



## Exploring the Experiences of Migration, Violence, and Homelessness of Conditional Refugee Women in a Non-Governmental Shelter

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### Abstract

At the intersection of structural factors such as patriarchy, globalization, racism, and categories like age, ethnicity, language, religion, social capital, and immigration status, women experience various phenomena of discrimination and inequality. Although the effects of violence against women have universal characteristics, social categories such as education, marital status, ethnicity, and social capital differentiate women's experiences. This study aims to analyze the migration, violence, and homelessness experiences of women staying in a shelter as conditional refugees in Istanbul. Shelters are places where women who are exposed to violence and deprived of social support stay. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 women staying in this shelter and 4 themes were discovered: "women's experiences of violence", "divorce processes and social violence", "the process of coming to the association, identity and employment problems in the struggle to set up a new life", and "future expectations". It was found that women experience all sorts of partner violence as well as violence of immigration, their families apply social violence during divorce periods, shelters which provide rights-based social services help women in post-divorce processes, and women's experiences differ at the intersection of their future expectations and social categories such as health, age, education, occupation, and immigration status. The main suggestions of this study include increasing rights-based social services for women, and gender, ethnicity, and culture-sensitive practices.

**Keywords:** Refugee women, violence, shelter, social work, non-governmental organizations.

## Sivil Toplum Kuruluşuna Bağlı Sığınmaevinde Kalan Şartlı Mülteci Kadınların Göç, Şiddet ve Evsiz Kalma Deneyimleri

### Öz

Patriarki, kapitalizm, küreselleşme, ırkçılık gibi yapısal faktörler ve kadınların yaş, etnik köken, dil, din, sosyal sermaye ve göçmenlik statüsü gibi kategorilerinin kesişiminde kadınlar ayrımcılık ve eşitsizliğin çeşitli görüngülerini yaşamaktadır. Kadına yönelik şiddetin etkileri evrensel özellikler taşısa da kadın deneyimi eğitim, medeni durum, etnik köken, sosyal sermaye gibi sosyal kategoriler kadınların deneyimini farklılaştırmaktadır. Bu araştırma, İstanbul'da şartlı mültecilere hizmet veren bir sığınma evinde kalan kadınların deneyimlerini öğrenmeyi amaçlamıştır. Sığınma evinde kalan 12 mülteci kadınla derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmış ve "kadınların şiddet deneyimleri", "boşanma

süreçleri ve toplumsal şiddet”, “derneğe geliş süreçleri, yeni bir yaşam kurma mücadelesinde kimlik ve istihdam sorunu” ve “geleceğe yönelik beklentiler” isimli 4 tema keşfedilmiştir. Kadınların göçün şiddetinin yanı sıra yakın partner şiddetinin tüm türlerini yaşadıkları, boşanma süreçlerinde ailelerinin toplumsal şiddet uyguladığı, hak temelli sosyal hizmet sunan sığınma evinin boşanma sonrası süreçlerinde yardımcı olduğu ve gelecek beklentilerinin sağlık, yaş, eğitim, meslek, mültecilik statüsü gibi sosyal kategorilerin kesişiminin kadınların deneyimlerini farklılaştırdığı bulunmuştur. Kadınlara yönelik hak temelli sunulan sosyal hizmetlerin artırılması, toplumsal cinsiyet, etnik köken ve kültüre duyarlı uygulamaların artırılması araştırmanın temel önerileri olmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Şartlı mülteci kadınlar, şiddet, barınak, sosyal hizmet, sivil toplum örgütü.

## INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy manifests itself in all areas of life and the resulting gender-based violence and discrimination shape women's lives. This violence manifests itself as economic, physical, psychological, sexual, or dating violence; or as harmful cultural practices such as early marriage, polygamy, or female genital mutilation. It is stated that, globally, one in three women experienced sexual or physical violence, one in four women experienced this violence during pregnancy, 200 million women and girls were subjected to female genital mutilation, 5000 women were the victims of the so-called honor killings, a girl is getting married every 28 minutes and more than 700 million women were married as children, 150 million girls were subjected to sexual violence by a member of their family, and every day 137 women are killed by their partners or a family member (Relief, 2020)<sup>1</sup>. While these numbers show the globality and gravity of the problem, each number indicates a life experience, the violation of women's basic human rights, and the lives they often fail to live. Similarly, reasons such as the fact that the perpetrator of violence is a close partner or a family member, that capitalist patriarchy makes women socio-economically dependent on men by restricting their education and employment, the increasing pressure of gender roles on women, fear of stigmatization, and unsupportive legal systems and institutions, limit women's access to grievance mechanisms (Bosch-Fiol&Ferrer-Perez, 2020, p.187). As a result, it is thought that many more women than represented by the statistics are subject to gender-based violence and discrimination every day and at every moment.

This violence is a global problem that knows no language, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or boundaries. Moreover, research shows that women as immigrants, poor people, members of ethnic minorities, or people of color are the groups that are most exposed to violence and that structural discrimination makes them much more vulnerable to interpersonal violence (Hearn, Strid&Husu, 2016, p.552; Dominguez and Menjivar, 2014, p.185). In a similar context, for women in refugee groups the immigration process reproduces the gender inequality they already experience in their country and causes them to experience different faces of gender-based violence (Roupetz et al., 2020, p. 10-11). In addition to partner violence, refugee women face the violence of war before migration; human smuggling, human trafficking, slavery, and sexual violence during migration; violence by local people in border regions, camps, institutions, and organizations, and in life outside the camps, such as early marriage, polygamy, physical and psychological violence after the migration (Afyonoğlu, 2021, p. 1-3, 14-15).

Turkey is one of the countries hosting the largest number of refugees in the world. The 3.700.000 registered Syrian population is followed by 21.906 Afghan, 4.961 Iraqi, and 1032 Iranian international protection applicants (Presidency of Migration Management, 2021). However, there is a limited number of studies focusing on the experience of the violence of refugee women and gender-sensitive studies. Qualitative studies on the experiences of Syrian women in Turkish cities such as Kilis, Ankara, Konya, Duzce, and Elazig state that refugee women face early marriage and polygamy, that they don't have access to or are afraid to use grievance mechanisms, as well as experiencing physical, economic, psychological, and sexual violence (Barın, 2015; Çelik&Vural, 2019; Cankurtaran&Albayrak, 2019; Karakaya, 2019; Çoşkun, 2017). Although the Syrian migration increased the number of academic studies on refugees in immigration areas, it should be noted that "other refugees" especially from countries with substantial populations of refugees such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Somalia remain invisible in social policies and research (Buz, 2008, p. 11-12; Akbaş- Demirel, 2018, p. 68).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/16-shocking-facts-about-violence-against-women-and-girls/>. Retrieved: 10.11.2022.

As it is emphasized in the literature on social work with immigrants, social workers should not only understand the problems of applicants, but also provide services for these problems and evaluate these services (IASSW&IFSW, 2016). A brief examination of the services provided for refugee women that were subjected to violence reveals that women can benefit from public services, but they are mostly beneficiaries of women or immigrant-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Rights-based, culture and gender-sensitive NGOs are considered positive social service models for the psycho-social well-being of women, as refugee women meet women with similar experiences and expand their social network through such organizations (Mackreath&Sağrıç,2017; Özgür-Keysan& Şentürk, 2021; Özdemir- Dal, 2022). These centers provide social cohesion activities as well as in-kind and cash support. However, in Turkey, NGOs in general and NGOs with a focus on refugees in particular, are insufficient in number and do not (cannot) provide shelter (Taşdemir-Afşar, 2018, p.192).

In this respect, our research aims to investigate the migration, violence, homelessness and shelter experiences of refugee women who benefit from the shelter service offered by an association in Istanbul. Our study is important in terms of discovering the problems of women benefiting from shelter services and contributing to the development of the support provided by shelters according to women's needs.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Qualitative research is recommended when it is necessary to explore a problem or issue, and to have an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). In this context, our study has been designed as a qualitative study to explore the problems faced by women staying in a shelter and caused by migration, violence, and deprivation of social support, and to gain an insight into the experiences of the women receiving service from an institution that provides services to them. During the research process, the shelter was visited every day for two weeks and a relationship was established with the participants. The techniques of the research are observation and in-depth interviews.

### **Data Collection Tools**

In order to understand the experiences of women, we designed a semi-structured in-depth interview form. Expert opinion was obtained from 6 social work academics for the semi-structured interview form for women who benefit from guesthouse services. The questions aimed to learn women's socio-demographic information, as well as their migration experiences, their process of coming to the shelter, opinions about the shelter, and expectations after leaving the shelter.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were recorded with the verbal and written consent of the participants, and a data set was created by transcribing the interviews. The strategies of inductive coding, which allows themes to be created directly from within the data set, and deductive coding (Linneberg, & Korsgaard, 2019), where coding is done through themes created based on literature and research questions were combined. Categories were developed from the generated codes and themes were created.

### **Study Group**

The study was conducted in a women's shelter affiliated with a non-governmental organization. The reason for selecting this organization was to see the exemplary practice of a non-governmental organization that provided the first shelter for refugee women in Turkey and to understand the problems and needs of women staying in the shelter. It was aimed to interview all 17 female participants staying in the shelter. However, 12 women who volunteered to participate in the study were interviewed. The interviewer knew Arabic, but could not speak the language fluently. Therefore, an interpreter assisted the researcher in interviewing women who did not speak Turkish. The researcher's knowledge of Arabic is important in terms of understanding the narratives, being active in the interview

process, and the reliability of the data. The socio-demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Socio-demographics of the participants**

<i>Code</i>	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Migration Route</i>	<i>Work Experience</i>	<i>First Marriage Age</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Number of Children</i>
Mona	Tunisia	38	College Dropout	Tunisia-Libya-Turkey- Saudi Arabia-Turkey	Chef	30	In divorce process	1
Ayşe	Syria	51	Primary School	Turkey-Syria-Lebanon-Turkey	Machiner in textile. Interpreter in the NGO	23	Divorced	4
Lale	Afghanistan	25	Primary School	Afghanistan-Iran-Turkey	Machiner in textile. Unemployed	18	In divorce process	1
Fatma	Syria	37	Primary School 5th Grade Dropout	Syria, Kilis	She worked as a machinist in textile and knitting. Not working now.	21	In divorce process	4
Eslem	Tunisia	31	Associate Degree (Tourism)	Tunisia-Izmit-Istanbul	She worked in date packaging. Not working.	20	In divorce process	2
Nur	Iran	31	University (Psychology)	Iran-Afghanistan, Van, Istanbul	She worked as an English teacher, a television director, and a psychologist. Not working.	22	In divorce process	1
Zeyno	Syria	56	High School	Lebanon-Turkey	She worked as a civil servant. Doesn't work, helps with things at the Shelter.	33	In divorce process	
Hacer	Syria	37	Primary School 2th Grade Dropout	Syria-Antep-Mersin-Istanbul Turkey	Machinery in textile not working.	24	In divorce process	3
Nergis	Syria	28	High School	Syria-Kilis-Reyhanlı-Bilecik-Istanbul	Tailoring in textile factory.		Single	
Hiba	Syria	51	Primary School 2th Grade Dropout	Syria-Kilis-Istanbul-Turkey	She worked in a restaurant, worked as an ironer in textiles. Not working.	17	Widow	5
Naime	Algeria	41	University	Algeria-Turkey	She worked as a secretary and a teacher. Not working.		Single	
Hafsa	Algeria	29	University (Psychology)	Algeria-Turkey	Not working	25	Divorced	1

## Findings

The shelter where the study was conducted is the sole accommodation service for refugee women provided by an association in Turkey. Women come to the association through police forces or by hearing about it from their social circles. The association provides asylum-seeking women with shelter, economic and psychological support, health services, and support for their legal actions. Psychologists provide psychological support in regular sessions to empower women. Vocational training courses and language courses are also organized for empowerment. Most women experience burnout due to their experiences of violence, war, and helplessness. Many women see participation in courses as a burden. As a solution, the management provides cash support with the condition of attending the courses. The new things women learn and the skills they acquire through participation in the courses both empower and improve them.

### Violence Experiences of Women

It has been observed that women have been exposed to physical, economic, psychological, and sexual violence during their marriage and often experience it all simultaneously. Women stated that they tried to endure physical violence, but they distanced themselves from their husbands when life-threatening dangers emerged. Unable to receive any economic, social, or psychological support from her husband, Syrian Hacer was subjected to life-threatening violence by her drug-addicted husband:

*Once he starts hitting, he can be hit to death. He ties your hands, feet, and mouth to the chair; knocks the chair down, you can't even make a sound. Once he beat me until I fainted; I couldn't put my clothes on because of my pain; then I ran away from home. I ran off to my father-in-law in tights and a t-shirt. 'Why did you come like this?' he asked, 'I ran away from your son, he was abusing me' I said. His son brought me my scarf and coat and said he didn't hit me and said that I left like this on my own decision. He was abusing me on the street once. 'Why are you hitting her?' people asked; he said, 'she hits herself, beats herself'. I wanted to die. I'm sick of being a victim of violence. I don't want to remember how he abused me. God knows how he used to hit me (Hacer).*

Hiba, on the other hand, explained that her every action was used as justification for violence and that she was exposed to both psychological and physical violence and was devalued: "He beat me a lot. I was in trouble if I was sleeping, or sitting, or left home. If I make coffee, that cup would be broken. I couldn't have a cup of coffee" (Hiba).

As seen, physical violence is sustained by psychological violence and manipulations, and at the same time, economic violence can be added to this. Lale's story includes economic, psychological, and physical violence by her husband in the house which they shared with another family:

*My life in Iran is okay; but my spouse has no job; we stayed here for 4 years; my spouse had problems; he didn't go to work; he was abusive to me; he claimed that I was cheating on him with the men in the other family. I wanted to move to another house; he wouldn't accept it; he didn't let me be in peace in the house we live in because of jealousy; so I decided to leave. He didn't give me any money even when he worked (Lale).*

Women's experience of economic violence can take the form of deprivation of basic needs, including children, as well as not being allowed to work:

*My spouse was gambling. He didn't come home; he didn't pay the rent or water. He hadn't paid the rent for 2 years. I don't care about money. I wanted a normal life; I wish he worked, looked after his own house. We were cold, we stayed under blankets. I have children and small ones too. I knocked on his brothers' doors, said 'my son is hungry'. My milk is not coming because of my nerves, because of*

*the things I've been through. I couldn't breastfeed two of my children. I must get milk for them; I can't find it either (Eslem).*

As can be seen, women are prevented from working and being more free participants in life by their husbands. Developing their skills and making a living may depend on the consent of their spouses. Women may have to accept this situation:

*I learned textile sewing in Syria. After I got married, my spouse didn't let me work, then when we had financial problems, I started to work with my brother in the packaging business; then we came here. I didn't work here for a very long time; he didn't allow me (Fatma).*

As the narratives of the participants show, women experience different types of violence simultaneously, and the consequences of this violence harm both their physical and mental health. Ayşe, who experienced physical, psychological, and sexual violence simultaneously:

*Being owned like a property. Just like having an animal. I saw myself as an adopted animal. He wanted to have me by force. He didn't think about anything while I was crying. He just wanted to satisfy his desire. For example, I was going to give birth, I was in labor for 10 days, he didn't take me to the hospital. What kind of selfishness is this? When I became pregnant with that daughter, I cried all the time. There was war and famine but the war inside the house was bigger; it was suppressing all the wars (Ayşe).*

As seen in Ayşe's words, women try to put up with being commodified and endure psychological, economic, physical, and sexual violence to the extreme. In addition to the life-threatening danger for women, violence against their children has been an important factor in leaving their husbands. Fatma stated that she distanced herself from her husband when sexual violence was directed at her daughter:

*I endured everything, all the violence he inflicted on me. But my husband, my daughter's father, molested my daughter. I felt like someone set me on fire. I can tolerate everything, but I can't let it happen to my daughter, I can't be silent about it (Fatma).*

### **Women's Divorce Processes and Social Violence**

The narratives of the participants indicate that although violence against women is a universal experience, the only support for women, who have experienced various traumas and whose social support networks have weakened during the migration process, might be their nuclear families. When women decide to get divorced in their struggle against violence, they are not supported by social support networks; on the contrary, they face "social violence". It has been observed that it is especially their mothers who stand against women's divorce:

*The violence started in the first year. My mother always passed it off by saying, 'You're newly married, you haven't learned his character yet'. He called my family in Damascus and said, 'Your daughter is going to get divorced and she's going to be a prostitute somewhere'. My mom called me and said, 'I'll bring you back dragging you by your hair; don't think you're something just because you went there'. I tried to endure violence for years, but I couldn't. The man always told me that the angels will curse me; my mother said the same thing. 'The angels will curse you...', 'The angels will curse you...'. It was in my head. Why would they curse me? I always thought I was cursed by angels for not loving the man. Then I said, 'Damn! I don't care, I am a cursed woman, let it be like this'. (Ayşe).*

As seen in Ayşe's narrative, women can experience family violence as well as spousal violence and be stigmatized by "honor"; that the basic principle of marriage in all religions is mutual consent might be ignored and religious elements might be cited for this violence:

*He was abusing me, and I wanted a divorce. I jumped off walls, went to my cousins. I said, 'I don't want him, I want to divorce him.' 'It's a shame to get divorced, you can't get divorced,' said my mother. She didn't approve and I was often sad when I visited my mother, and always went back to home with him (Hacer).*

In the example of Hacer and Ayşe, the fact that the woman does not want to stay married and is exposed to violence is not considered as a sufficient reason for divorce. It is not seen as a problem by their families that women continue a marriage without consent and are exposed to violence. This pressure is reinforced by means of cultural elements:

*In our society, divorce by women is not accepted; women don't get divorced; they cannot get divorced. My mother still wants me to return to my spouse and says that he loves me, appreciates me, but that I don't appreciate him (Ayşe).*

In Ayşe's story, the family exposes her to psychological violence, based on sometimes cultural, sometimes religious reasons, instead of protecting her and caring about her feelings and wishes. Even if women are abandoned by their husbands, they are not accepted and supported by their families. Since they cannot have healthy living conditions in their own habitats, they may turn to forced migration. An example of this is seen in Nur's narrative:

*My husband was having an affair with his secretary in his office. I tried to solve the problem, but he continued his relationship. One day we started fighting about something. He claimed that I was seeing another man. I said that that's a lie. Then we fought a lot. He stabbed me. I went to my mother's house, but she was sick. I couldn't stay there. When my sister saw my arm, she told me to go back to my house. I was also three months pregnant then. You know in Afghanistan; everyone saw me as a bad woman. Because if you get divorced in Afghanistan, you are a woman to be had for anything. Because if someone is divorced, that woman can do anything. That's how people think (Nur).*

In Nur's narrative, her husband cheats on her, attacks her, and abandons her. Despite this, the results of the divorce worried the family and herself and even though she was a working, educated woman, the many risks of divorce led her to asylum.

### **The Process of Coming to the Association, Identity and Employment Problems in the Struggle to Set a New Life**

As known, housing, social cohesion, and employment emerge as important problems in the post-divorce phases. The association provides women with shelter, and meets health related and basic needs. Particularly, in cases of divorces due to violence, the participants stated that their housing need - one of the most urgent needs - was met by the association and that they felt safe: *"I'm fine; I'm much more relaxed; I feel safe. My children and I get psychological help; we benefit from cash assistance" (Eslem).*

The shelter functions as a safe place for Eslem, who was exposed to economic violence by her husband, deprived of her basic needs such as food and heating, and was then kicked out of her house because the rent was not paid: *"Thanks to God, we have everything. There is trust, a safe environment, everything in terms of material and spiritual aspects. We benefit from health services, we benefit financially, we also benefit from social services. We get everything we need" (Zeyno).*

In addition to their needs being met in the shelter, women also talked about the psycho-social rehabilitative features of being together with women who have similar experiences:



*I received very good services; they also provided me with a wheelchair and a walker. There was an apparatus for my foot; they provided that too. I'm very relieved. I was able to leave the room. I started chatting with women and it felt very good (Nergis).*

Nergis, who was disabled during the war, is deprived of support systems in Istanbul because her family is in Syria. However, she was able to benefit from the shelter and got the health support she needed, as the shelter serves not only women who are exposed to violence by their husbands, but all women in need. As can be seen in Ayşe's narrative below, sharing similar stories supports individuals to manage the pain in their own stories:

*Let's say I gained experience here. Because every woman has her own story. Before I came here, I thought I was the only one with problems. After coming here, especially when I work as a translator, I say, 'I am not alone in this world; I am not the only one who has troubles.' I say, 'We are human; we are in a test hall, and we will pass this test'(Ayşe).*

Although the participants are happy with the services of the association and the shelter affiliated to the association, shelters do not offer a permanent life and women need to shape their future. This process can be managed more easily for women with working experience and an ID card. Ayşe, who wanted to work as a cleaner, has turned her Arabic into a cultural capital and describes her profession as follows:

*In the association, I applied for a cleaning job. Then someone was talking on the phone with xx. They said, 'We need 4 translators.' When I heard that, I remembered Arabic. I said, 'I can be a translator if you want'. It came out of my mouth shyly. They said 'OK'. I was hired that day (Ayşe).*

Nergis, who was a tailor while in Syria, continued her business in the association: *"The association helped me in many ways. I bought a machine; I was sewing with an overlock. I produce and sell"* (Nergis).

Women who do not have an ID have difficulties in working and continuing their children's education. Disadvantageous situations of the participants continue during the divorce process; the language barrier, fear of judicial authorities, lack of family support make them vulnerable to abuse and cause them to continue living without being able to request any help or support. When all this coincides with being without an ID, women feel helpless:

*We were in Izmit. I came to Istanbul, but I couldn't enroll the children in school because I didn't have a residence permit. The children are registered in Izmit. They are registered at the school there. Since I don't have a residence permit, I cannot get a certificate of residence. I have nothing, I have no documents; so, I'm a fugitive, I'm scared of the police. Since I do not have a residence permit, I cannot apply for a divorce (Eslem).*

Eslem, who is an irregular immigrant due to incomplete legal procedures has difficulties in staying away from her husband, getting a divorce, getting a residence permit, working, and making her children get education. The time spent for legal problems prevent Eslem's children from attending school and Eslem from building a life. Leyla is another woman who got married and came to Turkey. Her husband did not apply for a residence permit after her visa expired. Since she is an irregular immigrant, she cannot leave the association.

*My husband is very sneaky; he knows what to do. He didn't want to get me a residence permit. He would joke when we walked on the road; when he saw the police on the street, he would say 'come catch this, she has no residence permit!', supposedly jokingly. This was a hidden message, but I didn't understand. Now, I am a non-resident; unable to work (Leyla).*

In addition to lack of an ID, childcare, age, health, and education status determine women's participation in employment. Fatma, who has four children, explained that she did not want to work for long hours, because she needed to take care of her children:

*I force myself to work, but I cannot; I usually attend cooking workshops. I don't want to work for long hours, because I want to take care of the children a little bit, and I get tired, I get very tired; I need a short-time job. I want to work from home, but the kids said they didn't want to help me. I can't do everything alone (Fatma).*

Fatma's low level of education results in jobs with difficult conditions and long shifts. Fatma, the conditions of whose children and state of health are not suitable for these physical tasks, experiences many dilemmas.

In addition to education level, women's health status and age are also influential in participation in employment. Hiba, who was kicked out of the house by her child, cannot find a job due to her low education level, lack of profession, and being old for physical work. This situation makes it impossible for her to leave the shelter and establish a new life:

*I want to have a house, live alone, find a job, and support myself; but since I'm a little old, I asked many places, nobody wanted to employ me because of my age. I must work for rent and bills, but nobody wants to hire me. If I could, I would, but I don't have the opportunity to leave right now (Hiba).*

Some beneficiary women are unable to leave the shelter and attempt to establish a new future because of their poor health: "I can't work, because I have a broken shoulder" (Naime). Likewise Naime Zeyno said: "The working conditions here are harsh, I think it might be very difficult in terms of health, so I cannot work" (Zeyno).

Although the participants were educated, they stated that their identity status and the language barrier hindered their work: "I tried to find a job, to go to university, to do a master's degree, to go to other countries, but it didn't work" (Nur).

### **Future Expectations**

Participants answered the questions about their future expectations in terms of the options of staying in Turkey or going to another country. Some of the participants stated that they want to stay in Turkey and work for a better life: "I will stay in Turkey. After the children start school, I will work; I will try to stand on my own feet; I have no other thought for now" (Eslem).

Hacer, who works in textile industry in Turkey, believes that she can make a living by working. She also states that people in Turkey treat her well and that she can build her life with the support of people. The fact that Hacer is young and hardworking makes her hopeful and self-confident about the future:

*I want to stay here; people are very nice here. I cannot say that the Syrians are good, because no Syrian helped me when I was going through bad times; but most of the time, the Turks were with me and helped me (Hacer).*

Some of the women who wanted to stay in Turkey said that they regret leaving their families behind and that they want to live together with their families in Turkey:

*If our families want to cross the border illegally, they have to pay money. After crossing the border, they'll need money again. They'll need money for travelling. They don't have this opportunity... We left them in the middle of the war. We are comfortable here, there is no war where we live. But as long as they live that war there, we can't be in peace here (Nergis).*

Other participants, who see Turkey as a transit country, stated that they want to go to a third country for a better life:

*I decided to go to another country. Currently, there is no specific country. The immigration office didn't accept my application until recently. Now, they have accepted me as an immigrant; I will choose a country later (Lale).*

UNHCR often does not accept asylum applications from Afghans from Iran due to the "third country" rule. Refusal of asylum applications is difficult for Afghans. Women's asylum requests also face many obstacles. This may lead to exhaustion of legal remedies and to fall into the trap of organizations engaged in human trafficking or smuggling. For example, Algerian Naime set out to go to Europe with human smugglers but was helpless in Istanbul when her money was stolen and was directed to the women's shelter by the police. She dreams of a life in Europe for the future: *"My whole dream is to go to Europe; I have no other dreams. There they treat people very mercifully; I saw people living there and they live in very good conditions" (Naime).*

The participants' experiences in Turkey and social networks are effective in their third country decisions:

*I think forward. I don't want to go back to Syria. I don't want to go back to Lebanon either. Germany or Britain... I have a sister in Germany, so I want to go there. It could also be France; the important thing is to go somewhere (Zeyno).*

Hafsa from Algeria, who wants to get divorced due to spousal violence and return to her country, seems hopeful for the future. Hafsa, who is a university graduate, young, and has a strong family support system: *"I will return to Algeria with my family; I will work there and earn my living" (Hafsa).*

It was observed that women are generally deprived of the family support system. Only one gets family support. It has been seen that the resources for individuals to build a sustainable life are age, health, education, profession, language, legal status, and attitudes towards work. The lack of these resources causes the participants to be deprived of a plan about leaving the shelter and start a new life.

## DISCUSSION

This research aims to understand refugee women's shelter experiences through their narratives. In this sense, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 women staying in a shelter and 4 themes were discovered: "women's experiences of violence", "divorce processes and social violence", "the process of coming to the association, identity and employment problems in the struggle to set a new life", and "future expectations".

Women's experiences of violence are multidimensional and violence against women takes different forms physical, economic, and psychological. Women have generally been exposed to all three types. The most visible and what women generally describe as violence is physical violence. Many women had to end their relationships after experiencing constant or fatal physical violence. Violence against women is not a special case, it is a global problem. It is based on hostile sexism. Men's fear of loss of autonomy and power, and their belief that women will resort to inappropriate situations to gain power may lead to compulsive control behaviors. If this control does not provide the desired domination and control, men may use violence. (Loveland & Raghavan, 2017). Violent behavior is associated with beliefs, witnessing violence in families, and distrust; but anger control problems and destructive behaviors are mainly associated with severe personality disorders (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2008). The destructive behaviors of individuals with severe personality disorders generally affect the people in close relationships with them (Kernberg, 2014).

One of the violence experiences described by women is economic violence. Economic violence can take various forms. Some spouses do not meet the economic needs of women in cases in which women have ID problems, children in need of care, health problems, or when they do not have an income due to a lack of professional skills or when they are not allowed to work by their spouses. In another form of economic violence, men do not work, seize women's income, but do not meet the needs of women and children. The third form consists of not meeting the economic needs of women, taking the money of working women, and borrowing money on behalf of women. In all three forms, the common experience of women is their needs not being met and their deprivation not being eliminated despite all the tactics they develop. Despite all their tactics and attempts, women can experience desperation. While economic violence poses significant challenges for women, the primary impetus for leaving their husbands stems from the physical violence accompanying economic abuse and the fear of being killed.

Economic violence is a type of violence that has both short-term and long-term effects. It can negatively affect the lives of individuals as much as or more than physical, sexual, and psychological violence (Stylianou, 2018). Economic dependence can often lead to maintaining a relationship despite the violence. The fact that violence accompanies the relationships in which the traditional gender roles are not met and men do not meet the economic needs of their families, increases the possibility of the disintegration of families (Huang, Postmus, Vikse, & Wang, 2013). As can be seen in the narratives of women, the fact that men do not meet women's economic needs or women work and give money to their husbands, in other words, that women have to earn their living by working, reduced the possibility of enduring a bad relationship and became a factor that facilitated the separation.

Psychological violence, however, is a type of abuse that is difficult to define. It is often an unidentified type of violence. The experiences of women which can be defined as psychological violence are humiliation, shame, deception, blame, or self-disgust. The physical, economic, and psychological abuse experienced by women reinforces their feelings of worthlessness and helplessness. Since the effect of psychological violence is not directly observable and it is not taken as a great risk, it is a difficult situation to define. However, physical violence also includes psychological violence, and thus it is more emphasized. Yet, in some cases, psychological violence situations that are not accompanied by physical violence can be experienced. The consequences of psychological violence can sometimes be more serious than the consequences of physical violence. Psychological violence negatively affects the well-being of individuals and can lead to physical and psychological diseases (Mir & Naz, 2017). In this situation, which is difficult to define, it can be difficult to break the ties with the partner who uses psychological violence and the individual's self-esteem decreases (Neppel, Lohman, Senia, Kavanaugh, & Cui, 2019). Decreased self-esteem of individuals also negatively affects their social relations and self-development (Mir & Naz, 2017).

A combination of traumas brought by the migration process, problems of adaptation to the migrated country, language barriers, restriction of employment opportunities, poverty, structural inequalities etc., can cause family disintegration (Bloch, Galvin & Harrell-Bond, 2000). Although some of the participants stated that they were exposed to violence before marriage, it can be said that the intersection of war and migration created pressure on the families of the participants who talked about post-migration violence and this situation resulted in family breakdown (Alqallih, Shehada & Arts, 2016). Research results show that women endure violence until their lives are in danger, and after deciding to get divorced, their families use religious and cultural elements to prevent women from doing so; and that women, whose social networks and social support systems weaken during the migration process, also lose the family support system, which is the only support system left. In addition to partner violence, women experience gender-based violence through harmful cultural and traditional

practices; they experience social violence, isolation, fear, and helplessness (Perrin et al., 2019). Therefore, it is suggested that the issue should not be handled as a subject related to victims of a culture or religion, instead, it should be evaluated as male-violence against women (Ataman, 2013), and it should be conceptualized with a rights-based perspective that is aware of structures such as patriarchal capitalism, immigration, and globalization as the basis of violence. The NGOs offer shelter services within the framework of rights-based social services for women whose social support networks are weakened and who have survived after violence. NGOs provide “empowerment through assistance” by providing shelter and basic needs, which are the first needs of women in the divorce process; “empowerment through social integration” by language and vocational courses, “empowerment through raising awareness” by psycho-social support, and “empowerment through socialization” by bringing women together in various activities (Özgür Keysan & Şentürk, 2021).

Although shelter services facilitate women’s transition to their new lives, women’s ability to build a sustainable life is related to their refugee status, age, health status, available resources, education level, professional experience, language proficiency, legal status, attitude towards work, and skills that can be helpful in employment. It should be noted that for immigrants, identity or legal status is of vital importance in many factors such as confirmation of existence in the country of residence, work, and access to welfare services (Akhtar, 2018; Dinçer et al., 2013). Identity status determines the level of access to services. In other words, individuals’ access to resources suitable for their needs is determined by their legal status (Hassan & Cankurtaran, 2022; Konukman, 2017). Irregular immigrants do not have access to services and being an irregular immigrant is considered as a criminal act since it means the violation of legal boundaries (Tepealti, 2019; Topcuoğlu, 2016). Therefore, those who are irregular immigrants in Turkey can be completely defenseless against their perpetrators (Güldalı & Sema, 2021; Konukman, 2017).

For some women, the plan to leave the shelter and start a new life, seems impossible even though they receive social and economic support. These women have no plans on making a living by working because of their old age, health conditions which do not allow them to work for long hours, and their lack of qualifications. They are happy to be in the shelter. The fact that the systems with which the elderly interact is relatively limited compared to young people’s interactions reinforces their conservative attitudes towards change (Ercan & Arıcı, 2020). In this case, it is more attractive for the elderly to live in a shelter with other women who share similar life experiences. Having a room to stay in and meeting their basic needs is seen as a good enough opportunity for them. However, the fact that the shelter serves women for a certain period of time is perceived as a situation that triggers future concerns and insecurity for these women (Ercan, 2022). Considering the inequality of opportunity in education, the lives of women shaped in the informal sector in low-skilled jobs and gender-based violence, which are universal phenomena of patriarchy, the post-divorce social adaptation processes of immigrant women with low education levels, no previous professional experience, and no language skills are getting more difficult. Moreover, the language barrier and intimidation of women with low levels of education prevent these women from applying to legal authorities or seeking help. The fact that there is no authority they can apply to in the face of abuse increases the audacity of the perpetrators of violence (Hassan & Cankurtaran, 2022).

The results of our research show that refugee status, education of their children, and socio-demographic characteristics are important aspects concerning the future expectations of women. While Turkey provides temporary protection to Syrian refugees, asylum seekers of Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi nationality get international protection status, which is valid until they go to a third country. Reasons such as the density of the asylum seeker population in Turkey, the length of the application and

evaluation processes, the long waiting time for future appointments, and the reduction of refugee quotas by third countries leave Afghan refugees in uncertainty (Aygüler, Buz, Güzel, 2021); as a result it is seen that their future expectations are shaped around settling in a third country. In this context, while women whose children have started education, who are under temporary protection, and whose age and abilities are suitable for work want to stay in Turkey, it is seen that especially international protection holders and applicants want the uncertainty to end and to settle in a third country.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, we listened to the stories of 12 women through in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions. Although there are many different variables in these stories, it was observed that there are also many similarities. These similarities are generally consistent with the literature. Women have generally been exposed to all kinds of violence, including psychological, physical, and economic violence. The common characteristic among women is that they are deprived of a social support system. Their families are either weak and inadequate in terms of human capital, or they adopt attitudes that encourage women to endure violence rather than getting divorced, supporting this attitude with social, cultural, and religious arguments.

A shelter that serves women who are victims of violence or human trafficking, helpless due to health disability, and without an identity has a saving function for women. By means of such a shelter, women can partially access legal social support systems and the resources they need. Although shelters have significant empowering effects, their services are temporary. Women are expected to become stronger, participate in employment, and establish their lives. At this point, future goals of women gain importance. Women's age, health status, number of dependent individuals in their families, professional skills, educational status, and attitudes towards work affect both their participation in empowerment programs and their future plans. Also, since all women are foreigners, the language problem is seen as an important obstacle to establishing a new life. It has been observed that individuals who are young, in good physical health, who do not have small children, who have a job or are trying to acquire a job, and who have a high level of education dream of a predictable future and are more hopeful about life. Especially the elderly and sick individuals are not confident about leaving the shelter and they need external support. In line with the results of the research, it is suggested that legal procedures are expanded regarding irregular migration in a way that protects women, women are empowered instead of being penalized, and women are supported in their decisions regarding new settlement processes. Similarly, it is recommended that NGOs and public institutions increase their shelter services for foreign women who are victims of violence, homeless immigrants, and helpless immigrants even though they are not victims of violence. Finally, it is necessary to carry out studies that will strengthen women psychologically, educationally, and professionally during their stay in the shelters, and especially necessary to increase the quality of vocational courses.

### Article Information

<b>Ethics Committee Approval:</b>	The study received Ethical Approval from Selcuk University with the approval number of 2021/214 dated 24.02.2021
<b>Informed Consent:</b>	The purpose of the study is explained to the participants and their informed consent was obtained.
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<b>Conflict of Interest:</b>	The authors declare no conflict of interest.
<b>Copyrights:</b>	No material subject to copyright is included.

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