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ScienceDirect

The Social Science Journal 44 (2007) 698–720

The
**SOCIAL
SCIENCE
JOURNAL**

Domestic violence against women: A field study in Turkey

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Abstract

Factors affecting domestic violence against women in four Turkish cities (Adıyaman, Sivas, Denizli and Kırklareli) having different socioeconomic structures, are analyzed in this study. These factors consist of social, cultural, economic and psychological factors. In contrast to what we expected based on earlier literature, family income level has a positive relationship with violence. Logistic regression analysis also revealed that being a university graduate and having a personal income decreases the prevalence of violence as expected. However, working women and women with children are more prone to domestic violence. Again, there is a strong association between the neighborhood where the family lives and the incidence of violence. The extent of male dominance, as measured by the question “How are decisions taken in the family” is also associated with domestic violence: woman is less likely to be abused in households where decisions are taken collectively. Likewise, families where women have to get permission from the husband to carry out certain activities, have an increased incidence of suffering from husband’s violence. Psychological factors, like being abused or having witnessed violence as a child, are also significantly correlated with domestic violence.

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1. Introduction

Violence against women has gained worldwide interest among researchers in both developed and developing economies in recent years. Domestic violence or wife abuse, including physical abuse towards adult and adolescent women, by male intimate partners, is one of the most com-

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mon forms of gender-based violence. A great number of detailed studies have been conducted particularly in the West, conceptualizing violent relationships and wife abuse (Brownridge & Halli, 2002; Ellsberg, Peña, Herrera, Liljestrand, & Winkvist, 2000; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Kirkwood, 1992; Landenburger, 1989). Similar research has been carried out in non-Western societies as well (Amoakohene, 2004; Avotri & Walters, 2001; Casimiro, 2002; Haj-Yahia, 2002).

It is reported that in the USA, 28% of the women are subject to domestic violence by their partners at least once in their lifetime. It is also recorded that in the developing countries more than half of the female population are beaten by their husbands or partners. In India, this rate is 45%, in Philippines 47.2% and in Kenya 52% (UNESCO, 2000).

Similar percentages are given also in Nasir and Hyder (2003) review of the literature on violence against pregnant women. Twenty-eight percent of all women in the developed countries and between 18% and 67% of those in developing countries are reporting at least one incident of physical abuse. Heise, Pitanguy, and Germain (1995) review as well, highlight a rate of women between 16% and 39% having been abused physically and/or psychologically by their spouses. Another review (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottmoeller, 2002) including 50 population-based studies in 36 countries, demonstrates that between 10% and 60% of ever-married or partnered women had experienced physical violence by their partners at least once in their lifetime. Other studies also draw attention to childhood experiences of domestic violence increasing the risk of further victimization as an adolescent or an adult (Romito, Saurel-Cubizolles, & Crisma, 2001). There are very few studies concerning domestic violence in Middle-Eastern countries where religion plays an important role in shaping society, the results of which indicate that in countries such as Egypt, Palestine, Israel and Tunisia at least one out of three women is beaten by her husband (Douki, Nacef, Belhadj, Bouasker, & Ghachem, 2003; Haj-Yahia, 2002).

The issue of violence against women which gained worldwide significance during 1970s, began to be discussed in Turkey during the mid-1980s. The first massive reaction to this kind of violence came with the protest march entitled “Say No to Battering” on 17th of May 1987, which was followed by “Career Women’s Fest” on 4th of October 1987. Thus, it was only after the 1980’s that domestic violence began to be treated as a sociological matter (Tilic, 1997, p. 119), which explains the limited number of studies about Turkey.

A market research firm, PIAR (1988), conducted the earliest study which concluded that 75% of the women were physically abused by their husbands. In an interview with 140 married women, who applied for counseling to the Istanbul University Medical Center, Yüksel (1990) found that 57% of these women had a personal history of abuse. Esmer (1991), having interviewed 116 couples in Istanbul, stated that 54% of husbands admitted that they have battered their wives. The results of another nationwide PIAR (1992) survey with a sample of 1,181 women showed that a 22% reported physical abuse by their husbands.

Later on, there have been other studies such as those carried out by Icli (1994), the Foundation for Women’s Solidarity (1997), Ilkcaracan (1998), Yıldırım (1998), Ergin and Bilgel (2001), Mayda and Akkus (2004), Sahin and Sahin (2003), Bütün, Sözen, and Tok (2003) and Balci and Ayrancı (2005). Research has highlighted that, similar to other women in other parts of the world, many women in Turkey have also been the victims of physical assault as well

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