

## Original article

# Factors facilitating the emergence of domestic violence in Turkey

Sengül Yaman<sup>a</sup>, Lale Taskin<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup>Faculty of Health Sciences, Gazi University, <sup>b</sup>Hacettepe University Faculty of Nursing, Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Beşevler Ankara 06500, Turkey

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**Background:** Domestic violence is seen in all communities.

**Objectives:** To determine the risk factors that facilitate emergence of domestic violence.

**Methods:** A qualitative study where in-depth interviews were used. A total of 30 women who stated they had been experiencing violence from their partner for at least a year made up the study sample. The common opinions in the interviews were grouped and coded according to the themes created for “descriptive analysis”. Excerpts from the statements that best emphasized/defined the women’s opinions and experiences were used in the study report.

**Results:** The factors stated by the women as facilitating the emergence of domestic violence in our study were: the man being older, the woman being in a marriage that she did not want, was forced into, or that her family did not want, a lack of support by the woman’s family, the man’s family not wanting the woman, the man seeing violence as a societal right, and a lack of mutual love, respect, or trust in the marriage/relationship.

**Conclusions:** To decrease the emergence of domestic violence in the Turkish family system where traditional female–male roles are present: the woman and man within the marriage/relationship should have similar sociodemographic attributes (age, education, employment), the decision for marriage/relationship should be with the woman’s own free will, educational and awareness increasing programs to ensure societal change should be arranged, and the quality and quantity of social institutions should be brought to a level where the support systems for women can be strengthened.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, qualitative research, Turkey

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Domestic violence is the type of violence the individual is subjected to by the person(s) that he/she is close to. The Family Violence Prevention Fund definition is that domestic violence towards the woman is all behavior that appears with an assault or coercive behavior and includes physical, psychological, or sexually damaging aggression, constant isolation, monitoring, repressing, intimidation and scaring [1]. According to World Health Organization, domestic violence towards women includes slapping, hitting, kicking, and beating for physical assault; repressing, humiliating, and insulting for emotional assault; forcing into sexual relations for sexual assault; financial restriction and taking all her earnings for financial assault; and keeping away from family and friends, monitoring her movements and limiting access to information and help for social assault [2].

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**Correspondence to:** Sengül Yaman, Faculty of Health Sciences, Gazi Üniversitesi, Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Beşevler Ankara 06500, Turkey. E-mail: yamans@gazi.edu.tr

Domestic violence is seen in all communities. The studies in Turkey have shown that domestic violence is found commonly. The Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry, Family Study Institution has reported in 1997 following a study in 2,578 households representing Turkey that 25% of currently or previously married women are subjected to physical violence and that the 45% of these women who have children use physical violence against their children [3]. A study by Gülçür in 1999 of 155 women living in Ankara found that 39% were subjected to physical abuse [4]. A study by Altınay and Arat of 1800 women found that one-in-three women suffered domestic violence [5]. A study by the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry, Women’s Status general Directorate in 2009 of 24,048 households in Turkey found that 39% of women had been subject to physical violence, 15% to sexual violence, and 44% to emotional violence at some stage of their lives [6].

Domestic violence causes physical and mental problems, loss of productivity, decreased quality of

life of the individual and the family, disturbed family integrity, increased treatment expenses, and disturbed family and community health [7]. Women subject to violence can have experience health care problems such as depression, anxiety, psychosomatic findings, loss of self-respect, suicide attempts, eating disorders, various gynecological disorders, sexual disorders, alcohol or substance use or smoking, unwanted pregnancies, miscarriage and having babies with a low birth weight [8].

Prevention of domestic violence against women requires determining the risk factors and factors that facilitate emergence of domestic violence.

## Materials and methods

### *Sampling and participants*

The present study was approved by the institutional ethics committee of Hacettepe University. This study is a qualitative study where an in-depth interview method was used. The human behavior is best investigated by a flexible and holistic approach. In this regard, the views and opinions of the subjects participating in the study is very important for qualitative approaches [9]. Domestic violence against women is a very complex matter that is difficult to evaluate. Preservation of family integrity has an important place among community values. This makes objectively analyzing the domestic violence problem difficult [10]. This was why our study was qualitative. Domestic violence is an individually experienced problem and we therefore preferred the in-depth interview method to be able to access different and detailed information from each individual and understand the individual's point of view regarding the problem.

There is no need to define an universe when the main aim in qualitative studies is not to make generalizations, but to understand the cases thoroughly [11]. This was a qualitative study and we therefore did not define a universe. We used the "maximum variety sampling", which is a method of purposeful sampling when determining the study sample. Using purposeful sampling techniques in qualitative studies enriches the case pool that is the subject of the study [11]. We used the maximum variety sampling method so that we could ensure maximum variety of the individuals to access a larger amount of data in this study.

A total of 30 women who stated they had been experiencing violence from their partner for at least a

year made up the study sample. Women included in the sample group were selected from women who presented because of domestic violence to the domestic violence unit of a university hospital and two shelters. We also distributed women within two groups in similar numbers according to the factors of age, education, and employment that were thought to influence the domestic violence process to enhance the study data. To obtain groups of similar numbers, we chose the women among those stated to be subjected to violence by the institutional employees when we went to the institutions while taking the numbers in the groups into account.

### *Procedures*

We used the "In-depth Interview Directed towards Women Subjected to Domestic Violence Questions Instruction" that aimed to understand the experiences of the women subjected to domestic violence.

Before we created the "In-depth Interview Directed towards Women Subjected to Domestic Violence Questions Instruction" we carried out in-depth interviews with a total of 30 women who had been found to be subjected to domestic violence by the center employees at two community centers. We created the interview instructions according to the information we obtained from the interviews and after screening previous studies [12-17]. The investigator obtained the specialist opinions of Dr. Henrica (Henriette) Jansen, a specialist in domestic violence, Assoc. Prof. Banu Akadlı Ergöçmen, specializing in quantitative research, and Assoc. Prof. Füsun Terziolu, specializing in Female Health and Disease Nursing, to obtain the final version of the interview instruction.

The interviews with the women staying at the shelters took place within the environment they lived in and with the women presenting at the domestic violence unit at the environment they preferred. Only children younger than 2 years old were allowed to attend the interviews with women (with the assumption that children older than 2 years may talk about the content of the interviews elsewhere). There was one observer from among the institution's employees (psychologist or social service specialist) present during the interviews with the women. We were not permitted to have someone other than the investigator take notes because of the confidentiality concerns and principles, consistent with the safety rules of the shelter. The

investigator took the notes during the interview. The investigator talked with each woman for 45–60 minutes so that there was one interview at most per day. The interviews were recorded after written informed consent was obtained from the interviewee.

We obtained the necessary permission from the institutional ethics committee of Hacettepe University and from the institutions where the study took place, so that the study could be conducted. The interviews were held in places the institution found appropriate (institution building, interview room) so that the safety of the participating women could be ensured. The investigator only talked with women who accepted to participate in the study and who came to the interview room after written informed consent was obtained. While taking written consent, the consent form was read aloud, the woman was asked to read it herself, and form was then signed. In the written consent form, it was noted that in any research report common facts from all women will be mentioned, and that under no circumstances any personal facts that may reveal the identity of the participating women would be noted. Moreover, women approved that they authorized the researcher to review, transfer, and process their personal data. The women were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. Women who wanted to end the interview were able to do so. The interviews with the women participants took place by using the code names that they chose, instead of their real names so that their individuality and human dignity could be respected.

### **Data analysis**

The interviews were transcribed the same day, compared with the observer's notes, and any interesting points noted. The transcribed interviews were read again once all the interviews were over. The common opinions in the interviews were grouped and coded according to the themes created for "descriptive analysis". Excerpts from the statements that best emphasized/defined the women's opinions and experiences were used in the study report.

### **Results**

Qualitative studies open a window into individual's lives. Quantitative studies demonstrate the size and importance of the problem, but the results of quantitative studies cannot take the place of qualitative studies where information is obtained firsthand from the persons experiencing the problem.

Determining, intervening in and finding realistic solutions for the prevention of domestic violence requires detailed demonstration of the opinions and experiences both of the women who experience the problem personally and the disciplines that intervene in the problem. We evaluated the factors facilitating the emergence of domestic violence in our study. We found that factors also stated in the literature such as education status, employment status, financial means, the character of the woman/man, the families of the woman/man, substance abuse, and psychological disorders facilitate the emergence of domestic violence in the Turkish Society. However, we present and discuss the findings regarding the facilitating factors that we believe could be specific for the Turkish Society by contrast with the world literature. While findings are presented, information such as age, education status, marital status, and number of children that are believed to have possibility of revealing the woman's identity, are not noted because of security concerns.

### ***Age difference between the women subjected to the violence and the violent person***

When we looked at the age difference between the women experiencing violence and the violent person, 21 (70%) women were younger than the violent male, 5 (17%) were older, and 4 (13%) were the same age.

*My father then gave me away to someone 60–70 years old, but there was also a concubine.*

*There is a large age difference between me and my husband. He is 65 years old, I am 35 years old. There is about 30 years difference.*

### ***How the marriage/relationship took place***

When we looked at how the marriage/relationship of the women subjected to violence took place, 11 (37%) were the result of an arranged marriage/family request and the women had started the marriage/relationship under pressure, 5 (17%) had started the marriage/relationship to become free of the current family environment, 3 (10%) had run away from home and entered the marriage/relationship without the consent of the family, and 5 (17%) had become married after falling in love/with their own wish.

*...mine was an arranged marriage. I got married without wanting to. With that person. They*

*came several times to ask my hand in marriage. In the end I gave up and said "OK then". "May god be with me"*

*I thought he would save me and I always wanted someone to come and save me... So I said whatever happens! I had not loved the other person at all, but I was going to marry the first person that came. So I did not make a general evaluation.*

*My family had not consented to our marriage, but my family knew about it, that we were seeing each other, from the beginning.*

### **The family attitude**

Another factor that facilitates/causes domestic violence against women according to the statements of the women subjected to such violence is the attitude of the woman's own family. The women stated the woman's family insisting on the marriage to continue whatever happens (18 women, 60%), and the woman's family not being interested in the woman's environment or not talking to the woman (14 women, 47%) to be facilitating/causing factors.

*Because my family did not care for me. My family was never close...I called again 4-5 times, my family said don't come here. If you're going to die you're going to die in that home. Even if they kill you I am not going to take care of you. My father also was not interested.*

*...My older sister said on the phone "when you accepted head over heels, when you did not ask us, when we said he is not your type, he is not the man you want, you did not listen to us. You made the decision and now live with the consequences" "My husband also beats me, sends me away and then I put up with it all for my children, and that's the same." "And just because he beat you once".*

Other factors stated by the women to facilitate/cause domestic violence are the man's family not wanting the woman (17 women, 57%), and the violent man being influenced by the family (12 women, 40%).

*My husband's family did not want me...They had been thinking of someone else. From Bayla. My husband is from the greater Bayla region. There was someone else they were thinking of, so he says I don't want you and you tricked him and you had your family threaten him and look what*

*happened and now there is a child...*

*He did whatever his mother told him to. His mother was against me in the end and he was against me.*

### **The violent person seeing employing violence as a right**

Another factor stated to be a facilitating/causing factor for domestic violence by women subjected to violence is the fact that the violent person can see this as a right given to him by society (9 women, 30%).

*"He says 'I am the husband, I am the male of the house, I love you and I can beat you'."*

*"He said you should always keep your wife pregnant and beat your wife...."*

### **The absence of the factors that form the basis of the family**

Women subjected to domestic violence stated that the absence of factors that form the basis of the family facilitated the emergence of domestic violence. The factors stated by the women were the absence of love and respect (17 women, 57%), the man not trusting the woman (8 women, 27%), the man abusing the woman (5 women, 17%), and the male cheating on the female (4 women, 13%).

*I did not love my husband since the day of marriage. I had been forced into it and it had no meaning for me...*

*I never loved him, never liked him, I don't want to lie.*

*So I distanced myself from him following his violence. And he started suspecting me. He looked for other things as the cause.*

*...He started to think I was cheating on him, but there was no such thing. I am younger than him so he kept thinking I was cheating on him...Even if I said I was going to the hospital, he would beat me up when I returned from the hospital saying which doctor did you cheat me with. He was cheating on me so he thought that I was taking my revenge on him by cheating on him.*

*He sees women as slaves. He definitely does not like women. He just sees the woman as maid, to look after his child in a clean way and to meet his sexual desires, that's it. There is no love.*

*He started to cheat on me...There were 3-4 women he saw. He talked to them on the phone. A woman knows if her husband has another friend. But mine just talked openly. He said "She is calling; perhaps she is out of telephone money again".*

## **Discussion**

### ***Age difference between the woman subjected to the violence and the violent person***

The age difference between the woman and man in marriages/relationships can be a risk factor regarding domestic violence. The Turkish society generally prefers the man to be older than the woman in marriage. The principle of this preference is respect to the elders and listening to what they say. The person who is older in the family has the authority to punish the younger person if he/she does not listen. Our study findings are in parallel with this notion and most women are younger than the violent man. Studies from Turkey have not evaluated the age difference between partners, but studies from around the world have similarly found an age difference between the partners to be a risk factor for domestic violence [18-20].

### ***How the marriage/relationship took place***

Half of the women in our study said they had entered the marriage/relationship without wanting to or because they had to. Studies from Turkey have found that arranged marriages or those that are unwillingly entered are a risk factor for domestic violence [21-26]. It can be deduced that communication problems may arise when the woman is with someone that she does not love, facilitating the emergence of domestic violence. Some women also stated that they entered the marriage/relationship to be free from their family or without asking the family's consent. The lack of a supporting family in such marriages may leave the woman powerless when trying to escape domestic violence.

### ***The family attitude***

Once domestic violence starts women need social support to be able to escape the situation. The most important social support is the family. However, the society teaches women to put up with all kinds of difficulties and problems that life brings without protesting ever since childhood [10, 27]. This attitude of the woman's family and the fact that the woman is not with them can be a factor that facilitates the violence and makes it more difficult for the woman to escape it.

The mother-in-law and bride conflict is a frequent social problem in the Turkish society. The Prime Ministry Family Study Institution has reported that domestic violence increases with increasing family size and those problems that arise from a conflict with the mother-in-law cause a traditional bride-mother-in-law dilemma and a conflict between the partners [3]. Similarly the studies by Turan et al. and Vahip and Dođanavpargil have also found that bride-mother-in-law problems cause conflicts between partners [28, 29]. Verbal discussions may arise within the family when the woman is not loved/wanted by the violent person's family. This situation can facilitate the emergence of domestic violence.

### ***The violent person seeing employing violence as a right***

The widespread domestic violence in the society can cause this problem to be seen as normal. According to the traditional sexual roles within the Turkish society, the man is superior to the woman. The woman obeys and the man has the right to beat her according to the society values. Disobedience of the woman, i.e. not playing the role properly, makes the man who is the authority in the house beat the woman [30]. Some women in our study stated that the persons they were married to or were living together thought it was their right to use violence. The fact that domestic violence is a general problem in the society leads to men seeing this as normal or even as a right, thus facilitating/causing domestic violence.

### ***The absence of the factors that form the basis of the family***

Factors such as love, respect, trust, and loyalty are basic principles in the creation and maintenance of the family. The partners share a common life and have common rights within the family unit [31]. When the Turkish family structure is examined, it is observed that roles for men and women in the family are shared. The woman mostly plays her role within the house (housework, taking care of the children) and the man is responsible for financial matters [32-33]. The women who were subjected to violence in our study said that values such as love, respect, trust, and loyalty that formed the basis of the family were not present in their own family and the men they were married with or were together with sometimes saw them as individuals that only played roles within the house and did not deserve respect as a spouse. This may have

caused a communication conflict between the woman and the man and resulted in domestic violence.

### Conclusion

The factors stated by the women as facilitating the emergence of domestic violence in our study were the man being older, the woman being in a marriage that she did not want, she was forced into, or that her family did not want, a lack of support by the woman's family, the man's family not wanting the woman, the man seeing violence as a societal right, and the lack of mutual love, respect, or trust in the marriage/relationship. Therefore, to decrease the emergence of domestic violence in the Turkish family system where traditional female–male roles exist:

- The woman and man should have similar sociodemographic attributes (age, education, employment...) within the marriage/relationship,
- the decision for marriage/relationship should be with the woman's own free will and given voluntarily,
- educational, awareness increasing programs to ensure societal change to eliminate the traditional gender roles should be arranged.
- The quality and quantity of social institutions should also be brought to a level where the support systems for women can be strengthened.

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