In total, 15 questions were asked under five different headings. The questions were limited to interpersonal and social communication processes and interactions.

The interviews were recorded digitally or in writing with the participants' permission. Participants determined how the recording would take place. The obtained data were transferred to the Maxqda 2020 package program, and the code categories and themes were determined. In this context, five themes, 23 categories, and 742 codes were created. Descriptive analysis and content analysis were used in the analysis of the interviews. Descriptive analysis involves the direct quoting and interpretation of the necessary parts of the data obtained through previously determined or interview/observation-based questions within the framework of cause-and-effect relationships (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011, p. 224). Descriptive analysis classifies the data into small pieces and examines the relationships between these classifications, revealing concepts that are not directly seen. In this analysis, the researcher treats the phenomenon, as it is without any intervention (Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2011, p. 46).

Content analysis identifies themes and analyzes in-depth the previously unseen and unknown themes and connections in the field. It involves defining content with structural formatting, coding units, coding forms, and selecting an example for examining this form. In this way, hidden data within the texts are revealed, and unseen connections and concepts are identified, offering the reader a new perspective

(Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011, p. 223). Similarly, in this study, descriptive analysis was used to classify the data into small pieces, and then a deeper analysis of subcodes was conducted to reveal connections not visible at first glance.

## Results

Characteristics of the sampled families among the nine mothers included in the sample all responded as retired when asked about their occupation. Four mothers identified themselves as educators, three as freelancers, three as housewives, two as nurses, two as architects, two as medical doctors, one as an electronic engineer, one as a painter, and one as a bank manager. Of the parents, nine had only one child, 15 had two children, and four had three children. Notably, when single-child parents (nine parents) are excluded, it is observed that three parents' first child, five mothers' middle child, and 11 mothers' last (second or third) child exhibit LGBTQ+ orientation. The high number of last-born children with an LGBTQ+ orientation is noteworthy. Other details about the families are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Characteristics of Sampled Mothers.<sup>2</sup>**

<i>Mothers' Educational Levels: Mothers interviewed have different levels of education. This is significant for understanding the communication approaches of mothers with different educational backgrounds.</i>				
	Elementary	Middle School	High School	College (2-year college or higher)
Participants	2	7	5	14
<i>The societal and cultural backgrounds of mothers play a significant role in shaping their attitudes toward change and new ideas. When examining the participants' family structures, a delicate balance is observed between those who are open to new ideas and embrace change (progressive) and those who exhibit resistance to change and are not open to new ideas (conservative). This balance is crucial for studying communication processes within various family structures.</i>				
Progressive	13			
Conservative	15			
<i>Family Bonds: It is deemed necessary and important for the data on the communication process that the family bonds of the participants are not completely severed or bad (Fok, Allen, Henry, &amp; Team, 2014)</i>				
Good relationship/Cohesive	12			
Connected/Expressive	14			
Disconnected/Conflict	2			

### The Preceding Phases Before Mothers Discovering Their Children's Sexual Orientation

Characteristics of the sampled families among the nine mothers included in the sample, all responded as retired when asked about their occupation. Four mothers identified themselves as educators, three as freelancers, three as housewives, two as nurses, two as architects, two as medical doctors, one as an electronic engineer, one as a painter, and one as a bank manager. Of the parents, nine had only one

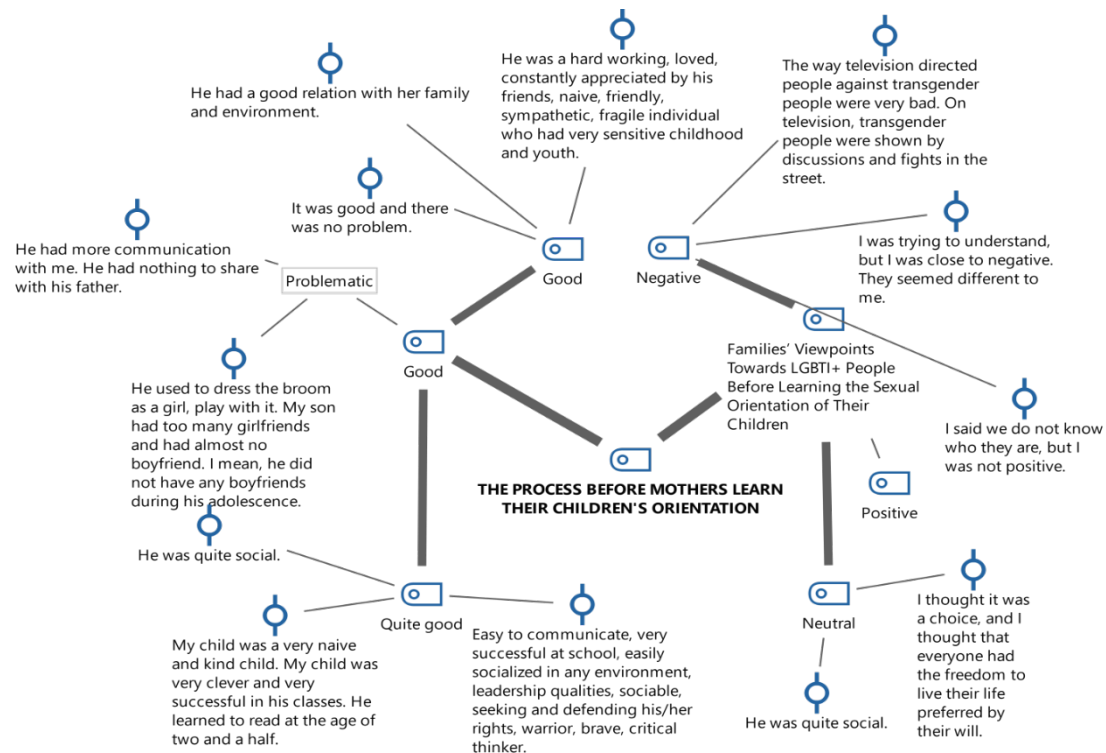
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### ***Child's Communication With the Environment in Childhood and Adolescence***

The obtained data predominantly emphasized that the communication of children with the environment was good or very good during childhood and adolescence. Accordingly, it can be said that the children were outgoing. One detail that did not stand out in the data is the disconnected or problematic nature of children's communication with the environment.

### ***Attitude Toward LGBTQ+ Individuals Before Learning About the Child's Orientation***

In the examined data, we observed that mothers with a negative attitude toward LGBTQ+ individuals and those with a neutral attitude were equally prevalent. With very little emphasis, it was mentioned that there was always a positive approach to this issue. Mothers with a negative outlook on this issue may have struggled more in accepting the process (see Figure 1).



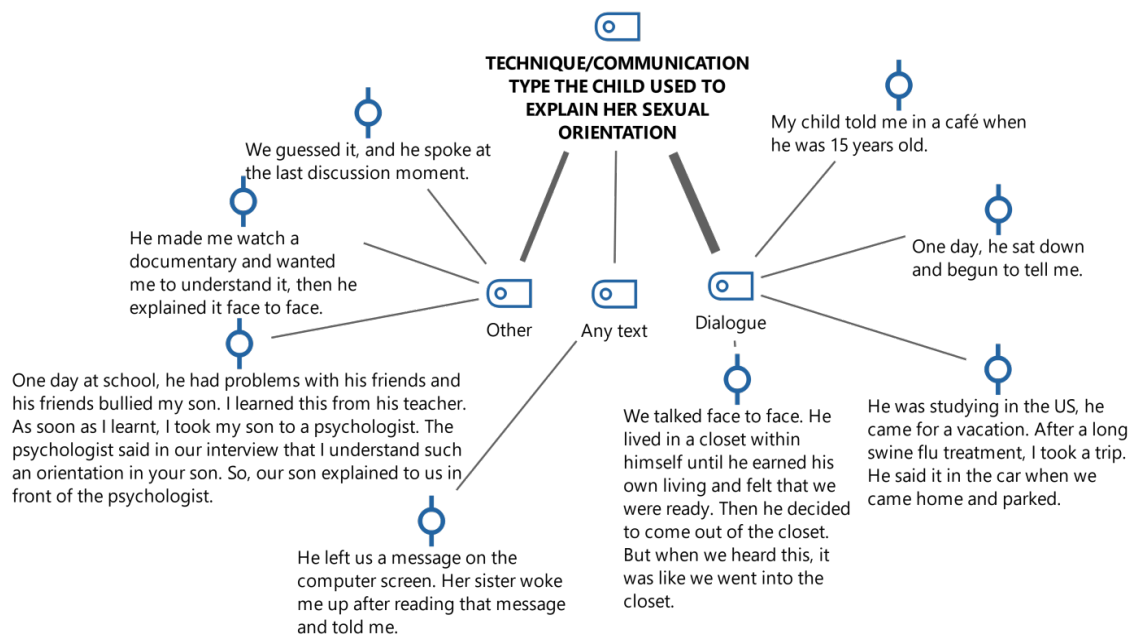
**Figure 1. The preceding phases before mothers discovering their children's sexual orientation.**



## The Process When Mothers Learned About Their Children's Orientation

### *Technique/Communication Type Used by the Child to Explain Their Orientation*

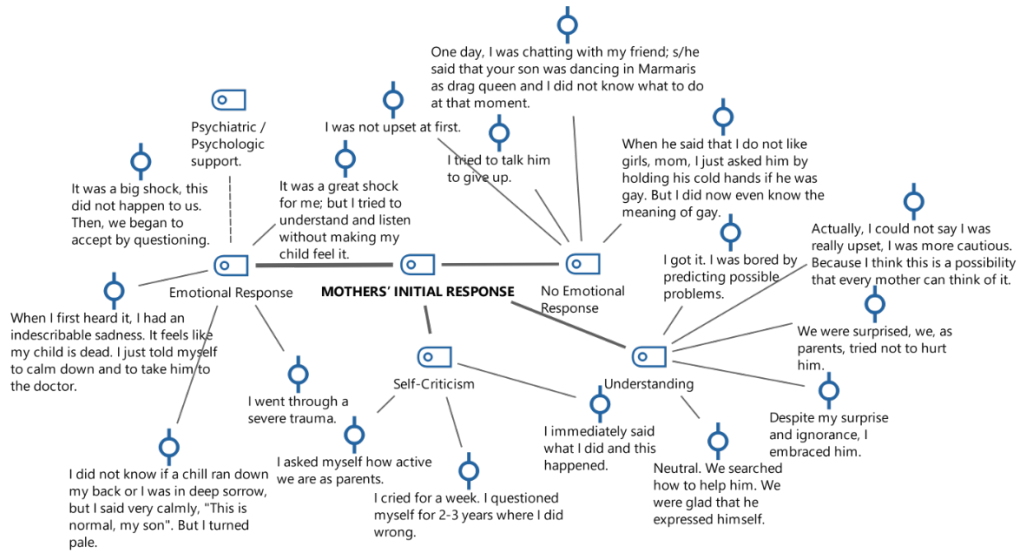
The obtained data emphasized the category of mutual conversation in explaining the orientations of the children. This indicates that most mothers are in dialogue with their children. In addition, messages were conveyed to mothers through writing, behaviors, and watching documentaries, expecting them to understand. Furthermore, explaining with the assistance of a psychologist has also become a code title. Children's preferences to tell their mothers about their orientations, some doing so not willingly but of necessity, indicate that there are things to be done in terms of intrafamily communication (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Communication type used by the child to explain their orientation.**

### *Mothers' Initial Reaction When Their Children Came of the Closet*

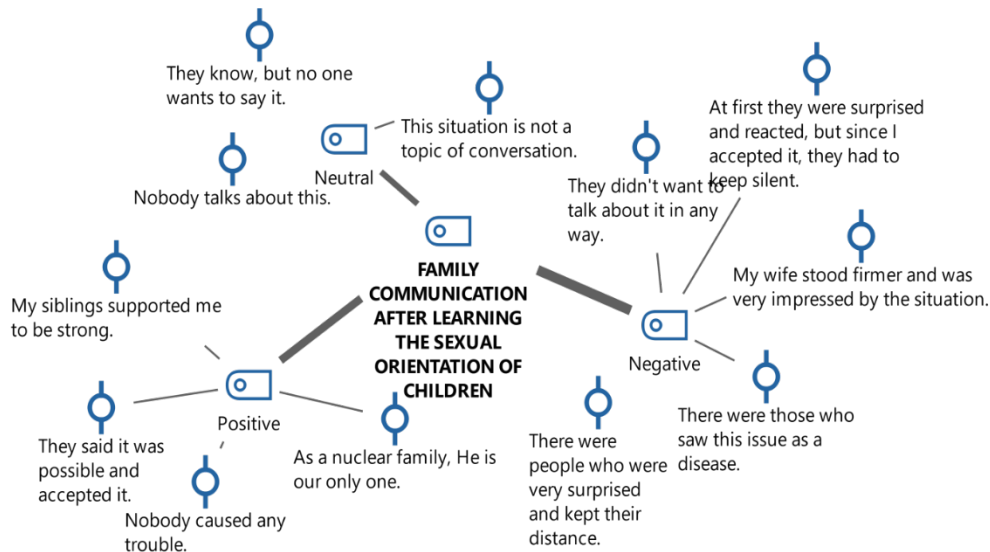
According to the data, mothers initially had emotional reactions when they learned about their children's orientation. However, the emphasis on continuing communication is also one of the other prominent codes. In some cases, mothers criticized themselves, while in other cases, they were understanding. The fact that most mothers had an emotional reaction and criticized themselves could be linked to ignorance about the subject and the perception that individuals experiencing this situation are always distant, could be, or should be (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Mothers' initial reaction.**

#### ***Approach of Family Members to Emerging Children***

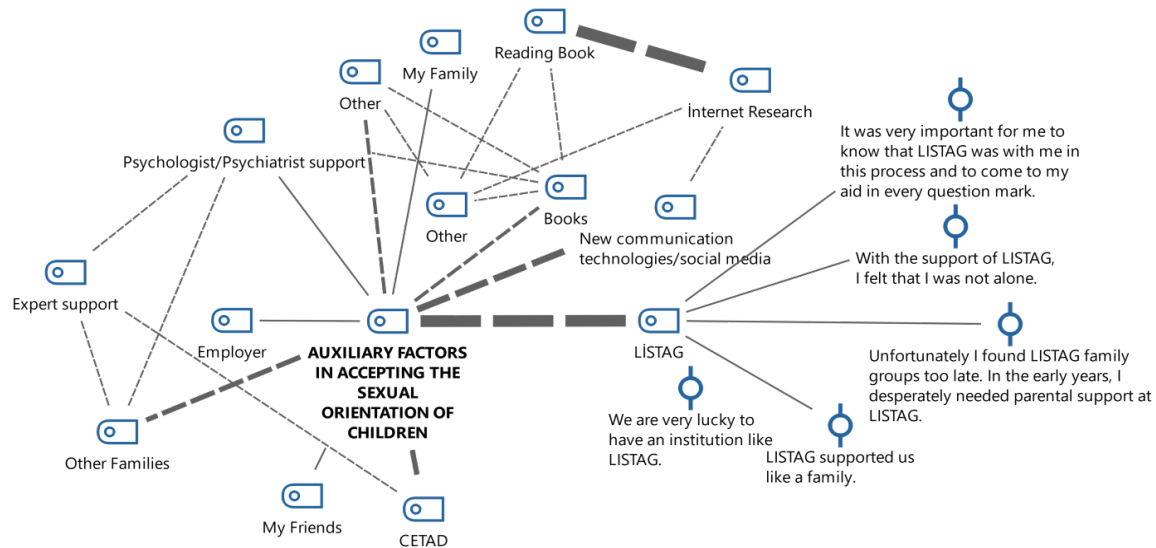
The data suggested a positive reaction from family members. However, there is also a mention of family members being neutral or negative about the issue, as highlighted in other codes. The data suggesting a negative approach to the subject may be related to ignorance of the issue, prevailing societal attitudes, and social anxieties (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Family members' approach to the situation.**

### ***Factors Assisting in Accepting the Child's Orientation***

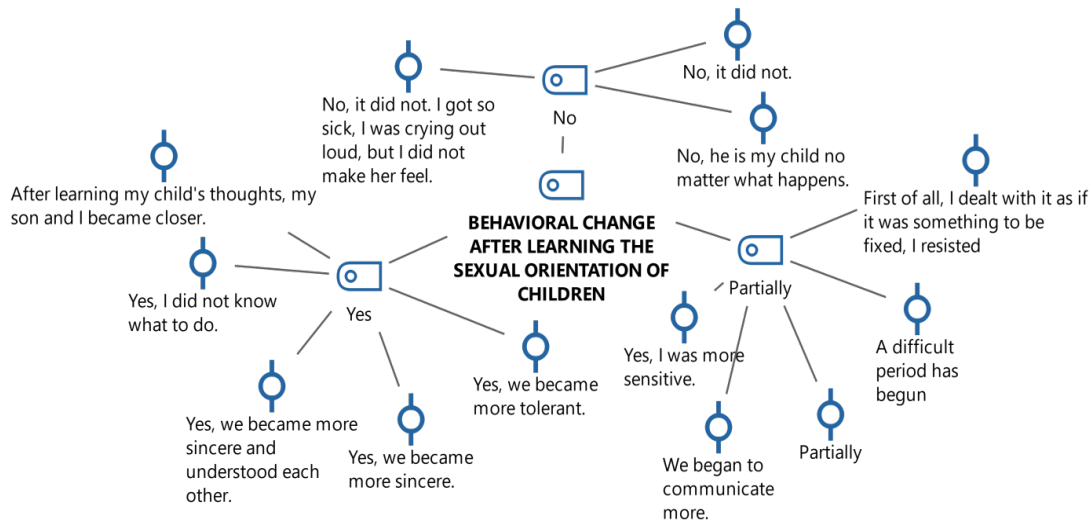
The results suggested that mothers tend to seek support from LISTAG during the process of accepting their child's orientation. In addition, new communication technologies, other mothers, and CETAD (Sexual Education, Treatment, and Research Association) are frequently highlighted. Families conducting online research have also extensively read books on the subject (see Figure 5).



***Figure 5. Factors assisting in accepting the child's orientation.***

### ***When the Child's Orientation is Learned***

The results indicate a similar emphasis on both the intensity of changes and the continuity in communication styles toward their children after learning about their sexual orientation. Additionally, the results suggest very few changes in communication style. For mothers whose approach to their children changed positively after learning about their child's orientation, it can be assumed that they found answers to some uncertainties and could empathize more easily with their children. Mothers whose communication remained unchanged either did not want to hurt their children or emphasized positive feelings toward their children. Moreover, mothers whose communication style changed partially may be considered to have accepted their children's orientation over time (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Changes in communication when the child's orientation is learned.**

#### **Process After Mothers Learned About Their Children's Orientation**

##### **Areas Mothers Criticize in Their Communication With Their Children**

The data revealed that mothers extensively criticized their communication with their children. These criticisms highlight their belief in a lack of information and the need for improvements in family communication. We included some quotes from the mothers about this issue. In many cases, they blame themselves for issues such as initially lacking knowledge or asking too many questions of their children. For example, one participant said, "I wish I had been more knowledgeable from the beginning and hadn't tried to change or transform him." Similarly, another participant said, "I wondered why he had difficulty opening up, and I asked too many questions." Furthermore, mothers indicated that they became a bridge between their children and other family members to make their children's transition easier. For example, one participant said, "Initially, I acted as a bridge between him and his father. I stopped being a bridge when I saw that the communication between them did not progress, and the problems were not resolved." While many participants blamed themselves for their communication style, some mothers did not think anyone should be blamed. For example, one participant said, "No one should be blamed. Being an LGBTQ+ individual is not a choice but an orientation. So, the innate orientation is unchangeable and has existed since the existence of our world but we were not aware until now." In general, mothers exhibited varied reactions to their communication styles with their children. While some believed they could improve, others realized that they were not aware of the situation until their children opened up to them. Subsequently, they made efforts to address the issue to the best of their abilities.

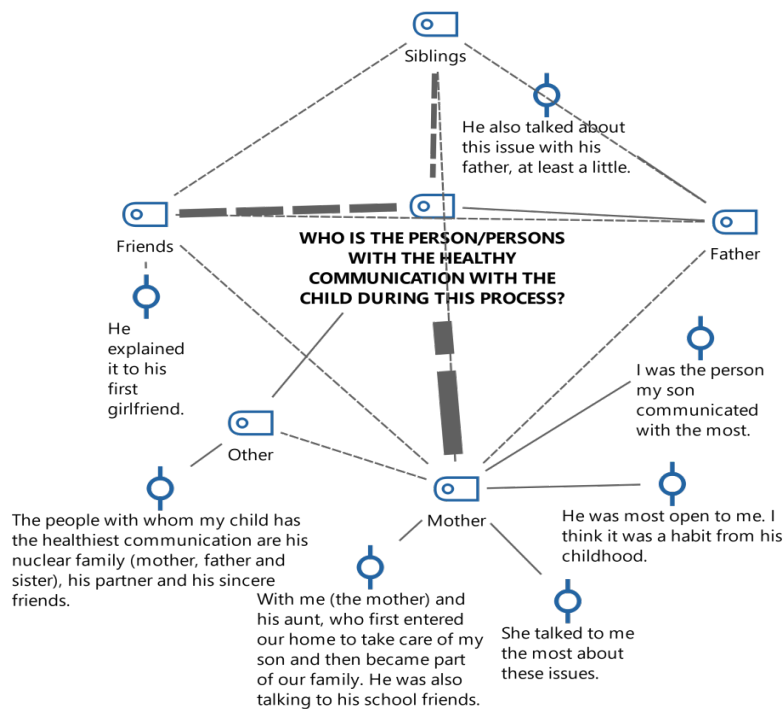
##### **The Effect of the Child's Orientation on the Environment They Communicate With**

The qualitative data frequently emphasize that the child's orientation affects the environment they communicate with. This situation is expected in human relationships. However, there are also codes

suggesting that it does not affect or only partially affect. Along with these codes, the importance of the child's education and having educated surroundings is highlighted.

- Participant 1: "Yes, he could make friends with girls more comfortably."
- Participant 25: "Yes, I think it affected."
- Participant 6: "It is very clear that it affected."
- Participant 22: "No, he graduated as an architect, hopes to work with an elite group, and I think it won't be a problem when he starts working."
- Participant 2: "Partly maybe, but he has an educated and modern environment."

The data show that in terms of the intensity of communication with the child, the mother, friends, siblings, father, and other individuals are listed. Although children are equally distant from both parents within the family, the prominence of healthy communication with mothers suggests a topic to ponder in terms of family communication. Additionally, the fact that friends and siblings are individuals with whom healthy communication is established much more than with the father opens the discussion about the father's role within the family. Looking at Figure 7, it is clear that mothers communicate most with their children, followed by friends and siblings. One of the important points that draws attention in the research is that LGBTQ+ young people cannot establish the same communication bond with their fathers as they do with their mothers, siblings, and friends. This situation indicates the need to reconsider paternal communication within Türkiye, which has a patriarchal society.



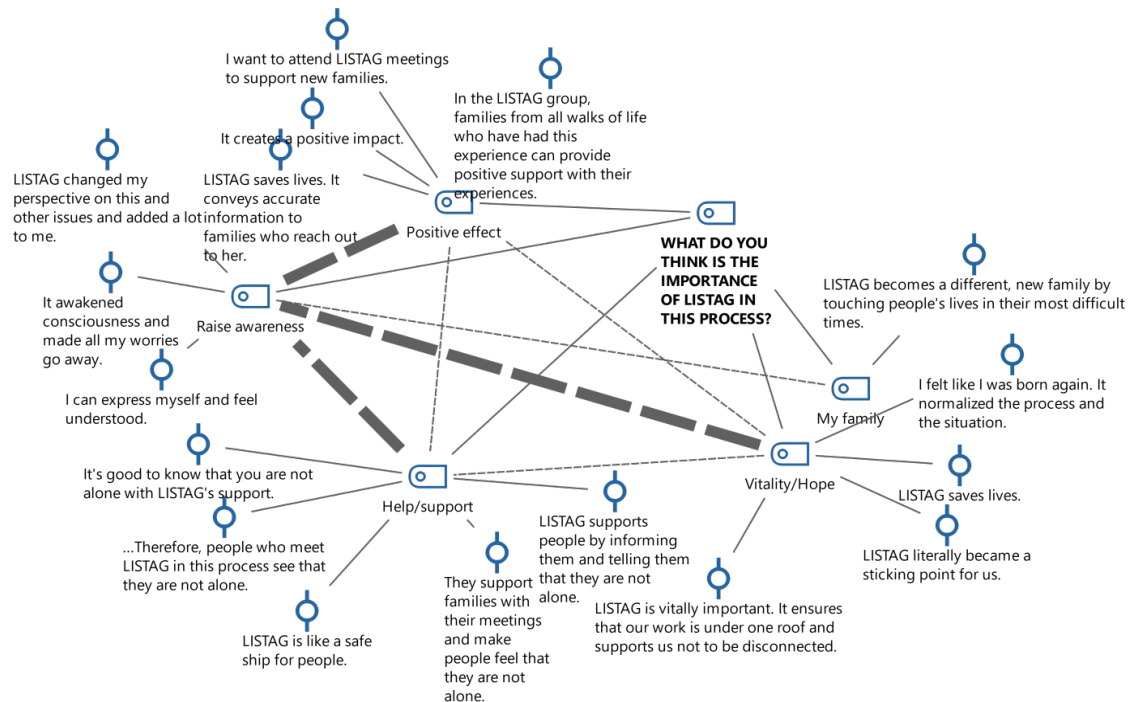
**Figure 7. Individuals with whom the child communicates most healthily during the process.**

### ***Social Initiatives Needed for Families With LGBTQ+ Members***

The data strongly emphasize the need for awareness campaigns targeting the LGBTQ+ community and families. In addition to awareness campaigns, conducting meetings and projects for families, supporting the psychological well-being of families, and conducting research and initiatives for institutions are other highlighted points. See the example quotes from the interviews on these points: "It is necessary to provide the society with more accurate information and ensure that our children are recognized not by their sexual identity and orientation but by their actions. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns" (Participant Quote 3), and "It is of great importance to raise awareness among both families and society. Educators and teachers need to be enlightened, and children should not be excluded during their school years. Guidance counselors should receive training on this issue" (Participant Quote 10).

### ***The Importance of LISTAG in the Process***

The data revealed codes that highlighted LISTAG as awareness-raising, supportive, vital, significant, and akin to a family. Moreover, when the purpose of LISTAG, which is established by individuals with LGBTQ+ orientation in their families to exchange ideas and support each other, is examined in detail, it is evident that the organization's goals are being achieved.



**Figure 8. The importance of LISTAG in the process.**

### ***The Importance of LISTAG in the Process***

In the data, codes highlighting LISTAG as awareness-raising, supportive, vital, significant, and resembling a family were observed. Moreover, when the purpose of LISTAG, which is established by individuals with LGBTQ+ orientation in their families to exchange ideas and support each other, is examined in detail, it is evident that the organization's goals are being achieved.

### **Conclusion & Discussion**

Family communication has great significance in shaping the identity formation process of children and directly influencing their social relationships in subsequent periods (Ramadhana, Karsidi, Utari, & Kartono, 2019). Some children believe that their gender differs from their biological sex and "come out of the closet" to their families during adolescence, youth, or much later (Steensma, Kreukels, Vries, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013). The deviation of children's orientations from societal expectations or norms can impact communication processes within the family in different ways. Parents may feel alienated from their children and experience the dilemma of accepting or rejecting them. In this process, the approach of mothers, who often bear more responsibility for communication with their children, is of great importance (Clark & Ladd, 2000).

This study is the first to address the coming-out processes of children of LGBTQ+ families in Türkiye. Therefore, this study aims to determine the communication style adopted by mothers of LGBTQ+ children when they learn about their children's orientations and to evaluate the intrafamily communication process with their children. In a country like Türkiye, where issues related to the LGBTQ+ community are deeply polarized (Yanik & Batu, 2019), politicized, and hate is intense (Yanik, 2017), especially on social media, this study is considered to have significant original value. In this regard, the in-depth interviews with 28 mothers conducted face-to-face, recording each interview, and coding the recordings by two researchers after transcription highlight the strengths of the study. The absence of data on fathers in the study can be considered a limitation.

The interviews yielded five main themes, encompassing different subtopics: "family characteristics," "pre-orientation process," "process of learning orientation," "process after learning orientation," and "general questions about the process." The study revealed that terms like "good" and "understanding" stand out in conservative families, and the concept of "family" is prominent. However, communication gaps were identified in both conservative and progressive families. The positive change in communication between many mothers and their children after learning about the child's sexual orientation emphasizes the importance of openness in communication. Mothers often expressed regret in their communication with their children because of their limited knowledge of the LGBTQ+ community in the past. Most of the interviewed mothers either had a negative view or claimed to be neutral before learning about their children's orientation. This situation can be explained by the family structure in Türkiye or Turkish culture (Kocamaner, 2018).

A common code among mothers in both progressive and conservative families is self-blame when they first learn about their children's orientation. This is thought to be related to maternal feelings. In the process of family learning about the orientation of LGBTQ+ individuals, core family support and parental awareness are crucial (Moya & Moya-GarófanoIt, 2020). However, in the early stages of a child's development, it is plausible

that families may be unaware of their children's sexual orientation, posing a significant issue that warrants attention. Civil society organizations, such as LISTAG and information and communication technologies, can play a significant role in the acceptance process of families. Given the potential for encountering misinformation in information and communication technology (ICT) environments, the imperative for civil society organizations to engage in necessary efforts and receive adequate support is paramount.

In summary, our study indicates that, for the majority of LGBTQ+ individuals, the initial disclosure of their sexual orientation commonly occurs with their mothers, and the communication between mothers and children during the coming-out process typically involves verbal expressions. The fact that fathers remain in the background throughout the entire process is noteworthy. When mothers first learn about their children's orientation, instead of engaging in open dialogue with their children, they tend to engage in more internal communication processes such as self-blame, questioning their parenting, and thinking about the negative aspects of the issue. Most mothers experience a "high degree of emotional elevation" when they first learn about this issue, indicating that there are things to be done at the family level. Some mothers can observe their children's orientations but do not dwell on them because of reasons such as lack of sufficient information, fear of confrontation, embarrassment, and fear of social repercussions. Our participant LGBTQ+ mothers stated that their children have an open communication structure, which facilitates communication with them. Moreover, our participant mothers emphasized the significance of LGBTQ+ organizations working on this issue, particularly mentioning LISTAG, and underscored the importance of these organizations in preventing them from feeling isolated throughout the process. They have highlighted the necessity and significance of these organizations in raising awareness within society and families, as well as in organizing these efforts. Lastly, mothers, bearing a substantial societal and cultural responsibility, see an increased level of responsibility within the family and the broader community while parenting LGBTQ+ individuals.

Future studies in this area should explore the experiences of fathers within LGBTQ+ families in Türkiye, providing a more comprehensive understanding of intrafamily dynamics during the coming-out process. This will help address the identified weakness in the current study related to the absence of data on fathers. Additionally, investigating the broader societal context and its impact on family communication, especially in terms of cultural and religious influences, can contribute to a more nuanced interpretation of the findings. Finally, examining the effectiveness of support mechanisms provided by organizations like LISTAG and their role in facilitating communication within families would be valuable.

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