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## Barriers to Reporting Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by Syrian Women Refugees: A Case Study of Syrian Women Refugees in Turkey

### *Suriyeli Kadın Mültecilerin Aile İçi Şiddeti Raporlamalarının Önündeki Engeller: Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Kadın Mültecilere İlişkin Bir Örnek Olay*

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#### ÖZ

*Bu çalışma, Suriyeli sığınmacı kadınların aile içi şiddet türleri ve bu şiddetle nasıl baş ettiklerini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın odak noktası, Suriyeli sığınmacı kadınların şiddete maruz kaldıklarında resmi kurumlardan veya kuruluşlardan yardım aramama nedenlerini belirlemektir. Araştırmada nitel yöntem kullanılmış olup, Ankara'daki 20 Suriyeli sığınmacı kadınla derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, kadınlar eşleri tarafından farklı şiddet türlerine maruz kalmışlardır. Şiddetle başa çıkmak için, kadınlar sakinleştirme stratejileri kullanmaktadırlar. Sosyo-kültürel faktörlerin yanı sıra, şiddetle ve kadınların algılarıyla, sunulan hizmetlerle ve iltica koşulları ile ilgili ve benzeri faktörler kadınların resmi kurumlardan yardım aramama nedenleridir. Araştırmada, Suriyeli sığınmacı kadınlara kadın hakları, kadına yönelik şiddet, aile içi şiddet ve onun sağlık ve sosyal etkileri hakkında farkındalık programlarının artırılması önerilmiştir.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Aile içi şiddet, sığınmacı kadınlar, Suriyeli kadınlar, yardım aramama nedenleri

#### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the forms of intimate partner violence (IPV) that Syrian refugee women are subjected to. It also examines the strategies that are used to deal with IPV. The main focus of the study is to determine the reasons that prevent Syrian women refugees from seeking formal help. The study use qualitative method, the data were gathered using an in-depth semi-structured interview with 20 married Syrian refugees in Ankara. The study found that most of the women were subjected to all forms of IPV. It also found that the women used Placating strategy to deal with IPV. Moreover, it also discovered that five main factors hinder women from seeking help or talking about IPV with specialists. These factors are socio-culture factors, factors related to the nature of violence, factors related to women's perceptions, factors related to services provided, and factors related to asylum conditions. The study recommended the need to increase awareness programs for Syrian refugee women about women's rights, violence against women, as well as health and social consequences of IPV.*

**Keywords:** Intimate partner violence, refugee, Syrian women, barriers to reporting

## INTRODUCTION

Majority of studies of IPV focus on female victims of violence more than males, this is because violence has more serious consequences for women and they are more in need of help compared to men (Vantar & Bjørkly, 2008). Many studies use the term Intimate Partner Violence or Domestic Violence interchangeably to denote abuse in intimacy. However, the term Domestic Violence is a broad concept that may include partner violence, child abuse, and/or violence to elderly people (García-Moreno et al., 2005). In this study, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is used rather than domestic violence because it is more specific. The intimate partner in this study means the "man/husband". The World Health Organization has defined intimate partner violence as: " any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (García-Moreno et al, 2005: 14). Previous studies indicated that women are more prone to gender-based violence in times of conflict and humanitarian crises. This is due to the lack of security, absence of social protection, and difficulty of accessing services. Women are exposed to gender-based violence, which includes child marriage, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and IPV (UNFPA, 2016; WHO, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2000; Usta et al, 2008). Changing traditional gender roles within the family and widespread trauma among conflict survivors also increase women's vulnerability to gender-based violence during and after wars (Amnesty International, 2004). During war, women are more likely to be exposed to violence even inside their homes by an intimate partner. The Human Rights Watch report (2000), reports on the increase in domestic violence rates in refugee camps in Tanzania, this is as a result of lack of sufficient accommodation, lack of security, and difficulty in obtaining food in refugee camps. The Human Rights Watch of 2006 also report that; the levels of domestic violence also increased during the second intifada in Gaza and the West Bank. In the Refugee Women's Resources Project Survey (2002) in Palestine, 90% of the participants mentioned an increase in violence against women as a result of the changing political, economic, and social conditions in Palestine (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Domestic violence also increased during the Rhodesian war in Zimbabwe. The women were faced with increased IPV caused by the frustration that their husbands faced as a result of loss of jobs and properties accompanied by the deterioration in the economic situation (Colson, 1995). In Sri Lanka during war, gender roles within the family changed this in turn leads to a situation where the men used violence to control their wives and restore their authority over the family. As such, violence by the intimate partner increased significantly (Gurgue et al, 2017). Rees, (2004) explores the experiences of domestic violence of East Timorese women asylum seekers residing in Australia. The study identified factors such as patriarchal culture, oppression in the country of origin, fears of resettlement as factors that contribute to the intensification of IPV among refugee women. In a study conducted by Tappis et al., (2012) it was found that while 30% of Iraqi refugee women living in Syria were subjected to physical violence and verbal or emotional abuse at some point in their lives, 71% were exposed to one or more forms of domestic violence during the past year. Al-Modallal et al (2014) also showed that 78% of

Palestinian refugee women who live in refugee camps in Jordan have been exposed to one or more forms of IPV.

When we look at Syrian refugees women, it was shown in The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report of 2016 that Syrian women reported an increase in domestic violence that was caused by lack of resources. In addition, the lack of job opportunities for men increased their tension and thus their propensity to exact violence against their wives. Men used violence on their wives as a means of venting the pressures they are experiencing. The study of Al-Natour et al (2019) aimed to describe the experiences of Syrian women living with IPV in refugee camps in Jordan. The results of the study showed that during the war in Syria, the risk of women being exposed to violence from their husbands increased. The social changes resulting from the war caused the men to abuse their wives more frequently. The displacement and the new life in the refugee camps coupled with the loss of support from family and friends created social isolation for women, the women participating in the study reported changes in their husband's behavior, as they became more nervous and more controlling.

Prior studies also shows that women who are subjected to violence from their husbands do not tend to disclose their experiences of violence with strangers, and often talk about violence with their close social networks such as family, friends, neighbors, and so on. Hacettepe University, Institute of Population Studies in collaboration with Ministry of Family and Social Policy conducted a study with women in the age group 15-59, in 12 rural and urban districts in Turkey in 2015. The results of the study shows that 89% of women who were exposed to physical violence or sexual violence by their partners or the men living with them did not seek help from official institutions. Among the women, only 37% report their IPV cases to their families, 24% to neighbors or friends, and 17% to the husband's family. The study also found that 44% of women did not talk about IPV with anyone, and the data collectors were the first people that the women disclose their IPV experience with. Prior studies also show that formal institutions help abused women by applying one or a combination of the following:

- Seeking help from local clergy or leaders.
- Seeking help from a psychiatrist.
- Seeking help from social workers.
- Talking about violence with doctor or nurse.
- Requesting help from refugee support centers.
- Helping the husband through family therapy.
- Providing shelters to women.
- Talking to someone at a domestic violence program or hotline.

- Contacting the police.
- Filing a criminal case in court.
- Requesting for the assistance of legal men.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

The study adopted the qualitative descriptive method to obtain in-depth data about the IPV experience of Syrian refugee women, and the reasons why Syrian women refugees refrain from reporting IPV. The qualitative methodology is one of the research methods that are used to reach an in-depth understanding and comprehensive description of human phenomena. Max Weber stated that; to understand the behavior of individuals and groups towards a particular phenomenon, the researcher must understand the vision, attitudes, and values of the respondents. Thus, qualitative research helps the researcher to integrate with the human phenomenon and coexist with it in order to fully understand it (Daniel, 2014).

### **Field Work Procedures**

Before starting the fieldwork, the researchers obtained permission from the Ethics Committee of Scientific Research at Hacettepe University in, January 2021. After obtaining the approval permission, the researcher contacted three centers in Ankara that are concerned with providing medical services, psychological and social support services for refugees in Ankara to conduct research interviews with Syrian women refugees. However, the researcher did not obtain approval to conduct interviews in these centers. The reason for the disapproval was that due to the corona pandemic, all activities were diverted to the online consultations. Refugee women were not received in these centers except in emergency cases. Thus, the researcher had to find another way to access research samples. In 2017, the researcher was trained as a social worker within the project titled "Strengthening Access to Sexual, Reproductive Health, and Sexual/Gender-Based Violence Services for Syrian and Other Refugees", the project was under the banner of Women and Girl Safe Spaces (WGSS). This project was carried out at the Ulubey Center Sağlık Ocağı, Altındağ/Ankara, and two other refugee centers in Ankara. During the training period, the researcher created a feminist group work of 10 women to empower them. The researcher gave awareness lectures on violence against women and women's rights. The researcher contacted one of the women from this group and told her that she was in the process of doing research on "Syrian Women's Social and Health Experiences in Ankara" and that she wanted to conduct individual interviews with a number of Syrian women refugees with specific features. The researcher did not reveal the title of the study, due to ethical considerations (See World Health Organization, 2002, p. 12.). The woman did not participate in the study; however, the woman agreed to help the researcher in accessing the research sample. The sampling was as follows:

Study participants were selected using a "Snowball Sample". Each of the women interviewed recommended another woman who had the same characteristics required in the research, and in this way, the research sample consisted of 20 Syrian refugees. The criteria for selecting the participants is simple; be a Syrian refugee, married, and living in Ankara. The interviews were conducted by visiting the women's homes in Ulubey Altındađı, Baraj kuzey Ankara, and Keçiören in Ankara, Turkey. The data were collected between March-May 2021.

### **Ethical Aspects of Research**

The guidelines of the World Health Organization Guide to Research on Domestic Violence (2002) were followed as an ethical guide during the course of this study.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using an in-depth semi-structured interview. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are interviews in which the questions are organized in a way that allows the respondents to express their feelings and emotions toward a particular human phenomenon without restriction. To conduct the interviews, appointments were taken from the respondents at their conducive date, time, and place. The researcher avoided conducting interviews during the weekend, due to the possibility of the husband being at home. The researcher exercises interviewing skills and techniques in social work. One of the most important techniques was to build trust and provide an appropriate atmosphere for the participants to talk about their problems. Good listening skills and empathy with the participant were exercised. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. Some of the participants preferred to conduct the interview at the house of their neighbor or friend, for fear that their husband would come at any moment. To allow the interviewee to talk about her experience with violence without fear, the researcher asked her to be alone during the interview. She was told that the subject of the interview would be changed if someone interrupt the interview.

### **Data analysis**

The data used in this research was analyzed using MAXQDA software. This program is used as a powerful tool in order to conduct mixed methods and qualitative researches (Michael, Rädiker, 2021). The data were analyzed in four steps: open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and the data summarization.

## **FINDINGS**

### **The Demographics of the respondents**

Table 1 shows the demographics of the respondents, the majority of the respondents come from Aleppo. They arrived to Turkey 3 to 8 years ago. The age of the respondents ranged between 22-60 years and the age of their spouses ranged between 32-69 years. As for the age of marriage, according to the respondents, the customs and tradition of the society is the main reason for

marriage at a young age. The customs of the society dictates that a girl goes to primary school until she reaches grade 6, after she reaches grade 6 the girl will leave school and will be prepared for marriage. The war also worsens the situation. Therefore, the majority of the respondents got married before reaching the age of 18. Regarding the respondents' past work experience, only one of the women reported her work experience, she was working as a tailor in Syria, but after the birth of her daughter in Turkey, she couldn't continue. Currently, only 2 of women have a job. One of the women works as a hairdresser in her home and the other works as a Turkish language teacher in secondary school. (Tablo 1).

**Table 1: The Demographics of the respondents**

Name	Age	Age of Marriage	Number of Children	Education Status	Women's Work Experience	City of Resistance	Age of Husbands	Education Status of Husbands
SA1	41	14	6	Illiterate	None	Aleppo	52	Illiterate
SB2	50	14	4	Secondary school	None	Aleppo	62	Illiterate
SC3	30	14	5	Secondary school	None	Aleppo	45	Primary school
SD4	25	18	3	Secondary school	None	Idlip	47	Primary school
SE5	36	28	3	Primary school	None	Aleppo	51	Primary school
SF6	32	17	4	Primary school	None	Aleppo	45	Primary school
SG7	31	24	2	Secondary school	None	Aleppo	47	Primary school
SH8	40	20	4	Primary school	Tailor	Aleppo	50	Primary school
SI9	24	17	2	Primary school	None	Aleppo	33	Illiterate
SJ10	33	22	3	Primary school	None	Aleppo	40	Illiterate
SK11	60	16	10	Illiterate	None	Aleppo	69	Illiterate
SL12	43	15	4	Primary school	None	Aleppo	53	Illiterate
SM13	22	16	4	Primary school	None	Aleppo	35	Primary school
SN14	24	16	3	Primary school	Hairdresser	Aleppo	33	Secondary school
SO15	32	14	6	Primary school	None	Aleppo	42	Illiterate
SS16	33	13	5	Secondary school	None	Aleppo	47	Primary school
ST17	57	17	6	Primary school	None	Aleppo	66	Primary school
SP18	28	13	4	Primary school	None	Aleppo	32	Secondary school
SQ19	31	13	5	Primary school	None	Aleppo	40	Secondary school
SR20	33	24	1	PhD student	Teacher	Aleppo	38	university graduate

## Forms of IPV

Previous studies conducted in the Middle East on gender-based violence against women indicate that the culture of patriarchal society and the imbalance of power are the major reason for women's exposure to violence (Haj-Yahia, 2005; Mac-Tavish, 2016; Cankurtaran & Albayrak, 2018). Syrian society is a patriarchal society that enforces customs and traditions that maintain the continuity of the patriarchal culture; accordingly, illustrations are going to be provided. In

patriarchal societies, a man plays the dominant role within the family and the woman is a subordinate to him. In this society, stereotyped roles for women and men are predetermined and the position of women in society also is determined. Women in these societies are always in the second class and take secondary roles in society. As for the man, he possesses all the power and authority in this society. These powers and authorities often allow him to exercise violence against woman and this is reflected in the social structure of the family. One of the basic duties of a woman in the home is to take care of the affairs of the house, such as cleaning, washing, cooking, taking care of the children, and being obedient and respectful to her husband.

In this study, the respondents were subjected to psychological violence, controlling behavior, physical violence, sexual violence, and economic violence from their husbands. The respondents reported that they were exposed to more IPV when they were in Syria. This happened due to the customs and traditions of patriarchy. For example, they mentioned that customs and traditions in Syria do not allow young women to leave the house on their own and there must be a man with them or their mother-in-law. Therefore, their husbands are used to controlling them strictly. They neither allow them to leave the house, nor go to the market to buy their needs, or even visit their families alone. They also mentioned that according to customs and traditions, when a son marries, he lives with his family. His wife becomes responsible for the duties of the husband's family (housekeeping, preparing food, and washing dishes) in addition to taking care of the husband and children. Failure to fulfill these duties is a major reason for their exposure to physical and psychological violence from their husbands. Furthermore, the women reported that not complying with the orders of the husband's family also exposed them to IPV.

As SB2 mentioned:

*"Once my uncle, my husband's father asked me to prepare breakfast for him and I was late in preparing the breakfast because I was busy with my children. My husband hit me and spat me and said if "my father or mother asked you for something, you should leave anything behind and go do the thing they asked of you. The problems between me and my husband were always caused by my mother-in-law and my father-in-law. Because they really want to degrade my personality" (SB2, 50 years old, Aleppo)*

Some women were subjected to physical and psychological violence from their husbands because the husband wanted to prove his masculinity in front of his family. In Syria men are used to gaining an appreciation for their masculinity through controlling their wives, the and society has been encouraging them consistently.

As SC3 mentioned:

*"When we were in Syria, my husband kept me angry for no reason. He always degrades me in front of people to a certain extent, especially when his family is present. **He tries to show them that he is a man and I am under his control.** For example, he often orders me to go and make*

*tea or such, so that it appears that he is a man in front of them. He also prevents me from going outside without his permission. I was allowed to visit my family only once a week and he always threatened to divorce me or marry another woman. But after we came to Turkey the situation changed and he became a little better” (SC3, 30 years old, Aleppo).*

In addition, because of maintaining living with husbands’ extended family, women are subject to further physical and psychological violence from the mother-in-law. The women reported that the mother-in-law controlled them and interfered in all the affairs of their lives. Some of them were also subjected to physical violence. According to Cankurtaran & Albayrak (2019), the husband’s mother’s control over the wife is also regarded as “psychological violence”. This is because of the woman’s (mother-in-law) attempt to put another woman under her control to gain power and dominance.

The respondents states that:

*“My husband did not hit me, but my mother-in-law used to beat me, and if his mother hit me, he wouldn’t say anything. My mother-in-law hit me twice during pregnancy. I had bleedings. I told my husband that I couldn’t do anything to her because I consider her as my mother” (SP18, 28 years old, Aleppo).*

*“When I first got married, I lived with my mother-in-law in the house, and that was one of the worst days of my life, because my mother-in-law is a tyrannical and domineering woman. I and my sisters-in-laws were responsible from the house, but I was the one with most of the responsibilities for laundry and helping her with the cooking. All the decisions of the house were in the hands of my mother-in-law. I never felt privacy. Even my dress was determined by my mother-in-law. I was supposed to listen to her words and I could not object. Sometimes I had to sleep with my husband by force, because I was afraid that if I didn’t my mother-in-law would bit me or create more problems for me.” (SF6, 32 years old, Aleppo)*

There is another custom of the society that women referred to, which is the habit of checking the virginity of the girl, which caused the girls to be subjected to sexual violence on the first night of marriage. They called this custom “The White Bed Sheet”. As one of the respondent stated:

*“The first day of marriage was a difficult day for me because I was a stranger and I was very scared of him. The custom in Syria is that when a girl gets married, she must have sexual intercourse on the first night, and the symbol of her virginity is to see a little blood drop in the white bed sheet. So my husband takes the sheet and shows it to his mother and my mother to make sure of my virginity. I didn’t want this, but.....”(Crying) (SI9, 24 Y, Aleppo).*

This study also found that as a result of the conditions of the war that began in March 2011, and the social and economic changes in the society, internal displacement and housing in camps, and the accompanying difficult economic conditions led to an increase in IPV against women from their husbands.



As SH8 mentioned:

*"There were a lot of explosions in Aleppo, even our house was bombed. We left Aleppo and went to Bab al-Salama camp. We stayed there for 7 months, but living in the camp is difficult. There were no bathrooms nearby. At that time, my husband became nervous all day. He yells at me and the children. I became afraid to talk to him so fearing that he might beat me or the children. I was silent all the time. I prayed to God a lot to save us from the camp life (SH8, 40 years old, Aleppo).*

The respondents mentioned that asylum in Turkey, moving to live in a new society, and living in a separate house away from the husband's family contributed a lot to alleviating violence against them. Most of them stated that they feel freer than they did in Syria. The women mentioned that after migrating to Turkey, the controlling behavior of their husbands changed. They further mentioned that they now go out of the house on their own, they go to neighbors and friends, and sometimes go shopping. The researcher observed that men still control women because women are expected to obey their husbands and they should not leave the house without the consent of the husband.

As SF6 mentioned:

*"After we came to Turkey, my life takes 180 degrees turn. My husband became affectionate to me, and he neither hit me, nor was he mad at me, not even once. Before emigrating from Syria, my life with him was hell. We lived with his family, my mother-in-law was very controlling. Now I visit the neighbors, go out into the street without covering my face, and go to the market to buy my supplies and children's supplies, and even if I get a job, he has no problem with me working outside the house and help with financial matters. The thing is that I discovered my husband's affectionate personality after we came to Turkey."(SF6, 32 years old, Aleppo).*

### **Dealing with IPV**

Women have developed many strategies for dealing with violence. These strategies differ according to the severity of the violence and the type of violence. The researcher observed that one of the ways that women get rid of IPV is by obeying the husband thereby fulfilling all his requests and taking care of him. Additionally, avoiding arguing with the husband and not doing anything without his consent also helps. Likewise, women avoid any situations that would anger the husband. This type of strategy is referred to by Goodman, (2003) as "placating strategies."

### **Factors That Hinder Women from Seeking Help from Official Authorities**

Previous studies found that women, who live in patriarchal societies in developing countries, do not report domestic violence to the police or authorities (Al-Shdayfat & Hatamleh, 2017). Women in general and Arab women, in particular, do not like outside interference in family problems (Abu-Ras, 2003; Aswad & Gary, 1996). This is due to the fact that in the culture of Arab societies,

domestic violence is considered a family issue and thus, it must be kept within the family (Al-Natour, 2019). Alsaba & Kapilashrami, (2016) indicated that; reporting IPV in a patriarchal society is regarded as some sort of treachery to the family values. Arab women hide IPV and this reduces their chances of seeking help from official authorities (Abu-Ras, 2003). Cankurtaran & Albayrak, (2019) also found that Syrian women do not talk about domestic violence with anyone, and tend to hide it in order to maintain their family solitude. MacTavish's study (2016) identified three obstacles that prevent Syrian refugee women in Za'atari camp-Jordan from reporting incidents of sexual violence. The obstacles are; lack of confidence in the reporting authorities, Fear or revenge and retaliation, and social stigma or the feeling of self-pity and shame. Al-Shdayfat & Hatamleh, (2017) also found that there are five main reasons that prevent women from reporting IPV to health care providers. These reasons are: acceptance of violence, lack of social support, lack of trust in health care providers, fear of the consequences of reporting, and lack of empowering women.

In this study, we also found that; women reported that when they were in Syria, they never seek help from any official authority when they were exposed to IPV. This is because, according to customs and traditions, violence is a family matter and strangers should not interfere in it. Society also stigmatizes the woman who complains about her husband to the formal authorities especially the police or court of law. All problems between husband and wife are only resolved within the family framework. All the participants told the researcher that she was the first stranger they spoke to about their experience of IPV. Only one of the women mentioned that when she was in Syria, she used to talk to the imam of the mosque when she was subjected to severe physical violence from her husband or when her mother-in-law kicked her out of the house. But he did not give her any help, rather he only advised her to obey her husband and mother-in-law so that she would not be subjected to more violence. She also thought to go to the police, but she did not go because she knew that she would not find any help. Regarding of factors that prevent women from seeking help from formal authority, the analyses of in-depth interviews shows that 4 factors are responsible for preventing women to seek help. These factors are:

1. Socio-cultural factors.
2. Factors related to violence.
3. Factors related to women's perceptions.
4. Factors related to the services provided.
5. Factors related to asylum conditions.

### **1. Socio-Cultural Factors**

In the Syrian society, it is believed that violence is a family issue and that it is not permissible to reveal marital secrets. The women mentioned that before marriage they are recommended by their families to preserve the family's privacy to ensure the continuation of the marriage. Therefore, women think that it is not ethical to seek help outside the family when they are exposed to

violence. Only two of the women mentioned that a woman who is subjected to violence has the right to seek help from women's support centers, doctors, psychologists, and other specialists.

**Respondents were asked about whether a woman has the right to complain to her husband to the police as a result of being subjected to IPV.**

The women's answers were that; it is "very shameful and disgracing" for a woman to go to the police stations and complain about her husband. The words "shameful and disgraceful" were repeated more than 20 times when encoding the data. They mentioned that a woman's complaint to her husband violates the values of society. Therefore, it leads to the disintegration of the family and in turn negatively affects the children. They stated that; a woman should look for other solutions with her family or her husband's family instead of complaining to the police. Only two respondents believe that when a woman is subjected to IPV, she has the right to seek help from the police. And the police must help her.

As SM13 and SK11 mentioned:

*"I am against women who are complaining about their husbands in the police station. This is very disgracing for us in Syria, as well as in our conservative society. Because I do not like women to expose their husbands in front of others and these are the secrets of the family, and this is a great shame and error for her, and if she does this it indicates that she wasn't raised properly. No matter the size of the problems between them, the police are not supposed to be involved in marital problems"* (SM13, 22 years old, Aleppo).

*"God forbid!!! This is a great shame for us for a woman to go to the police and complain about her husband. It is not right for her to complain about her husband. He is the father of her children. If she goes to complain to the police and if they take him into custody, who will take care of the children? A respectable wife always hides her husband's shortcomings. If she doesn't do that, it means that her parents doesn't know how to raise a child. So they did not raise her well. For the sake of her children, a good woman stands with her husband no matter how hard he is".* (SK11, 60 years old, Aleppo).

**2. Factors Related to Violence**

Some women do not submit any request for assistance from the official authorities, because they are afraid of increasing violence against them by their husbands if they find out. A request for help to the official authorities may be a reason for divorce and deprivation of children. The women are also economically dependent on their husbands. Some women also mentioned that their husbands do not allow them to leave the house without their consent and they specify whom they can meet. Therefore, some husbands isolated their wives from help providers.

**3. Factors Related to The Respondent's Perceptions**

Some women think that they do not need to seek help from outside; they feel that they are strong enough and can solve their problems on their own. Some of them view violence as a normal thing, and that their marital life is free from violence, so there is no need to seek help from outside. Some women feel that no one will listen to them and that they will be blamed. Some women have reached a stage of despair, so they think that no one can help them. Others believe that seeking help from strangers especially from support centers for women, who are subjected to violence, contributes to the disintegration of the family.

As SE5 stated that:

*“In Turkey, many centers that help women are inciting women against their husbands and telling them that; if there is a problem between her and her husband, she should call the police, but I believed this is a big mistake, because if the children knew that their mother complained about their father, this will affect their psychological state, it is better to seek help from a respectable person like the imam of the mosque or the sheikh of the neighborhood instead of the police.”(SE5, 36 years old, Aleppo).*

#### **4. Factors Related to the Nature of the Services Provided**

Some women do not trust centers that support women and talk to social and psychological specialists about violence because their personal experiences have led to a lack of confidence in the centers and service providers. Others neither know who to talk to, nor did they know the locations of the supporting authorities that provide services to women who are subjected to IPV.

As SJ10 stated that:

*“Once upon a time, a psychological counselor wanted to destroy my neighbor’s family. Her husband used to beat her a lot. She went to the counselor and she told her that “you have the right to do anything without your husband. Do whatever you want with him, and you can complain to the police and we can come take you with the children and protect you for 8 months,” and my neighbor was convinced. She came and told me, and then I told her that; it is a wrong and forbidden method to deprive your husband from his children and for this reason your family will be destroyed. My neighbor kept going to this psychological counselor. I and the rest of the neighbors advised her a lot, and she gave up the idea.”(SJ10, 33 years old, Aleppo).*

#### **5. Factors Related to Asylum Conditions to Turkey**

Some women reported that they do not want to seek help from the official authorities for fear of not receiving assistance because they are refugees and feel that there is some discrimination against them. They also mentioned that their situation here in Turkey is not permanent and that the husband's complaint may cause him to be imprisoned and/or deported to Syria. Thus, they may lose their breadwinner.

As SO15 mentioned that:

*"The first time I arrived in Turkey, I was very annoyed because I left everything behind and came to a country that is not my country. I don't like to talk about my problems with my husband to outsiders. Because the Turks don't like the Syrians and they won't give me anything if I ask for help. We know that if I complain they will arrest him or they can deport him to Syria. And if that happens, what will I do? (SO15, 32 years old, Aleppo).*

### **To whom do Women Turn, When Exposed to IPV?**

Previous studies indicated that women when exposed to violence from their husbands, they normally take resort to the informal network of relationships, which includes family, friends, and neighbors (Riddell & others, 2009; Goodman, 2003; García-Moreno et al, 2005; Hacettepe University, Institute of population studies, 2015; Campbell & Rose, 2000) and they do not resort to seeking help from official authorities until after all opportunities for patience and endurance to violence have been exhausted (Hacettepe University, Institute of population studies, 2015). Talking with the family is sometimes unhelpful, because the family, in particular, may blame the woman for being the cause of the violence she was subjected to by not obeying her husband, not fulfilling the requirements of the house, or not performing her roles in the home as it should. In a study on marital violence among Syrian refugee women in refugee camps in Jordan, it was found that women like to talk about violence with family and friends and they find comfort doing it. However, some of them mentioned that there is no point in talking about violence with family and friends in that it does not contribute to solving the problem. On the contrary, family or friends blame the woman, and talking to them may increase violence from the husband (Al-Natour, 2019).

In this study it was found that most women talk with their families, especially with their mothers or sisters when they are subjected to IPV; and women reported receiving support from the family. The received support has been in the form of talking to the husband and his family to prevent the repetition of the violence. Some women mentioned that their families helped them divorce their husbands. However, some of them reported that they did not receive support from their families. They advised them only to endure, have patience, and sacrifice for the sake of their family. Nevertheless, the family blames the women, which makes them feel "humiliated", "weak" and "there is no support for them" said the respondents. In some cases, women have been subjected to physical violence from their paternal family in the process of requesting help against their husbands' violent behavior. Therefore, women continue tolerating their husbands' violent behavior both in cases of being silent and also not seeking help from any party. Talking to the family depends on the nature of the violence itself. Women, who experience severe physical violence acts, are more likely to report violence with someone than those who have experienced less physical violence (García-Moreno et al, 2005). In this study, most of the respondents mentioned that they turn to their families to seek help in the event of severe physical violence. In this case, the family intervenes and supports the woman. Even the husband's family intervenes to stop the

severe physical violence against the woman. Women also ask for help from their families in the event of her being expelled from the house by the husband. But some women mentioned that even in this case, their families do not support them. They always return to the husband's house. Thus, women feel "humiliated" and "broken". Also, in the case of economic violence, some women mentioned that they ask their families for money to buy their needs. The respondents did not talk about sexual violence with anyone before. They justified this as a private matter and should not be talked about. One of them told the researcher that she is the first person they talk to about their experience with sexual violence.

Some respondents mentioned that, when they were in Syria, their husbands prevented them from seeing their families. Even when they go to them, the husband's mother, sister, or the husband himself should go with them. The woman does not find an opportunity to talk about violence with her family. This result is consistent with that of García-Moreno et al, (2005), which found that; men control their wives and do not allow them to leave the house or meet with friends or family and men isolate women from potential sources of help. Some respondents prefer to talk about violence with friends and neighbors, and often they do not provide them with assistance too, but the aim of the talk is to relieve the pressures they are experiencing due to violence. The women reported that they started talking about violence with neighbors or friends after fleeing to Turkey. The reason for this is that when their husbands were in Syria, they did not allow them to leave the house on their own, so the husband's mother or sister must be present next to the woman. Women are also afraid to talk to neighbors because most of the time they are relatives of the husband. However, the freedom of living without the husband's family in Turkey made them resort to talking about violence with friends and neighbors. The women reported that they had more freedom to leave the house and go to the neighbors now. Some of them do not trust the neighbors, so they do not talk to them.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

This study finds that women were subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological violence and controlling behavior from their husbands. Besides husband violence, women are also exposed to both physical violence and controlling behavior by the mother-in-law. Customs, traditions, and living with the husband's family were the main reasons for the increase in IPV against women when they were in Syria. After seeking asylum in Turkey, and the accompanying social and economic changes in the structure of society that result from the migration, which were reflected in the structure of the family, are the reasons for the inclination to talk or seek help from outside. The Syrian women refugees resort to seeking help from their social networks .

The results of the study are consistent with the studies of Colson, (1995); Human Rights Watch, (2000); Rees, (2004); Human Rights Watch, (2006); Usta et al, (2008); UNFPA, (2016); Al-Natour, (2018). They both found high rates of violence from the intimate partner against women during the war and humanitarian conflicts .This study found that IPV was prevalent among Syrian refugee women before the war, as a result of the customs and traditions of the patriarchal society. This

means that it is not only the war that has created an environment for IPV by the husband. The culture of patriarchal society in the societies of the Middle East and North Africa gives men superiority over women, including the right to discipline one's wife and children (Al-Natour, 2019). In Syria, all family members are subject to the authority of the man, and the woman believes that she is always in need of his protection (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2014). These attitudes make the woman subservient to the man and create an environment for violence by the husband. Thus, women tolerate these conditions, which makes them accept violence as a normal phenomenon. This may be one of the reasons why they don't seek help. That is why some of the respondents indicated that their lives are free from violence and they do not need help. Talking about IPV is the first step to breaking the cycle of violence. The results of our study showed that the Syrian refugee women in Ankara did not ask for help, not even once from the official authorities.

This study also found that the culture of a society that considers IPV a "family issue" is the main factor that causes women not to report IPV. Despite the presence of the respondents in a new society, they still retain the customs and traditions of their original society. This result is supported by previous studies such as Haj-Yahia, (2002); Abu-Ras, (2003); Abu-Ras, (2007); Cankurtaran & Albayrak, (2019); Al-Natour et al, (2018); Al-Shdayfat & Hatamleh, (2017); Mactavish, (2016). The findings of this study also shows that the conditions of asylum and the poor economic and social conditions of refugee women constitute another factor that restrains women from asking for help. This was also indicated in the study of Abu-Ras, (2003) and Erez et al, (2009). They both stated that factors like; cultural and linguistic isolation, lack of knowledge of the sources of services, lack of familiarity with the procedures for applying to the criminal justice systems, feeling of racism towards immigrants .

This study also finds that factors relating to violence include; the economic dependence of the women on men, which plays an important role in the respondents' failure to seek help. This is consistent with feminist literature, which indicates that the economic and social situation represented by the financial dependency of the wife increases violence and reduces the chances of women seeking help from outside. Also, the man's feeling that the woman is subordinate to him gives him the right to control her and prevents her from asking for help. A number of respondents said that they tried to talk about the psychological pressures they are experiencing with psychologists and social workers, but their husbands did not allow them. Rose & Campbell, (2000) called this "forced isolation" (Rose & Campbell, 2000, p. 34). One of the factors is the woman's feeling of weakness and despair in finding help from others. The same conclusion was reached by Al-shdayfat, (2017). Haj-Yahia, (2005), stated in his study that the patriarchal orientation is reflected even in social care, health, mental health, and legal services. The lack of institutional support for women, the blame and attempts to preach by the providers of these services in the necessity of the husband's tolerance to maintain the continuity of the family, and the tolerance of

the violent husband. This made Palestinian women feel hopeless, helpless, and socially and psychologically isolated. These conditions caused them to not seek help from the official authorities when they were abused by their husbands.

Our study also found that women resort to solving marital problems with family members, and do not accept outside interference. The reason for this is mentioned by Haj- Yahia, (1995), and Haj- Yahia (2000). The two studies indicated that; Arab family is founded on the basis of the values of solidarity and mutual support between family members, and family privacy is of utmost importance, that is why issues like that of IPV are solved within the family.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

IPV is one of the biggest problems Syrian refugee women face in their marital lives. Despite the magnitude of this problem, women do not tend to talk about violence by their husbands with strangers. This is because of the societal beliefs that IPV is one of the problems that should be solved only within the family. Women's fear of the consequences of reporting IPV, such as; divorce and increased IPV hinders them from reporting IPV. There is the belief that asking for help from official authorities contributes to the disintegration of the family. In addition, women's economic dependence on their husbands also hinders them from reporting IPV. The husband also doesn't allow them to leave the house and go to places where help is provided to them. Lack of information on where to request for official help, economic and social conditions, women's fear of blame, and the feeling that no one can help them, led to the fact that women do not ask for help from the official authorities. Women seek help from their social networks, family, friends, neighbors, in-laws, and relatives, and find it useful in some cases. In addition to that, women have developed many strategies for dealing with violence from their husbands.

This study recommends the need to increase awareness programs about women's rights, violence against women, gender, health, and social consequences of IPV to Syrian refugee women. Encouraging women to talk about the violence they are subjected to by making them aware that violence committed by an intimate partner is not a family matter, but rather specialists should be sought for help. The study also recommends for educating women regarding who and where they can apply to in case they are exposed to IPV.

## **ETHICAL INFORMATION ABOUT RESEARCH PRIOR TO THE RESEARCH**

Approval was obtained from the Ethics committee of Hacettepe University (dated 26.01.2021, numbered E-35853172-300-00001430755).

## **PERCENTAGE OF CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS**

The authors contributed equally to the study.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

There is no potential conflict of interest in this study



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