Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey

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Introduction to Domestic Violence:

Guldunya Toren, a 22 years-old woman from Bitlis, had an affair with her married cousin. By the time she realized that she was pregnant, it was already too late to hide the increasingly visible signs. Her family’s tribe found a solution to protect their “honor:” she was going to be sent to her uncle in Istanbul. Guldunya was worried because she knew the matter was far from over. She feared for her life and, even worse, for her baby’s life. Before long, her older brother came to Istanbul to kill her. When her brother found Guldunya, he gave her a rope and told her to hang herself. Guldunya jumped out of the window to take refuge inside a police station. She told the police what she had been through, explaining that if they were to not protect her, she was going to be killed by her family. In response, the police called her uncle and older brother in and had them promise that they would not kill her. She did not, however, trust them and instead asked to stay with her friend’s father, Alaattin Ceylan.

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003, Guldunya gave birth to a healthy boy, whom she named Ümit (Hope). With tears in her eyes, she had to give her baby up for adoption to a friend because she knew her family’s tribe would kill the baby. A few months later, her older brother came to get her and told her that she did not need to pack any of her things. Ceylan came along to the bus station. Guldunya’s younger brother took an ambush on the street her older brother took her to. He shot Guldunya in the hip. Ceylan lied on top of her to protect her, while both brothers subsequently ran away. After the attack she was taken to the hospital, where the police left her alone with no protection despite her repeated requests. Her lack of protection enabled her younger brother to enter her room with ease and shoot her dead with two bullets in the head.
It was March 1st, 2004. Güldunya became the victim of an “honor” killing carried out in cold blood. One could easily find such stories of violence against women on the third page of Turkish newspapers every day: a 16 year old girl buried alive because she had male friends, a 17 year old girl’s throat cut in a shopping mall because she went to a pastry shop in the supposed hope of meeting a man, and many more. As the most explicit form of domestic violence, honor killing is unfortunately still a horrific aspect of the Turkish society. In basic terms, ‘honor killing’ refers to the murder of a woman by members of her own family as punishment for engaging in the sort of behavior that brings shame and dishonor upon the family’s reputation. In countries like Turkey, where religious customs still play an important role in the daily lives of the majority of the population, the social code of conduct revolves around the concept of honor. Men are thus expected to protect their women’s honor. According to the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), 5 women are murdered by men every day in Turkey for the motives of protecting their family’s dignity, honor, and moral principles.

Violence against women is not only a serious criminal issue but also has wide political and socio-economic consequences. Societies that uphold rigid gender roles tend to also develop stark inequalities between men and women. Recently, the story of a 24-year old woman was all over the Turkish media after she was left outside in the winter cold, where the baby she gave birth to died in her hands. During her grief period, she was locked up in a bathroom for days...

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without receiving any food and was ultimately left to die. According to recent research, most Turkish women report their husbands as the perpetrators of the violence they regularly experience. For these men, violence constitutes a convenient tool to project control over their female relatives. Some of these women do not leave their husbands in the hopes that they would change and begin to treat them better in future, whereas others stay due to their fear that their husbands would ultimately locate them to inflict more violence. Some women are uninformed about their legal rights, whereas some of those more informed ones do not acquire the fortitude and strength to defend these rights. As a consequence, these women feel trapped in such abusive relationships, especially if they have children, whom they fear of not being allowed to see by their husbands in case of a divorce. Violence therefore perpetuates itself behind closed doors and probably exists on a higher scale than what meets the eye.

One of the main obstacles in analyzing the problem of domestic violence in the Turkish society is the lack of reliable statistical material, including official statistics and nationwide surveys. What limited data we have has so far been compiled as a result of small-scale research conducted by women’s organizations, universities, or health institutions. And even this data is not likely to be very reliable because most women fail to report due to fear, shame, lack of awareness, and lack of safety. Although violence against women is highly prevalent in Turkey,
the likelihood of these incidents being admitted to emergency departments and put in forensic reports is comparatively very low.\textsuperscript{11}

Given that most women are not aware of the broad scope of the definition of violence, their legal rights, not to mention the facilities and services that they can use, they choose to become silent in the face of this brutality. Learning about the different types of violence is the first step in taking action against this social problem. It is important to keep in mind that these are only ideal types and that some episodes of violence could easily fit into several categories simultaneously.

**Types of Violence:**

*Physical Violence*

It occurs through the application of physical force to one’s body in an attempt to harm him/her or coercion of the individual to make him/her engage in an unwanted physical act. Forms of physical violence include slapping, hitting, bruising, beating, kicking, burning, shoving, pushing, punching, fracturing a bone, threatening with or using a weapon, honor killings or customary murders, and forcing or encouraging suicide. According to Altinay and Arat’s nationwide study on domestic violence with 1800 ever-married women from 56 provinces, the percentage of women who have, at one point in their lives, been subjected to physical violence by their spouses is 35%.\textsuperscript{12} In other words, one out of three women has been subjected to physical abuse at the hands of her husband. Sadly, almost half (49%) of the women who had been subjected to physical violence also reported that they have not talked about it to others.

\textsuperscript{11} Serinken et al., 2007.
In a study conducted in Ankara with a sample of 370 women, 88.1% of the respondents defined violence only as physical. The fact that many women perceive violence only in its physical forms makes them oblivious to other types of violence even if they are frequently exposed to them, and leaves them to not engage in attempts at eliminating it.\(^{13}\) We will examine three other types of violence against women that constantly occur.

*Psychological, Verbal, and Emotional Violence*

It consists of abusive behavior or demeanor that could cause one to feel humiliated, constantly belittled, intimidated, or to experience sadness, worthlessness, and lack of self-confidence through psychological oppression or restriction of his/her actions. One is subjected to psychological, verbal, and emotional violence if he/she is not being allowed to meet with family members or friends, threatened to hurt his/her family or friends, pressured to take one’s children away from him/her, kidnap one’s children, and not being shown the children,\(^ {14}\) monitored, isolated, restricted his/her access to people or information, not respected for one’s emotions or thoughts and deterred from having one’s own opinions, made fun of by being called derogatory names, insulted, yelled at.

This form of violence could cause psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, sleeping problems, not enjoying life, irregularities in menstrual periods, aggression, cigarette, substance or alcohol addiction, binge eating or not eating at all, and suicide attempts.\(^ {15}\) It could also trigger serious medical problems such as hypertension or heart diseases. In a study held in Konya, a province in central Anatolia, female victims of domestic violence experienced


emotions of insecurity, suicidal thoughts, despair, and left home more often than the women who were not abused by their husbands. The self-assurance of individuals is shattered, when they are made to feel incompetent while fulfilling a task, incapable of taking care of their children, or guilty for their actions and behaviors. An example of psychological violence happens in a family when a wife lacks emotional attention and is therefore emotionally neglected by her husband.

Economic Violence

It is defined as attitudes and actions that bring serious limitations to the economic transactions, behaviors and freedoms of other beings. Individuals can sometimes feel helpless and dependent in the face of economic violence. In patriarchal societies, economic violence is one of the most commonly used methods to control and subjugate women. In such societies, husbands take on the burden of providing for the family and, in turn, their wives are expected not to question where and how their husbands spend their money. And yet their spending is controlled and limited to a tremendous degree. Instead of joining the labor force, women are highly expected to take care of the children and carry out the household chores such as cleaning the house, cooking food, doing the laundry and the dishes. Economic violence therefore includes being deprived of the right to work outside the home or get the education one desires, being denied the right to spend money, being forced to relinquish earnings, receiving little information about the family’s income, having the husband spend family’s income on alcohol, gambling, drugs or other women, having the income taken away if allowed to work, being

17 Sallan Gul, Songul. Turkiye’de Kadin Siginmaevleri, pg. 19.
20 Sallan Gul, Songul. Turkiye’de Kadin Siginmaevleri, pg. 19.
bereaved of the inheritance or forced to relinquish the right to inheritance, or having the husband not pay for alimony following divorce and being left with the children in hard circumstances.  

Most women are forced to remain silent on the physical, emotional, or sexual domestic violence they experience, for they do not enjoy economic independence that could help protect themselves from the prospect of poverty they would most likely face if they were to leave their abusive partners.

Another form of economic violence, commonly practiced not just in Turkey but also some parts of Africa and Asia, is the custom of bride price - the sum of money the groom’s family is expected to pay to the bride’s family for marrying their daughter. This practice, which is not prohibited by the Turkish legal system, is nothing more than “the woman being sold to her future husband for a price.” Despite its negative consequences, however, economic violence is understudied and overshadowed by more visible forms of violence, which is physical or psychological violence, because women internalize the social gender roles imposed on them.

Sexual Violence

It occurs when individuals are forced to perform any type of sexual acts such as entering sexual intercourse, being subjected to molestation, harassment, or abuse. Sexual violence includes marital rape, incest of family members, children or handicapped people who do not have the power to give consent, forced or arranged marriages, forced prostitution by a spouse or other family members, kidnapping and threatening to rape, controlling the fertility rate of women by forcing them to use or not to use protection, hurting the sexual organ of an individual.

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21 Isik, Nazik. “Turkiye’dede Kadina Yonelik Ekonomik Siddet.”
22 Gokkaya, Veda Bilican. “The Effects of Violence upon Women’s Health in Turkey.”
24 Sallan Gul, Songul. Turkiye’dede Kadin Siginmaevleri, pg. 20.
Despite the difficulty of researching sexual violence in Turkey due to its taboo nature, a field research conducted in 19 settlements in Southeastern and Eastern Turkey among 599 women has shown some striking results. According to its findings, 16.3% of the women often and 35.6% sometimes experience sexual violence in the form of rape at the hands of their husbands. Unfortunately, due to acceptance of patriarchal norms by more traditional segments of the society, most women are reluctant to denounce sexual violence or even consider it as a major problem since it is seen as the obligation of a wife to please her husband at all times.

Factors of Domestic Violence:

a) Socio-cultural and Socio-economic Factors:

Male-Dominated Patriarchal Social System

Traditional Turkish families are run under male hegemony. Men generally have power over women resulting from their “elevated” social status. The probability of abuse against women is amplified in direct proportion with the difference in power between men and women in a family. Violence is viewed as a way for men to hold onto their social control over women. According to such ideological constructions, men are expected to acquire a masculine identity based on power, strength, and authority. In sharp contrast, women are advised to have subordinate qualities and characteristics in the household, such as being dependent on their husbands, maternal, caring, and submissive. The rigid gender roles are further reflected and reproduced through the Turkish idioms. For instance, “the female bird prepares the home” and “a woman’s place is her house” are just some examples of sayings that encourage women to become housewives, take care of the children and discourage them from getting a paid job or

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even having the freedom to go outside without having a male relative or husband come along to protect the family’s ‘honor.’

Many idioms that justify, if not support, violence against women are also commonplace in the Turkish language: “He is my husband; he can love me and beat me,” “isn’t he a man; he can love me and beat me,” “beating comes from heaven.” For example, “ones who do not hit their daughters will end up hitting their knees” is a saying which means that fathers will repent not having hit their daughters for the disgraceful ways their daughters will act in the future. Another outrageous saying that depicts the mentality that women are mainly good for getting beaten and bearing children is “do not forget to make whip available to a woman’s back and babies available in a woman’s womb.” Witnesses of domestic violence are advised that “one shall not go in between husband and wife.” Such sayings cause the Turkish society to normalize and legitimize violence against women. Thus, women are left alone to suffer the consequences of the violence they experience while the presumption that men have supremacy over women prevails.

The Influence of the Media

Violence against women is also pervasive in the media through TV series, commercials, and news programs. People get accustomed to the frequent occurrence of violence against women on TV and mistake the fictive world of these broadcasts for reality. Moreover, viewers can identify with perpetrators of violence and establish them as role models. Violence against women occurred in 5.8% of 979 scenes that were analyzed in a research study. The fact that 35.1% of the women who were exposed to violence remained silent and 22.8% cried makes battered women look weak and helpless, and does not give viewers an example of a powerful

female figure. Also, 96.5% of the perpetrators of violence were not penalized for their aggressive behaviors, which is an understatement for the aftermath of what their actions should bring.

In the popular TV serial ‘Kuzey Guney,’ we observe all sorts of violence against women. For example in the 4th episode, the leading male character’s parents traditionally ask for the approval of the girl’s mother in getting the two of them engaged:

“Father: The kids took a step forward. They know each other well.
Mother: They also love each other, of course.
Father: Am I going to talk or are you?
Mother: I am sorry; of course, go ahead.”

This scene powerfully illustrates the subtlety of verbal violence; the mother is not allowed to express her views in getting her son engaged and apologizes after speaking because she does not want to disrespect her husband, who is viewed as the person who makes the decisions and as the head of the family. In another episode of the same show, one of the female characters secretly gets married to a guy, whom she brings to her house to introduce him to her parents. After hearing the news, her father, who had already chosen a potential husband to marry his daughter, shoots her on the street. Despite her serious arm injury, she does not report the identity of the shooter to the police and the police fail to question it. An honor crime goes unpunished and stays inside the family.

The Education Levels

The unequal rates of educational distribution for different genders and levels of income, the decrease in financial resources set aside from the national budget for educational purposes, scarce opportunities for educating adults, inadequate educational establishments in rural regions, the dogmatic and uncreative principles of education in public schools including the existence of corporal punishment are only some of the impediments that the educational system in Turkey

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faces today. The persistent gender gap in schooling is a huge factor in understanding women’s scant access to education and the insufficient quality of the education they receive. Even though the rate of illiteracy has successfully decreased from 80.8% in 1935 to 6.0% in 2010, the gap in illiteracy rates between men and women remains. In 2009, 11.5% of the women and 2.8% of the men were illiterate; similarly in 2010, 9.9% of the women and 2.2% of the men were illiterate (see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1. Illiteracy Rates for Population Ages Six Years and Over

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945(^a)</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950(^b)</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Population seven years and over; \(^b\)population five years and over.

A recent study suggests that women’s exposure to abuse declines parallel to an increase in their level of education. Women with no education experience 55.7% of lifetime violence, whereas women with a high school education and above experience 27.2%. Despite the fact that education seems to be an influential factor in protecting women from violence, it is thought

provoking that roughly 3 in every 10 women with a high school education and above are still exposed to violence (see Table 1.2).\textsuperscript{30}

**TABLE 1.2. Physical or Sexual Violence by Education Level, 2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>No education / Not completed primary school</th>
<th>First level primary education</th>
<th>Second level primary education</th>
<th>High school and above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifetime Violence</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in the Last 12 Months</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The lack of formal and higher education of both of the spouses\textsuperscript{31} and women’s approving feelings toward their husbands’ violent behaviors are found to be common factors that relate to the rate of domestic violence.\textsuperscript{32} Illiterate women in a cross-sectional study were 2.6 times more likely than women with a college degree or higher educational level to experience partner violence, and women with illiterate husbands were 2.7 times more likely to be subjected to partner violence than ones who have a husband with a college degree or higher.\textsuperscript{33}  

**Religion: Islam’s Take on Violence against Women**

Under the Kemalist revolution, the Turkish Republic experienced significant changes from its Islamic past with the hopes of achieving a thriving civilization. Whereas the Ottoman Empire was governed by monarchy, the Turkish Republic is governed by a democratic republic. Whereas the social, political and legal issues were decided upon based on Islam, the official


\textsuperscript{33} Ergin, Nilufer, et al., “Domestic Violence: A Tragedy Behind Doors.”
religion, in the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic strived to remove religion from defining
the social, political, and legal organizations through its secular reforms.\textsuperscript{34}

Despite the fact that religion does not exercise any control over the state, women are still
viewed from the wide traditional angle that is influenced by the social rules pertaining to Islam.
A verse in the Surat Al-Baqarah of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, reads: “O you who
believe, when you transact a loan for any period, you shall write it down…Two men shall serve
as witnesses; if not two men, then a man and two women whose testimony is acceptable to all.
Thus, if one woman becomes biased, the other will remind her…”\textsuperscript{35} One man’s testimony is
equated with that of two women’s, simply indicating the absence of gender equality in the
Islamic community. Similarly, women’s share from the family’s inheritance is only half of that
of men’s.\textsuperscript{36} Women’s role inside the society is secondary compared to men’s.\textsuperscript{37}

According to the Islamic dictate, men are allowed to marry up to four women.\textsuperscript{38} In
Ilkkaracan’s study, 10.6% of the women were in polygamous marriages regardless of the
prohibition of polygamy since 1926.\textsuperscript{39} Only one of the wives can have a civil marriage, while the
rest of the women only have religious marriages, which are also illegal according to the Civil
Code and the Penal Code. Thus, women with only religious marriages cannot gain any rights
during a potential divorce or inheritance in case of the husband’s death. However, the findings
also demonstrate that nearly half of the wives in polygamous marriages stated that they requested

\textsuperscript{34} Yildirim, Seval. “Aftermath of a Revolution: A Case Study of Turkish Family Law.” Pace International Law
\textsuperscript{39} Ilkkaracan, Pinar. “Exploring the Context of Women’s Sexuality in Eastern Turkey,” pg 234.
or agreed to this type of marriage.\textsuperscript{40} The Islamic influence is thought to have a factor in the endorsement of this practice by not only men, but also women.

Furthermore, in Surah An-Nur of the Quran, women are advised to lower their looks, protect their chastity and personal parts, not to reveal their adornment except for the ones over visible parts, and to cover their veils over their bosoms.\textsuperscript{41} Under the Islamic influence, many women are restricted in the ways they act and dress and men’s responsibility is to protect the honor of their women (e.g., wives, daughters, sisters). A verse from Surat An-Nisa’ states:

“Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband’s] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them…”\textsuperscript{42}

Exertion of violence against women is advised to men as a means of correcting the misbehaviors of their wives. Similar to many other Muslim countries, where violence is seen as a disciplinary technique that is exclusively kept inside the family,\textsuperscript{43} in Turkey violence against women is not widely handled as a social issue.

\textit{Participation in the Economic Life}

Economic hardships constitute the main cause for marital conflicts and domestic violence.\textsuperscript{44, 45} According to 55.5\% of 155 women in a study, economic insufficiency was the main reason for the increase in violence inside the family, followed by dispute (50.3\%), and alcohol consumption (12.3\%).\textsuperscript{46} In most families, having only one spouse with a paid job is not enough to take care of the expenses. Due to the patriarchal nature of the society, women are

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[40]{Ibid, pg 235.}
\footnotetext[43]{Page and Ince. “A Review of Domestic Violence.”}
\footnotetext[44]{Ergin, Nilufer, et al., “Domestic Violence: A Tragedy Behind Doors.”}
\footnotetext[45]{Alper, Zuleyha, et al., “Domestic Violence: A Study among a Group of Turkish Women.”}
\footnotetext[46]{Guler, Nuran, et al., “Kadinin Aile Icinde Yasanan Siddete Bakisi.”}
\end{footnotes}
expected to become less and less involved in the economic life, are forced to be economically dependent on men, both of which play an important role in leading them to poverty.47

Women’s participation in the labor force was 28.8% in 2011.48 On the other hand, 71.7% of the men participated in the labor force in 2011, a rate two and a half times higher than that of women. In lieu of participating in the paid labor force, women and children engage in unpaid family labor in the rural areas, where agriculture is a source of income.49 While men provide for the family, the social burden is on women to take care of the house and children. Even though women engage in intensive household and in some cases agricultural labor, they neither have social security nor retirement benefits. In addition, their husbands have control over how much of the family’s earnings their wives get to spend.

Even when women participate in paid labor, they still have to take in all of the household responsibilities and are mostly scattered around static jobs with the lowest wages.50 Maxine Molyneux argues that women’s social status is not only determined through their subsidiary status inside the home, but also through their powerless position in the labor market, which solidifies their reasons for pertaining to the house setting.

b) Psychological Factors

Internalized Oppression

In the Turkish family structure, women are not given the right to speak and men make most of the decisions. Men take it as their duty to watch over the virtue and honor of their wives.

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and female relatives because they see these women as property that needs to be guarded.\textsuperscript{51} It is no wonder that men see violence as a way to punish their wives when their wives oppose them. Oddly, when women do not obey their husbands, they also consider the punishment they receive as justified. In Yaman Efe and Ayaz’s study, 43.2\% of the women found violence to be reasonable if they were to cheat on their husbands and 22.2\% if they were to not listen to their husbands.\textsuperscript{52} In such circumstances, these women find themselves responsible for their husbands’ violent behaviors and accept physical abuse. Not only men, but also women accept the social gender roles that are imposed on them.\textsuperscript{53} These women, who are constantly abused for stating their own views, stop exposing their opinions because they start believing that their opinions do not matter and are worthless. They also begin to rationalize men’s exertion of economic power by thinking that men gain the money and therefore it is their right to spend it.\textsuperscript{54} This covert process is known as “internalized oppression”\textsuperscript{55} and ingrains patriarchy in itself.

\textit{Social Learning Theory}

Violence works within a vicious cycle: it gets carried on from parents to children and replicated over generations. In a recent study, a significant relationship was found between a history of childhood physical violence and perpetration of child abuse as well as between exposure to spousal physical abuse and perpetration of physical violence to children among 100 female psychiatric outpatients.\textsuperscript{56} Altinay and Arat’s results were even more striking: a history of

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., pg. 113.
witnessing or experiencing childhood abuse doubled the probability of men using violence against their wives and women experiencing violence from their husbands.\textsuperscript{57} These studies reflect the dangerous effects of experiencing childhood violence, either as a witness or a victim, on being subjected to spousal violence for women, perpetrating spousal violence for men, and perpetrating violence towards children for both genders.

The inheritance of violence can be explained through Albert Bandura’s “social learning theory.” According to Bandura, people learn behaviors socially through the examples facilitated by instrumental models.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, aggression is learned through observation and retained through reinforcement. Social learning theory proposes that aversive stimulation creates a condition of emotional arousal, which can make certain modes of responses possible. These responses, one of which is aggression, are acquired as a coping mechanism for stress.\textsuperscript{59} Given that most abusive husbands have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse as children, it is likely that they have learned aggression as a way to solve their problems arising from distress. Furthermore, notions of masculinity and rigid gender roles may allow aggressiveness to be socially reinforced and encouraged, if not by the victim.

Rigid gender roles also have an impact on society’s labeling of individuals’ behaviors. A woman’s physical assertiveness may be viewed as more aggressive than the assertiveness of a man performed at the same rate. A woman’s such behavior may be overstated because it diverges from the commonly expected female roles, whereas a man’s aggressiveness may be underrated because it is in accordance with expected male roles. Thus, labeling behavior as aggressive sometimes depends more on the evaluator than the aggressor.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57} Altinay and Arat, Violence against Women in Turkey – A Nationwide Survey, pg. 51.  
\textsuperscript{60} Bandura, Albert. Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis, pg. 8.
c) Judicial Factors:

According to Liz Ercevik Amado, a board member of Women for Women’s Human Rights (WWHR) – New Ways, an independent women’s NGO based in Istanbul, Turkey:

“Violence against women is the oldest systematic, social, historical, political form of inequality; there is not a more tremendous cruelty, not a bigger oppression, not a more pervasive discrimination in the world. The government looks at gender relations from a perspective of equity instead of what should be equality. The questions remain: ‘Is the government organizing itself to guard the rights of its citizens or to control its citizens? Does the government want to create equal and free beings?’ Unfortunately, the answers have never been reassuring in Turkey.”

In order to understand violence against women, the legal rights that women acquired over the years should be scrutinized.

_The Turkish Civil Code_

The Turkish Civil Code of 1926 was accepted into the new Civil Code on November 22nd, 2001 and took effect on January 1st, 2002. Largely due to the efforts of women NGOs, the 2002 Civil Code underwent major changes promoting gender equality during marriage and after divorce. Seval Yildirim pessimistically points out that even though these reforms are a step towards gender egalitarianism, “the same Islamic law concepts in the 1926 Code survive unchallenged in the 2002 Code.”

Over the years, the 1926 Civil Code was amended in order to abolish gender inequality. For example, on November 19th, 1990, the Constitutional Court (Decision No. 1990/31) abrogated Article 159 of the 1926 Civil Code, which stated that married women needed their husband’s expressed or tacit consent to have a job outside the home. In 1996, the court annulled Article 440 and Article 441 regarding the topics of adultery of women and men, respectively for the reason that the principle of gender equality and the provision of Convention on the

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Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) were violated because of
the different treatment of adultery for women and men. Moreover, on May 14th, 1997, Article
153 was altered so that even though women are automatically given the last name of their
husbands, they are allowed to use their maiden name with it.

The 2002 Civil Code became a reform that attempted to fully eliminate the gender bias
of the legal system. For example, under the new Turkish family law, the husband is no longer
considered the head of the family and spouses have equal status within the marriage. According
to the old Civil Code (1926), “the husband [was] the chief of the marriage foundation,” whereas the new Civil Code (2002) states that “the spouses govern the marriage foundation
equally together.” This amendment allows both spouses to have equal responsibilities in the
process of decision-making and providing comfort in marriage. It aims to prevent people from
treating the husband in the role of the guardian and the wife as the person being protected.

In an attempt to further promote gender equality in marriage, the age of marital consent
was altered from fifteen for girls and seventeen for boys to eighteen years for both spouses in
the 2002 Civil Code. Thus, at the age of fifteen, teenage girls who are not considered old enough
to have a clear world-view and to participate in the voting process for the elections in their
country are spared more time to make - what may be considered - one of the biggest decisions in
their lives. In a society where the widespread traditional mentality is that “girls leave their
fathers’ house in a wedding dress, and their husbands’ house in a shroud,” being allowed for

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<http://www.hukuki.net/kanun/743.13.text.asp>
65 Turkish Civil Code of 1926, Law No. 743, art. 152.
<http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k4721.html>
67 Turkish Civil Code of 1926, Law No. 743, art. 88.
68 Turkish Civil Code of 2002, Law No. 4721, art. 124.
more time gives the girls a chance to understand the institution of marriage, have the willpower to keep their families from choosing their husbands for them, and prevent any kinds of regrets they might have from rash judgments.

The most controversial article of the 1926 Civil Code was the sharing of properties after a divorce. According to the old Civil Code, no matter what both spouses might have agreed upon in the marriage contract, in case of a divorce, each spouse got back exactly what he or she brought into the marriage.69 Most wives do not hold paid positions outside of the home because of their domestic responsibilities, while their husbands provide for the family. Even though the duties of both spouses are equally significant, given that the husbands are the ‘bread-winners’ in the family, they “bring” money into the family. Hence, this article of the old Civil Code prohibited unemployed women from getting back any of the family’s earnings during the marriage. The new Civil Code allowed for spouses to share equal rights over obtained properties during marriage, unless they wished to complete a matrimonial contract in which they could choose from a variety of property systems.70 71 However, the opposition parties created a law so that the article is only considered valid for property obtained after January 1st, 2002.72 This law is highly damaging to the women who got married and acquired assets before this date as it excludes their rights and deprives them of economic independence.

Nevertheless, Yildirim lays out numerous sections of the 2002 Civil Code that still retain the Islamic influence in the family law, which rule out total gender equality. One of these sections is under Article 132,73 which states that the divorced woman needs to wait for 300 days

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69 Turkish Civil Code of 1926, Law No. 743, art. 146.
73 Yildirim, Seval. “Aftermath of a Revolution: A Case Study of Turkish Family Law.”
starting from the termination of the previous marriage until marrying another man in order to ensure that the she is not with a child from her previous marriage. Women can lift this waiting period by providing medical proof of not being pregnant to the court. This article violates women’s freedom of privacy and sexuality, both of which are controlled by conservative notions. Paternity can easily be determined through DNA tests and therefore women’s choices and actions do not need to be tied down under so-called family values.

*The Turkish Penal Code*

The Turkish penal code, which was adapted from the Italian Civil Code, was promulgated by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1926, as part of the Kemalist elite’s efforts to establish a modern, secular regime. Thus Turkey became the first Muslim-majority country to institute a legal system that was not based on Islamic jurisprudence – a highly controversial and radical move at the time. Its revolutionary aspects notwithstanding, there were still some shortcomings regarding its treatment of women and had a rather family-bias, especially by today’s standards. It considered women’s sexuality as a threat to their husbands’ (if married) or fathers’ (if not married) morality and honor. Moreover, because it was not revised over the decades, it largely became outdated in modern times. For instance, sexual crimes against women were not considered as crimes against individuals or violations of their integrity, but crimes committed against women’s husbands, fathers, or the public. With the hope of transforming the underlying perspective of the 1926 Penal Code, a massive campaign was launched during 2003-2004 and a Platform introducing the demands for a holistic reform was

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After extensive debates on deciding which articles should be included, the draft law was accepted on September 26th, 2004 and came into effect on June 1st, 2005.

The amendments that the new Turkish Penal Code included were able to successfully recognize women’s rights and autonomy on paper. For example, a sexual crime is no longer based on patriarchal constructs and viewed as a crime against public decency or family honor. It is considered a “sexual behavior that infringes somebody’s bodily inviolability” and higher prison sentences are given to individuals who commit a sexual crime. Furthermore, if such an act is committed against a spouse (marital rape), interrogation and prosecution is dependent upon the victim’s complaint. In a society where sexual violence is normally accepted, this amendment is a head-start to change the patriarchal mentality of its members.

In regards to customary killings, sentence reductions to perpetrators have been revoked and homicides by motivation of custom are now considered aggravated circumstances that lead to life sentences. Another controversial topic of the old Penal Code was the abolition of the prison sentences for rape and abduction in situations where the perpetrator marries the victim. The new Penal Code allowed this outdated article to be removed. Moreover, according to the new Penal Code, domestic violence against a spouse or a family member is an offense which is penalized with three to eight years of prison.

Even though the massive campaign established the necessary legal groundwork for gender equality in Turkey, some of the demands of the platform were not recognized. These
demands are as follows: the penalization of enforced virginity testing, the prolongation of the legal abortion period from 10 to 12 weeks, the penalization of discrimination due to sexual orientation, the description of honor crimes and not just customary crimes as aggravated homicide.\textsuperscript{81,82}

\textit{The Law on the Protection of the Family}

Following the lobbying of the women’s movement, the Law on the Protection of the Family, Law No. 4320, was enacted by the Turkish Parliament on January 14, 1998 and amended on April 26, 2007. Also entitled as the Protection Order, this law allowed any family member who is a victim of domestic violence to apply to the court in order for the judge to issue a ‘restraining order’ to the perpetrator of violence. The accused individual was ordered some of the measures assigned by the judge such as not engaging in violence or any verbal or physical behavior that may intimidate the members of the family, leaving the abode shared by members of the family and not getting close to their abode or their work places, not destroying property of family members, not disturbing family members via any communication devices, surrendering any weapons the person may acquire to the police, not approaching the shared abode after using alcohol or any intoxicating substances or not using them in the abode, applying to a health care facility to get examined or treated.\textsuperscript{83} These measures applied for a period not exceeding six months and a prison sentence of three to six months would be given if the perpetrator does not follow the rulings of the court. A copy of the protection order was given to the Public Prosecutor, who monitors the implementation of the rulings through the police.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{81} Ilkkaracan and Amado. “Good Practices in Legislation on Violence against Women in Turkey and Problems of Implementation.”

\textsuperscript{82} WWHR – New Ways. \textit{Turkish Civil and Penal Code Reforms from a Gender Perspective: The Success of Two Nationwide Campaigns.}


\textsuperscript{84} The Law on the Protection of the Family, Law No. 4320, art. 2.
Nevertheless, many jurists and women’s rights activists could not help but notice and advocate for amendments of the inadequacies behind this law. In the application of this law, due to the lack of specification of the term, the police and the judge might have interpreted ‘violence’ only in its physical forms such as battery that leaves a scar. The fact that violence is not only physical but also psychological, social, sexual, or economic should have been expounded. Moreover, individuals who are not officially married or are divorced did not receive protection from this law. To prevent some of the problems that might have aroused during the application of this law, a description of the types of violence should have been provided and the law should have applied to all women who were exposed to violence, regardless of their marital status.

*The Law on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence against Women*

The Law No. 6284 was passed by the Parliament on March 8, 2012, as a tribute to women on the International Women’s Day. It aims to protect and prevent violence against women, children, family members, who are exposed to violence or in danger of violence, or individuals who are victims of constant harassment.

The accused individual is ordered the same measures as the ones in the Law on the Protection of the Family, Law No. 4320, by the judge, in more detail and with additional clauses. Law No. 4320 was annulled after Law No. 6284, which includes an advanced version of all of the articles in Law No. 4320, came into effect. Compared to Law No. 4320, ‘violence’ is defined

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86 Ibid.

more specifically in Law No. 6284, as a cautionary measure for the accused to not victimize the
protected individual.\footnote{Ibid., art. 5 and 23.}

In the new law, the protected individual, and if needed the children, are given some of the
cautionsary measures assigned by the administrative chief such as being provided a shelter in the
current abode or another location, temporary financial help, psychological, occupational, legal
and social counseling services, temporary protection if there is a life-threatening danger or
demand, day care center facilities paid through the ministry budget for two to four months to
support participation in the work force.\footnote{Ibid. art. 3.} The protected person is also given some of the
measures assigned by the judge such as having the work place changed, a new abode if the
person is married, a change of identification and other documents if the person is in life-
threatening danger and if other measures are not sufficient.\footnote{Ibid., art. 4.}

Despite being an improvement over the status quo ante, some women’s organizations and
groups were not fully content with the Law No. 6284. First, they claim, violence against women
should be explicitly defined as a violation of human rights. The law should have articles added
about accepting the intervention of women’s organizations in any type of lawsuit about violence,
regulations in regards to women’s shelters and sexual crisis centers, and cautionary measures
should be taken not only for the people who engage in violence but also for the ones who aid in
the violence, while penalties should be given also to the people who do not obey the cautionary

Some of the important suggestions of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) were not
recognized: that the state should pay a compensation for these victims, the prison sentence for
ones who do not obey the cautionary measures should be higher than 6 months, and penalizations
should not be converted into a fine and postponed. That the staff for Violence Prevention and Watch Centers got minimized from 5557 (old proposal) to 362 caused a huge disappointment for a country with very high rates of violence against women. Nazan Moroglu, the chairperson of the Union of Women’s Organizations and the president of Turkish Association of University Women, elucidates an important shortcoming of Law No. 6284:

“It is an elaborate and comprehensive law. However, some articles are prepared without the existence of an institutional foundation. For example, the law came into effect before establishing coordination units combating and centers monitoring violence. Provisions about how to protect women with the prospect of experiencing violence have been left out. There is no regulation about the duties of the police in the likelihood of facing such a situation. As a result, difficulties emerge in implementing this law.”

Despite its promising aspects, this legislation does not fully stand on solid ground.

d) Political Factors:

The recent political developments in Turkey signal a threat for women’s rights, despite the judicial reforms made in the past 15 years. On June 8, 2011, the Turkish government lessened its focus on women's rights by replacing the current title “Ministry for Women and Family” with the “Ministry of Family and Social Policies,” which will likely impact the efforts to reduce discrimination and violence against women. What may be considered a minor alteration is seen by many individuals as a regulation that does not recognize that women are also individuals outside of the family setting. During our interview, Canan Arin, a feminist activist and lawyer, explained the drawbacks of having a government that chooses family over the individuals and male hegemony over gender equality:

“As long as virginity is an imperative, wrongfully interpreted Islamic values are of importance, and religious books that have been interpreted with a male-oriented

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92 Ibid.
perspective are of significance, I do not believe that the prevention of early and forced marriages is likely. To preclude these types of marriages, gender equality should first be ensured, children should receive secular education instead of education of religion, all children should get proper education regardless of gender, opportunities and possibilities should be presented to them. However, these actions are not probable in this government because it prioritizes the protection of the family, not the women exposed to violence.”

Today, women are regularly under the threat of getting bereaved of their own legal rights, especially considering the recent agenda about the potential prohibition of abortion.

The Abortion Problem

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the prime minister of the Turkish Republic, has recently remarked at the 1st International Congress of Technology of Addiction: “Parents nowadays are saying ‘1-2 is enough.’ Produce at least three; the conditions have gotten easier. There are laundry machines. Even 5 children would do.” Over the past decade the Turkish public opinion has indeed become accustomed to such outbursts of Erdogan, who once admitted that he does not believe in gender equality. During a speech he delivered at the 3rd Annual Women’s Congress of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Erdogan intensified his attack against the law on abortion and Cesarean section with another salvo. His words were sharper and more directed this time:

“I am a Prime Minister who is against giving births by Cesarean section and I know that these are decisions made out of convenience. I know that such steps are taken forward to inhibit the increase of our population... I see abortion as murder... Is there really any difference between killing a baby inside the mother’s womb and killing it after its birth? ...We all know that this is an insidious plan to wipe out our nation from the face of the Earth. We should not give any credence to these ploys in order to keep our nation growing.”

Recep Akdag, the Minister of Health, agreed to Erdogan’s take on abortion and indicated that the Parliament would decide on the legislation of the draft law that they will soon bring forward. The current law on abortion, promulgated in 1983, states that induced abortion could be carried out until the end of the 10th week of pregnancy. The Islamist government has recently put on its agenda a proposal to reduce the legal period to 4 weeks and only in situations where the safety of mothers’ health are concerned. However, most doctors do not carry out abortions until the 5th week of pregnancy especially since women need at least 4 weeks to learn that they are pregnant. Hence, if this law is to be legislated, abortion will de facto be banned.

Several people protested against this possible ban on abortion with the famous slogan ‘My body, my decision.’ In a matter of days after the shocking news, writers and columnists expressed their alarmed and concerned reactions in newspaper and magazine columns, activist groups formed protest demonstrations with the participation of countless individuals, and websites were launched displaying the true spirit and power of the Turkish society. A special website which asked people to send photos of their messages written on their bodies, on pieces of paper, on eggs, or on computers freely expressing their thoughts became extremely famous, and gained the attention and support of people from all around the world.

After seeing people’s reactions, the Justice and Development Party may have felt the need to stop their claims and therefore the ban on abortion may not be emanating in the coming months. However, these comments signaled that certain leaders in the parliament could easily think of depriving women of their own legal rights. In Berat Guncikan’s interview with her,

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Handan Koc, a feminist writer and journalist, spoke about the consequences that the ban on abortion would bring to women: “This would mean that women’s health and safety are put in danger. This would mean that a woman’s life is spurned.”

Twenty-nine years ago, when induced abortion was not legally accepted in Turkey, women used all sorts of dangerous ways to have self-induced miscarriages – that is unsafe abortions. The women who realized that they do not have the economic privileges to feed another child or the ones who did not want to have a child from a man who sexually abused them had to go through self-inflicted injuries (e.g., lifting heavy loads, jumping from high grounds, putting stones on the stomach, receiving punches to the abdomen, and inserting wires or coat-hangers into the uterus) to keep the fetuses from being born. Such acts to miscarry the fetus caused women to sometimes have serious injuries, disabilities, and at times resulted in the death of pregnant women.

According to the calculations of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2008, countries where abortion laws are less restrictive have very low unsafe abortion rates than countries with more restrictive laws. Legal restrictions on induced abortions raise the number of illegal and unsafe abortion measures. The Turkish Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology (TSOG) reported in its press release that since abortion was legalized for up to 10 weeks of pregnancy, induced abortion rates have decreased by 3; mother death rates have decreased by 6 and female life span has increased by 14 years. TSOG noted that while almost half of the reasons for mother deaths were miscarriages in the 1950s, only 2% of mother deaths are due to unsafe

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abortions today. TSOG finally stated that an abortion prohibition would seriously increase mother death rate.\textsuperscript{104}

The prohibition of abortion would be another form of violence against women. Forcing women to become mothers when they are not emotionally, physically, or economically ready would inflict another difficult responsibility that they should have the freedom to decide on whether to take over or not. Unfortunately, this responsibility is usually not assumed as much by the fathers because most women are left alone not only in child-bearing but also in rearing while the men hold paid jobs. In these families, raising a child becomes a physical, emotional, and economical burden to both spouses.

**Conclusion: Proposed Solutions and Ways of Implementations**

In order to promote gender egalitarianism in Turkey, ample possibilities for actions that could be taken both locally and nationally by policymakers are available. First, gender stereotypes should be overcome inside the classroom by teaching students to respect gender equality and ensuring that students internalize it. Teachers and school administrators could go through sufficient training and check that the textbooks that they will be teaching do not have latent or manifest examples of gender-based representations for work opportunities (such as female nurses and male doctors).

Although primary school education is compulsory, six percent of the Turkish population was reported to be illiterate as of 2010. Unfortunately, a large portion of them tended to be women -approximately ten percent of the female population- since some parents do not send their daughters to school, thinking that they do not need formal education to become housewives. In such cases, being deprived of education not only hampers their ability to find opportunities for

employment in the paid labor force, but also prevents them from learning about their legal rights in the face of violence and denies them of simple opportunities for entertainment. That is to say, more educational facilities should be built not only in urban but also in rural regions of Turkey and families should be persuaded to send their daughters to school. These facilities should also have legal and vocational training opportunities available for women to teach them to become less dependent on their husbands.

It is a truism that women’s autonomy and self-reliance depend partly on their participation in the labor force. Women who participate in unpaid labor by engaging in agricultural activities in the rural regions should be able to receive their effort’s worth and also benefit from social security. The prerequisite for most women who either work or want to work outside of the home is the existence of preschools and day care centers. For this purpose, legal and administrative regulations should be made to render possible the formation of preschools and day care centers in all private and state enterprises regardless of the number of women who work in these companies. This web of preschools and day care centers should be disseminated around the smallest accommodation units.\textsuperscript{105}

Other important facilities that help women gain more independence are women’s shelters. The women’s shelters were first opened in the late 1960s in various industrialized societies but only as late as the early 1990s in Turkey. As of 2011, however, there were only 69 women’s shelters throughout the whole country and most of them were plagued by financial and managerial problems.\textsuperscript{106} According to Municipality Law No. 5393, municipalities with a population of more than 50,000 are obligated to establish women’s shelters.\textsuperscript{107} By such standards, at least 149 municipalities should have opened shelter houses, albeit the large cities

\textsuperscript{105} Tanilli, Server. \textit{Ne Olursa Olsun Savasiyorlar: Kadin Sorununun Neresindeyiz?} pg. 232.
\textsuperscript{106} Sallan Gul, Songul. \textit{Turkiye’de Kadin Siginmaevleri}, pg. 84.
needing more than one to offer support to women. The number and quality of existing shelters is therefore woefully inadequate in comparison to what is needed. Among these only 21 have been owned and run by the municipalities in 2011. Those operated by NGOs, on the other hand, face major difficulties because they receive very little financial or administrative support from the government and local administrations. To lessen the rate of domestic violence, more women’s shelters and counseling centers should be opened with increased quality in Turkey to adequately reach out to all women and their children who need a place to stay to save their lives and escape domestic abuse at home. The state should also financially support existing women’s shelters to make them more sustainable and free them of budgetary duress. Canan Arin, co-founder of the Association for the Education and Support of Women Candidates, Purple Roof (the first women’s shelter in Turkey which was closed due to a lack of funds), the Purple Roof Foundation (first autonomous women’s group), and the Istanbul Bar Association Women’s Rights Enforcement Center, elucidated potential implementations about women’s shelters:

“The information about the women accommodating in these shelters should not be provided to anybody, the shelters’ locations and locations of their children’s schools should be kept confidential, the fact that shelters are places of accommodation and not prisons should be socially accepted, and support programs that could promote the autonomy of these women should be offered.”

Keeping the location of these shelters confidential is especially vital since the past is full of instances of men murdering their wives or girlfriends once they stepped outside their shelters.

The scarcity of shelters is only part of the problem caused by not properly implementing the existing legislations. The practice of holding religious ceremonies instead of an official marriage (marriage license) is banned. Anyone who gets a religious marriage without the civil one is sentenced from two to six months, though this can be terminated in case he or she obtains

109 Arin, Canan. *Personal Interview*.
110 Turkish Civil Code of 2002, Law No. 4721, art. 143.
a civil marriage.\textsuperscript{111} In case this person is married (bearing in mind that Islam does not prohibit polygamy), he/she gets an additional sentence of six months to two years. Due to the strong influence of Islam among some civil servants and policymakers, the law is not being enforced strictly and many polygamous couples are openly in violation of the legal system. The first step in eliminating this practice - which harms women more than anything else - is to strictly penalize those who have religious ceremonies without proof of the actual marriage license.

The widely held customary practices that keep the power ratio between genders imbalanced are incompatible with the judicial reforms that yield a major transformation towards gender equality.\textsuperscript{112} The discrepancy between law and social customs causes women to get hurt physically, emotionally, sexually and economically every day. The grounds for the handicap in exercising women’s legal rights are twofold. First, most of these unlawful practices are condoned by the police, who generally send victims trying to find refuge back to their abusive husbands on the grounds of not interfering in a family matter.\textsuperscript{113} It is for this reason that most other victims choose not to go to the police when they had experienced intra-family violence. Police officers need to get trained about the duties and responsibilities of their jobs, including taking victims of violence to hospitals instead of placing them back in the hands of abusers. Also, staff members at health institutions and district offices, judges and prosecutors should go through an on-the-job training about violence against women.\textsuperscript{114}

During our interview, Liz Amado set forth her opinions about how to further mobilize around the law violations in Turkey:

\textsuperscript{111} Turkish Penal Code of 2004, Law No. 5237, art. 230.
\textsuperscript{114} The Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW – Turkey: Women’s Platform on the Turkish Penal Code. Shadow NGO Report on Turkey’s Sixth Periodic Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, for submission to the 46\textsuperscript{th} Session of CEDAW. July 2010.
“Turkish laws are far ahead of the conditions in Turkey. But many shortcomings and problems exist at the implementations of the new government, police, health workers, judiciary, municipalities and local authorities. Therefore, I do not believe that sole education of these institutions is enough. A monitoring and penalty system should be developed in order to propel these institutions to implement the laws.”

Second, most of these women are not fully aware of their legal rights. Raising consciousness about women’s rights is the only way to bring about social change in a strongly biased community. For example, the Human Rights Education Program for Women, which has been carried out by the independent women’s NGO Women for Women’s Human Rights (WWHR) – New Ways, was developed in 1995. The program succeeded in educating women on their human rights and helping them acquire the skills to take action upon the infringement of their rights. Its results have so far been highly positive. After partaking in the program, 63% of the women successfully put an end to the physical violence and 75% were able to either stop or reduce the amount of psychological violence they were experiencing. These women also illustrated that gender norms and roles about housework and decision-making could and should be restated. Similar social support programs in rural and urban areas geared towards the empowerment of women should be initiated. Furthermore, information on women’s legal rights should also be manifested in several different languages other than Turkish (e.g., Kurdish, Arabic) at the police stations or district offices for speakers of other languages.

Not only women, but also some men are not aware of women’s rights and do not comprehend the necessity of gender equality. Nazan Moroglu, lawyer, activist, and academician in the field of women’s rights, suggests the dissemination of programs explaining gender

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115 Amado, Liz Ercevik. Personal Interview.
116 Amado and Ilkcaracan. “Human Rights Education as a Tool of Grassroots Organizing and Social Transformation.”
117 The Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW – Turkey. Shadow NGO Report on Turkey’s Sixth Periodic Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
equality and combating against domestic violence to male staff members at workplaces.\textsuperscript{118} She also argues that because it is compulsory for every able man to do military service in Turkey, such educative programs could also be held in the military institutions. In order to dissuade men from violence against women, information should also be provided about victims of abuse in these programs.

Part of the reason why violence against women is seen as an individual offense but not a social problem is the lack of national statistics or nationwide surveys. In order to understand its scope and to bring about social change, national data from institutions such as the Turkish Statistical Institute (Turkstat) or more official nationwide research studies about the rate and frequency of different types of violence against women should be collected. Higher scale studies with more centers are also needed to start getting more accurate data. The government could implement most of these actions by allocating a small portion of its budget into tackling the issue of violence against women, one which has already been called into question during Turkey’s European Union (EU) Accession Process.

However, a coordinated approach between the judiciaries and police, collaboration between the women’s NGOs and the state, all-inclusive state policy and political decisiveness about, and serious budget allotted for this problem are not the only necessary needs of this violence prone country. Turkey was one of the first countries in Europe to give women the right to vote and to run for public office in the 1930 local elections and in the 1934 parliamentary elections - earlier than many industrialized countries like France and Belgium. Currently only 78 of the 550 national deputies in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey are women, however.\textsuperscript{119} Similarly, only 1 out of the 25 ministers in the national cabinet is female. As Nilgun Guresin, a

\textsuperscript{119} Turkish Statistical Institute. \textit{Women in Statistics 2011}. 
famous blogger who has written about domestic violence and interviewed lawyers about women’s legal rights in Turkey, regrettably states: “There are only a few women in the Parliament and none of these female representatives are mobilizing in solidarity around our country’s epidemic: violence against women.”

During our interview, Guresin expressed the necessity of revising the Parliamentary Elections Law with the purpose of making affirmative action a must so that both genders would be represented by 50% in political parties. In order to solve problems about women’s rights, women need to appear much more in politics and local governments; they need to hold positions where decisions are made.

Turkey has ratified several international agreements regarding violence against women, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international bill of rights for women. Unfortunately, Turkey’s 2010 shadow NGO report showed very little progress on curbing discrimination against women since 2005. The NGOs were obliged to reiterate most of the demands regarding violence against women that were exhibited in the 2005 shadow NGO report. The Turkish government should begin displaying political will to protect the well-being of its citizens, regardless of gender, by obeying the requirements of international agreements regarding violence against women that it has already ratified. Support from the government can be very effective in eliminating this alarming issue. Public officials, more than anyone else, should not make any sort of discriminating or aggressive comments against any group (e.g., women, refugees, homosexuals). For that, however, the Turkish government should reaffirm and strengthen the secular system that is in place. The abortion problem was only one of many instances of the secular regime coming under attack.

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121 The Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW – Turkey. Shadow NGO Report on Turkey’s Sixth Periodic Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
Violence against women is a major violation of human rights and a social criminal problem. Notwithstanding numerous legal reforms on gender equality, male hegemony prevails in all fields, including education, labor force, media, religion and politics. Eradication of the patriarchal social system and empowerment of women could only be made feasible through the collective efforts of all individuals from different disciplinary fields.
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