

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Received: 16.03.2022
Acceptance: 12.05.2023
DOI: 10.18521/ktd.1088632

Konuralp Medical Journal
e-ISSN1309-3878
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www.konuralptipdergi.duzce.edu.tr

Anatolian Women's Opinions Attitudes and Behaviors toward Violence against Women

ABSTRACT

Objective: Violence against women is a global humanitarian problem. The present study evaluates the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of women living in the Kars province of Turkey toward violence against women, and analyses the socio-demographic factors that influence both physical violence, and the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of women toward such violence.

Methods: This cross-sectional research was conducted with 183 volunteer women aged 17–83 years who benefited from healthcare services in a family health center clinic in the Kars province of Türkiye. The survey questions were prepared based on a Turkish report on domestic violence against women (2014).

Results: Of the women in the study sample, 71.7% had been subjected to physical violence (41.3% moderate physical violence and 30.4% some form of severe physical violence), and a younger age ($p<0.023$), relatively short relationship duration ($p<0.041$), low educational level of the partner ($p<0.029$) and low family income ($p<0.002$) were all found to significantly increase the risk of physical violence against women. Low family income in particular increased the risk of physical violence 3.152-fold. Women with a higher level of education and with greater economic independence, those in employment and those in the relatively younger age group (≤ 45 years) mostly considered violence against women to be “never acceptable”. Furthermore, the women who sought legal aid when exposed to violence by their partners were predominantly in the well-educated and economically independent groups, to a significant degree.

Conclusions: Culture, education and economic status are the main risk factors for violence against women. Multidimensional studies are required to better understand the root causes of such behaviors..

Keywords: Culture, Domestic Violence, Education, Violence Against Women.

Anadolu Kadınlarının Kadına Yönelik Şiddete İlişkin Görüş Tutum Ve Davranışları

ÖZET

Amaç: Kadına yönelik şiddet, küresel bir insanlık sorunudur. Bu çalışma; Türkiye'nin Kars ilinde yaşayan kadınların, kadına yönelik şiddete ilişkin görüş, tutum ve davranışlarını değerlendirmekte ve hem fiziksel şiddeti hem de kadınların bu şiddete yönelik görüş, tutum ve davranışlarını etkileyen sosyo-demografik unsurları incelemektedir.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Bu kesitsel araştırma, Kars ilinde aile sağlığı merkezinde sağlık hizmetinden yararlanan 18-83 yaş arası 183 gönüllü kadında yapılmıştır. Araştırma verisini toplamak için kullanılan anket, Türkiye'de Kadına Yönelik Aile İçi Şiddet Raporu (2014) temel alınarak hazırlanmıştır.

Bulgular: Çalışma grubumuzda fiziksel şiddete maruz kalan kadınların oranı %71,7' dir (%41,3 orta ve %30,4 ağır fiziksel şiddetin bazı şekilleri), kadının görece genç yaşı ($p<0.023$), görece kısa olan ilişki süresi ($p<0.041$), eşin düşük eğitim düzeyi ($p<0.029$) ve düşük aile geliri ($p<0.002$) ile kadına yönelik fiziksel şiddet arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı ilişkili bulunmuştur. Düşük aile gelirinin fiziksel şiddet riskini 3.152 kat arttırdığı görülmüştür. Eğitim düzeyi yüksek, ekonomik bağımsızlığı olan, çalışan ve daha genç yaş gruplarındaki kadınlar, yüksek oranda, kadına yönelik şiddeti “asla kabul edilemez” olarak değerlendirmişlerdir. Eşlerinden şiddet gördüklerinde adli yardım arayan kadınlar da önemli ölçüde iyi eğitilmiş ve ekonomik olarak bağımsız olan kadın grupları arasındaydı.

Sonuç: Kültür, eğitim ve ekonomik durum, kadına yönelik şiddetin başlıca risk faktörleridir. Bu tür davranışların temel nedenini anlamak için çok boyutlu araştırmalara gereksinim vardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültür, Aile İçi Şiddet, Eğitim, Kadına Yönelik Şiddet.

INTRODUCTION

Like any other type of violence (violence against children, men, nature and animals), violence against women (VAW) is a human behavioral disorder (1). Despite being mostly derived from psychological issues and thus requiring therapy, this disorder is considered almost “normal” in some cultures (2,3). Several studies to date have shown reported VAW to be more prevalent in societies with low socio-economic and education levels (4-6). Although its prevalence varies depending on the level of development and the cultural characteristics of a society, it has been reported that 35% of women around the world have experienced some form of violence, whether physical, emotional, economic or sexual, in their lifetime (7,8). A rapid increase in the prevalence VAW has been witnessed in Turkey, especially over the last 10 years (9,10), and many contributing factors have been identified, from jealousy to economic issues, although all of these factors seek to attribute violence to an excusable cause. Violence, however, is primarily a behavioral problem that needs to be fixed. It is well known that human behaviors, as well as individual characteristics (such as education, talent, intelligence, vision, values and personal philosophies), are shaped by one’s culture (1,11-14). Cultures develop out of common beliefs, values and behaviors, among which, behaviors are the most visible aspects of a culture. Behaviors manifest within the mutual interactions of humans, and just as cultures produce behaviors, behaviors also produce cultures. It’s clear that the behaviors of men and women interact in a society and create culture together in the process. Unfortunately, VAW is often seen as “ordinary”, especially in the lower socio-economic and less educated segments of society in Turkey, and is frequently normalized in such Turkish proverbs as “If you don't beat your daughter, you beat your knee” (making use of the rhyming of the Turkish words for daughter [kız] and knee [diz]), “The husband both loves and beats” and “Roses bloom where the husband hits”. To understand the causes of violent behavior among men, it is necessary to comprehend the cultural characteristics of the society in question, and the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of women toward violence.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to understand the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of women toward violence against women, and to examine the associated socio-demographic factors affecting the issue through a study of women living in a developing city in Türkiye.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted among women (who applied for healthcare services) registered with a family health center clinic in the Kars province of Türkiye. The outpatient clinic from which the data were garnered

is located in the center of the city, but provides services to people from across the metropolitan area meaning that the beneficiaries were homogeneous socio-economically. The data were collected in compliance with ethical standards, and the Kafkas University Medical Faculty Ethics Committee approved the study (protocol number: 80576354-050-99/114). No appropriate sample size was calculated, as all women who agreed to participate in the study were included in the survey (n=183). The survey questions were prepared based on a Turkish report on the subject of domestic violence against women (2014) (9). The data were collected over a period of three months through face-to-face interviews, conducted in a private room to ensure the confidentiality of the respondent, and began after the respondent had been informed about the study and had given verbal informed consent for their participation in the study. As all of the respondents had been registered with the same doctor in the same family health center for a long time, there was a close relationship and a high level of intimacy between the doctor and the respondents, and this served to increase their trust in the researcher, and to answer the questions sincerely. The questionnaire forms were responded to in full by all the respondents. A10-item questionnaire form was used to assess the socio-demographic characteristics (age, marital status, relationship duration, education level, education level of the husband or intimate partner, monthly family income, employment status of the respondent, employment status of the partner, number of children and level of economic independence) of the respondents, after which a 5-item questionnaire form comprising closed-ended questions was used to identify exposure to violence of any kind (physical, emotional, economic, sexual), and whether the respondent had been exposed to domestic gender-based (father, brother, etc.) violence in their birth family. The women were also asked if they had divorced due to violence. The types of violence encountered by the respondents were examined in four categories: physical violence, emotional violence, economic violence and sexual violence (9,15,16). Physical violence was categorized as either moderate or severe, with moderate physical violence defined as slapping, throwing objects, pushing or pulling hair; while severe physical violence was defined as striking with a fist or object, kicking, dragging, beating, choking, burning or threats of use, or actual use, of

a weapon, such as a gun, knife, etc.; Emotional violence was defined as insults, swearing, humiliation in front of others, scare tactics, threatening behavior and threats of physical violence; Economic violence was defined as prevention from working, forcing the person to quit their job, not give money for household expenses and depriving of income; and Sexual violence was defined as the use of physical force to have sexual intercourse and intercourse without consent (9,15,16). The present study, besides addressing the issue of physical violence, examined also the emotional, economic and sexual violence encountered by women living in a developing region of Türkiye. As almost all of the victims of physical violence in the study were exposed also to economic, emotional and sexual violence, and almost at the same rate, only the prevalence of physical violence was analyzed based on the yes/no responses of the respondents. To evaluate the opinions of VAW among the respondents, one simple question was asked: "Is violence acceptable to women?", which produced five common answers: "never acceptable", "it depends on the situation", "maybe some moderate physical violence", "on rare occasions" and "no idea". The attitudes of the women were then evaluated with the question, "When faced with violence, what do/did you do?", which also produced five common answers: "hide from everyone", "ask for legal aid", "ask for help from a family member", "ask for help from friends" and "separate immediately". To evaluate the behavioral dynamics of the women who had been subjected to violence, the open-ended question "Why do you remain in a violent relationship?" was asked, producing four common answers: "social pressure", "for the children", "for economic reasons" and "due to dependence on the relationship". The respondents were divided into two groups based on the mean age of the sample (≤ 45 and ≥ 46); and into three groups based on their education level, as: no formal education/elementary school; secondary school/high school; and university and above. In the analysis of the data, the education level variable was based on none/high school and university/above, employment status was defined as either unemployed or employed, and marital status was defined as married or living with a partner, and others (divorced, widowed or currently without a partner). Women who had been single throughout their lives were excluded from the study. The relationship duration variable was based on the mean duration of the relationship of

the respondents (≤ 19 and ≥ 20 years). The economic status variable was based on the stated monthly family income, and statistical evaluations of economic status were based on the average monthly income for a family of four, divided for the analysis into a set of two variables based on the poverty line (less than \$800/month) (17), leading to groups $\leq \$800$ and $> \$800$. The number of children value was dichotomized as \leq two and $>$ three, based on the mean number of children (mean 2.53 ± 1.89).

Statistical Analysis: The SPSS Statistics Version 20.0. (University of Kafkas, IP number: 194.27.41.6) was used for the data analysis. Descriptive statistics were expressed and examined as percentage distributions, frequencies, arithmetic means and standard deviations (SD). Depending on the type of variable (continuous or categorical, respectively), the characteristics of the respondents were expressed as mean and SD, or frequencies and percentages. For the comparison of variables, Pearson's Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were used. The odds ratio (OR) values were calculated between the categorical variables for risk evaluation (sc. the ratio of differences was calculated for the risk evaluation in crosstabs, not logistic regression) and a 95% confidence interval (CI) of the OR values was also determined. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The study group was aged 17-83 years (mean: 44.77 ± 14.69 years) and 11.5% of the respondents reported currently having no partner (1.2% divorced, 10.3% widowed). The relationship duration of the study group ranged from 1–51 years (mean: 18.90 ± 13.33), and 73.6% of the respondents had been married for more than 20 years, while 18.6% had been in their relationship for less than 5 years. The education levels of the respondents were 67.2% none/elementary school, 18.6% secondary school/high school, and 14.2% university/above; while the education level of the respondents' partners were 49.3% none/elementary school, 32.8% secondary school/high school, and 17.9% university/above. The proportion of the respondents in the study group reporting a monthly family income below \$800 was 63.9%, and the proportion of women in work (employed) was 29.5%, while 71.6% had an employed partner. Of the total, 26% of the respondents stated that they worked with their partners in agriculture as seasonal workers. The mean number of children in the study group was 2.53 (min: 0, max: 7, SD: 1.89). A total of 56.8% of the respondents had ≥ 2 children and 13.7% of the respondents had no children. Of the total, 71% of the women reported being economically dependent. Table 1 presents a summary of the socio-demographic data of the

Table 1. Relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and physical violence

Socio-demographic characteristics (n=183)	n	%	SD Standard Deviation	95% CI		P (PV)
				Min	Max	
Age						
≤45	116	63.4	14.69	17	83	0.023
≥46	67	36.6	(mean:44.77)			
Marital Status						
Married	162	88.5				0.958
Other	21	11.5				
Relationship Duration						
≤19	34	18.6	13.33	1	51	0.041
≥20	149	81.4	(mean:18.90)			
Women Education Level						
None-High School	157	85.8				<u>0.066</u>
University-Above	26	14.2				
Partner Education Level						
None-High School	150	82.1				0.029
University-Above	33	17.9				
Monthly Family Income						
≤\$800	117	63.9	2674.69	2.700	12.000	0.002
>\$800	66	36.1	(mean:5562.84)			
Women Employment Status						
Employed	54	29.5				<u>0.083</u>
Unemployed	129	70.5				
Partner Employment Status						
Employed	131	71.6				0.004
Unemployed	52	28.4				
Number of Children						
≤2	104	56.8	1.89	0	7	0.046
≥3	79	43.2	(mean:2.53)			
Women Economic Dependency						
Yes	130	71.1				<u>0.078</u>
No	53	28.9				

n: Frequency, %: Percentage, CI: Confidence Interval, Min: Minimum, Max: Maximum, PV: Physical Violence, p<0.05.

study group. The proportion of the respondents who had encountered physical violence was 71.7% (41.3% moderate physical violence and 30.4% some form of severe physical violence - striking with a fist or object). No women reported exposure to choking, burning, or threats of, or actually, use of a gun, knife or other weapon among those exposed to physical violence. Of the total, 72% stated that they had been exposed to emotional violence, 76.8% to economic violence and 64.7% to sexual violence. The proportion of women exposed to domestic violence in their birth family was 76.2% in the study group, and the vast majority of women who were exposed to physical violence had also been exposed to domestic violence in their birth family (78.4%). Among the victims of physical violence, the rate of economic violence was 99.2%, the rate of emotional violence was 98.7% and the rate of sexual violence was 73.1%, indicating that almost all of the women who had been exposed to physical violence had also been exposed to economic, emotional and sexual violence in the study group. The responses of the participants when asked their opinions of domestic violence were, in order, “never acceptable” (33.7%), “it depends on

the situation” (26.2%), “possibly some moderate physical violence” (20.8%), “on rare occasions” (15.6%) and “I have no idea” (3.7%). When asked how they responded to such violence, the most common answers from the respondents were, in order, “I hide from everyone” (68.3%), “I turn to my family for help” (19.7%), “I turn to friends for help” (8.7%) “I seek legal help” (2.1%) and “I separated immediately” (1.2%). All of the women who stated that they had “separated immediately” were already divorced in the study group. When asked “why do/did you remain in a violent relationship”, the responses of the appropriate respondents were “social pressure” (36%), “for the children” (30.4%), “for economic reasons” (31.5%) and “dependency on the relationship” (2.1%). A significant relationship was identified between physical violence and age, with a higher rate of physical violence reported in the ≤45 years age group. There was also a significant relationship between duration of marriage of less than 5 years and physical violence, while no significant relationship was identified between the level of education of the respondents and exposure to physical violence, although the rate of physical

violence was relatively lower among the women with higher education levels. In contrast, the rate of physical violence was significantly higher among women whose partners had a low level of education, and a significant relationship was also found between economic status and physical violence, with the rate of physical violence being significantly higher in the low-income group. An analysis of the relationship between employment status and physical violence revealed that women with unemployed partners were subjected to significantly higher rates of physical violence, while no significant relationship was identified between unemployment in women and physical violence. A statistically significant relationship was detected between physical violence and the number of children, as the rate of physical violence was significantly lower among the respondents with three or more children. The rate of physical violence was also low among the economically independent respondents, although this difference was not statistically significant. The relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and physical violence are presented in Table 1. Among the higher educated, economically independent, employed, relationship duration less than 5 years and younger age women groups, the level of the response “violence against women is never acceptable” was close to statistical significance. The older age and three or more children groups

were significantly associated with the response “violence could be acceptable in certain situations”. The less educated, low family income and economically dependent women groups said that they remained in violent relationships due to “social stigma”, to a significant degree. In the economically dependent and low family income women groups, the respondents stated that they remained in their violent relationships due to the “children” to a significant degree. The response “for reasons of economy” to the question “why you remain in a violent relationship” was significantly higher in the low family income, three or more children, and economically dependent groups. A significant relationship was also identified between the response “I hide the violence from everyone” and the older age, low family income and economically dependent groups. Significantly more women seek legal aid among the well-educated and economically independent women groups when violence is encountered. Among the younger age, relationship duration of less than 5 years and well-educated women groups, the response to physical violence of “separated immediately” was higher, to a statistically significant degree. The results of a comparative analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their opinions/attitudes/behaviors toward violence against women are broadly presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The relationships between the socio-demographic characteristics and women’s opinion-attitude-behavior toward violence against women

Characteristic →	AGE	RD	WEL	PEL	MFI	WES	PES	NC	WEI
	p	p	p	p	p	p	p	p	p
Women’s Opinions of Violence Against Women									
Never Acceptable	0.055	0.051	0.053	0.896	0.143	0.057	0.259	0.391	0.054
Depends on the Situation	0.041	0.076	0.157	0.264	0.457	0.955	0.854	0.048	0.386
Moderate Could be Possible	0.383	0.092	0.083	0.748	0.256	0.469	0.559	0.185	0.843
On Rare Occasions	0.562	0.376	0.474	0.843	0.185	0.694	0.386	0.366	0.379
No Idea	0.524	0.422	0.236	0.381	0.811	0.653	0.583	0.642	0.588
Women’s Attitudes Toward Violence Against Women									
Social Stigma	0.056	0.129	0.041	0.834	0.026	0.096	0.758	0.382	0.043
Children	0.389	0.982	0.353	0.867	0.047	0.375	0.465	0.754	0.038
Economy	0.664	0.742	0.256	0.750	0.034	0.583	0.885	0.033	0.026
Dependency	0.348	0.511	0.482	0.634	0.381	0.745	0.476	0.343	0.271
Women’s Behaviors toward Violence Against Women									
Hide	0.047	0.324	0.547	0.965	0.046	0.253	0.128	0.116	0.023
Legal Aid	0.856	0.765	0.029	0.443	0.549	0.852	0.648	0.784	0.047
Family Aid	0.485	0.586	0.548	0.575	0.853	0.931	0.942	0.387	0.643
Friends Aid	0.975	0.487	0.637	0.837	0.489	0.506	0.574	0.641	0.561
Separate Immediately	0.032	0.026	0.048	0.653	0.387	<u>0.092</u>	0.549	0.645	<u>0.059</u>

RD: Relationship Duration, WEL: Women Education Level, PEL: Partner Education Level, MFI: Monthly Family Income, WES: Women Employment Status, PES: Partner Employment Status, NC: Number of Children, WEI: Women Economic Dependency.

The risk of physical violence was 2.328 (95% CI, 1.890–3.494) times higher in the ≤45 years age group than in the ≥46 age group. The risk of physical violence was 1.532 (95% CI, 1.103–2.758) times greater among the respondents in relationships for fewer than 5 years. A relatively low educational level of the partner meant a 2.981-fold (95% CI, 1.603–4.981) increase in the risk of physical violence.

The risk of physical violence was 2.974 (95% CI, 1.705–4.953) times greater in women with an unemployed partner; and a low family income increased the risk of physical violence 3.152-fold (95% CI, 1.901–5.234). It was further observed in the present study that having two children or less increased the risk of physical violence 1.526-fold (95% CI, 1.112–2.659) (Table 3).

Table 3. Risk of physical violence with the socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristic	Categorization	Physical Violence	
		OR	(95% CI)
Age	≤45	2.328	(1.890-3.494)
	≥46		
Relationship Duration	≤19	1.532	(1.103-2.758)
	≥20		
Women Education Level	None-High School	1.211	(0.954-2.218)
	University-Above		
Partner Education Level	None-High School	2.981	(1.603-4.981)
	University-Above		
Women Employment Status	Employed	1.185	(0.896-1.986)
	Unemployed		
Partner Employment Status	Employed	2.974	(1.705-4.953)
	Unemployed		
Monthly Family Income	≤\$800	3.152	(1.901-5.234).
	>\$800		
Number of Children	≤2	1.526	(1.112-2.659)
	≥3		
Women Economic Dependency	Yes	1.297	(0.948-2.090)
	No		

OR: Odds Ratio, CI: Confidence Interval, p<0.05.

DISCUSSION

This study's results showed that a large proportion of the women in the study sample had been subjected to physical violence. A significant association was identified between a younger age, a relatively short relationship duration, a low educational level of the partner and low family income and physical violence against women. This concurs with the findings of earlier studies reporting a decrease in the risk of physical violence with older age, and identifying a low economic level as a risk factor for violence (4,5,18-21). As is the case in the rest of the world, Türkiye is experiencing an economic recession and an increase in youth unemployment, exacerbated by the fact that Türkiye's population is considerably young (22). The north-eastern Region of Türkiye ranks below the national average in all socio-economic criteria (22,23), and cultural habits are maintained here more intensely than in other Anatolian regions. All the above factors could contribute to the higher rate of VAW among the respondents in the present study. It has been reported in several studies around the world that economic and socio-demographic factors play a leading role in the prevalence of VAW (5,24,25). Women with low educated, unemployed partners and with a low family income were found to be exposed to significantly higher rates of violence in the present study, and the economic dependency of women was one of the main factors identified preventing women from escaping abusive relationships. In an examination of the risk factors associated with VAW in the present study, greater risk was identified in the low family income, low-educated partner groups. It is well known, however, that, regardless of the societal level, it is not only men with a low level of

education and a low economic level who commit violence against women (6-8). Although no statistically significant relationship was identified in the higher educated, economically independent and employed women groups, these groups reported a lower rate of physical violence, which suggests that if women are well educated and participate in the labor force, they are better able to shield themselves from exposure to violence. There have been several studies to date reporting that it is the intimate partner that is the most frequent perpetrator of VAW (6,24,25). To examine the cause of male violence, an integrated model was developed by Heise in 1998 that was revised in 2011, proposing that intimate partner violence (IPV) is influenced by interconnected factors at four different levels: individual (experience of childhood violence, low social support, socio-demographic characteristics), relationship/interaction (non-egalitarian decision-making, poor communication, high relationship conflict), community (norms e.g. acceptance of wife-beating, stigma of divorce, family privacy, lack of sanctions, neighborhood characteristics), and macro-social (gender order e.g. discriminatory family law; cultural factors, e.g. collectivist vs individual; economic factors, e.g. level of development) (13,14). In this widely accepted model, the influence of culture on IPV is clearly observable. Anthropological studies view violence as a part of human behavior that can become normalized by an underlying cultural logic (11). To understand "how violence is affected by cultural factors", it is important to understand the ideology of masculinity in a society. The hegemonic masculinity in Türkiye promotes the domination and control of women by the male sex.

VAW is mostly an expression of power that is encouraged by other men, and even elderly women, as men may otherwise suffer humiliation among their peers. This compelling role ascribed to men can also be a burden and an undesired situation for men. As stated by Fulu et al., violence is a compensatory action in men when they feel that their authority is waning, and unemployed and financially embarrassed men may project their masculinity as a means of compensating for failure (12). The reconstruction of the cultural concept of a society in which violence is tolerated is only possible through education and the enactment of long-term social policies. It is clearly apparent that there is a need to change and transform the cultural infrastructure related to VAW in the long term. The increased violence against women in Türkiye is certainly worrying, but we believe it is inevitable given the declining economy and also the lack of progress in education. That said, the increase in VAW can be attributed to multidimensional elements, and not only to education, economy and culture. Understanding the effects of the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of women toward VAW on the violent behaviors of men requires follow-up cohort studies, which falls outside the scope of the present study. The aim of the present study was to determine the frequency of VAW and to garner data on the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of women on the subject of VAW through a small group analysis. The cross-sectional nature of the present study served to identify some significant relationships between risk factors and physical violence, but failed to reveal any casual

relationships. Understanding the reason for the dramatic increase in VAW in Türkiye, especially over the last 10 years, will require multidimensional research. The strength of the present study lies in the fact that all of the respondents were given the opportunity to express their opinions candidly, and to explain their approaches and responses to violence in their personal lives. They had no fear of repercussion when describing their experiences due to the assured confidentiality, and this intimacy facilitated in-depth interviews and ensured high reliability in the findings. Future studies should include a qualitative study to gain a better understanding of the context and causes of violence against women. The findings of the present study offer clear evidence that the lives of women are not easy in this region. If we are to improve women's lives, promote their participation in social life and increase community development, VAW must be given greater emphasis and subjected to academic study in all of its dimensions. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to date of this issue to be conducted in this specific region, and in this country. As the study was not based on a nationwide sample from Türkiye, the results cannot be generalized for the country as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We give special thanks to all the women who generously shared their private thoughts with us.

Funding: This work was not supported by any foundation or institute.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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