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## **An Examination of Femicides Committed during the Divorce Process**

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**Abstract:** With couples getting married and having children, individual, husband-wife, parent-child, and sibling subsystems are formed. If a couple cannot maintain their marriage and one of the parties desires divorce, it is necessary to dissolve the husband-wife subsystem that was formed through marriage to achieve a healthy divorce. This research addresses femicides that occur as a result of the failure to dissolve the husband-wife subsystem during the divorce process. For a detailed analysis of the situation, divorce and femicide-related news articles published between 2016 and 2020 were searched on the websites of three of the most widely read newspapers in Turkey. The research findings revealed that murders are committed in Turkey due to the unhealthy conduct of the divorce process. These murders occur mostly during the formal divorce process, and they increase in parallel with the rising number of divorces each year. Moreover, during the divorce process, it is observed that men exert continuous pressure on women. The mismanagement of the divorce process by couples and men's inability to accept separation can lead to fatal consequences. The findings of the research highlight the importance of mandatory counseling services during the divorce process. Social work professionals and policymakers who intervene at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels are recommended to develop policies that enforce mandatory counseling services for couples going through the divorce process.

**Keywords:** Divorce, Divorce process, Femicide, Counseling service

### **Introduction**

Marriage creates a social institution with functions such as fulfilling individuals' needs for love and affection, sharing life's responsibilities, maintaining a regular sexual life, and ensuring the continuity of the family line. According to system theorists who define the family as a system, marriage establishes the husband-wife subsystem between spouses. After having children, this subsystem expands to include the individual subsystem, as well as the parent-child and sibling subsystems (Bartle & Selesnick, 2013).

In the literature, "divorce" is defined as the termination of the marriage contract by individuals due to reasons such as incompatibility, disagreement, infidelity, financial difficulties, and violence (Kucukkaragoz & Aktas Akoglu, 2018). After divorce, individuals are expected to dissolve the husband-wife subsystem that formed during the marriage in a healthy manner. However, in some cases, one or both of the divorced partners may struggle to sever their emotional ties with their ex-partner. They might contemplate getting back together, show continued interest, curiosity, or love, monitor developments in their ex-partner's life, interfere with the new relationships, try to have a say in their ex-partner's life, and exert pressure. This situation is referred to as "ex-spouse syndrome" (Kahn, 1990; Kahn, 2011). Ex-spouse syndrome can remain at an emotional level with feelings of interest, curiosity, or love towards the former spouse, or it can manifest in both physical and

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emotional dimensions by attempting to intervene in the ex-partner's life, influencing their decisions, and trying to exert control. This ongoing connection in both physical and emotional dimensions can make it difficult for both individuals to move on and build new lives. Continuing the physical and emotional aspects of ex-spouse syndrome can eventually lead to verbal harassment, violence, and even murder. All of these outcomes can be experienced throughout the divorce process. Research in the literature also shows evidence of verbal harassment, violence, and murder occurring during the divorce process (Fleury et al., 2000; Webster et al., 2003; Brownridge, 2006; Can & Aksu, 2016). Studies focused on ex-spouses indicate that such violent incidents are primarily perpetrated by men (Johnson et al., 2014). When the studies on femicides in Turkey are reviewed, it is seen that the desire for divorce or the act of divorce is among the leading reasons for these murders. In a study on 1260 femicide cases between 2008 and 2018, Yildirim (2018) found that 348 cases were due to disputes, ranking first, while 176 cases were related to divorce requests or divorce itself, ranking second. In a study analyzing 121 newspaper articles on femicide, Seven and colleagues (2015) found that "divorce/wanting a divorce" was the leading cause in 35 cases. According to Can and Aksu (2016), women can be subjected to violence or even killed due to their desire for divorce. The information from the literature showing the relationship between divorce and violence/murder against women reveals the consequences of ex-spouse syndrome.

One of the most common risk situations for violence against women is related to separation and divorce processes. However, there have been few studies that specifically examine the extent or nature of violence during the divorce process (McMurray, 2009), and the available studies are in the international literature. According to Brownridge (2006), there are several factors during the divorce process that contribute to the risk. Dependency on their spouse is one of these factors, especially among men. Men who cannot accept the end of their relationship and fail to terminate it in a healthy way resort to violence.

Patriarchy, male peer support, and the post-separation phase are other risk factors within the macro system that contribute to violence during the divorce process. Men may perceive their partner's desire for divorce as a threat to their authority and struggle to accept the idea of divorce, leading them to resort to violence to maintain control over their spouse. Men who want to preserve their status within their peer group and fear losing their approval may also use violence against their spouse who wants a divorce. As time passes after the divorce, the likelihood of violence decreases proportionally. Most incidents of violence occur shortly after separation (Brownridge, 2006). The first instance of violence after separation typically occurs within 1-2 years. Although the risk of violence perpetrated by the former spouse decreases over time, it never completely disappears (Fleury et al., 2000).

In Turkey, the majority of research on divorce focuses on the reasons for divorce and the challenges experienced during the divorce process (Kucukkaragoz & Aktas, 2018), post-divorce experiences, the impact of divorce on children (Can & Aksu, 2016), and the theoretical structure of the divorce process (Korkut, 2003). However, when the research on femicides in the Turkish literature is reviewed, it is observed that divorce is merely mentioned as one of the reasons for femicides (Seven et al., 2015; Yildirim, 2018). There seems to be a lack of in-depth studies investigating what causes femicides specifically during the divorce process.

This study aims to bridge the gap in the literature by examining femicide and divorce in conjunction and highlighting the importance of pre-divorce counseling measures to reduce femicides. Additionally, the study is significant as it not only statistically analyzes femicides during the divorce process but also evaluates these murders in the context of the ex-spouse syndrome, thus providing in-depth insights. The research findings can be utilized in the formulation of preventive policies against femicides. Social workers, who specialize in family matters and preventive services, are believed to play a crucial role in the development of such policies.

The study aims to explore the consequences of the ex-spouse syndrome resulting from the unhealthy termination of the husband-wife subsystem during the divorce process and its impact on the parent-child subsystem. It also aims to identify when and at which stages of the divorce process these femicides occur the most. To achieve this aim, news articles related to femicides/femicide attempts and divorces published in three of the most widely read newspapers in Turkey in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and the first two months of 2020 were analyzed. The study investigates the relationship between the ex-spouse syndrome and femicides during the divorce process, the number of murders, locations and cities where these murders took place, and the outcomes of these crimes. Within this framework, the research seeks to answer the following questions regarding femicides committed during the divorce process: What are the statistical results (number of murdered women, number of murders by year, cities with the highest murder rates) related to femicides? At which stages of the divorce process (pre-divorce, during the divorce, post-divorce) are femicides most frequently committed? What are the factors contributing to femicides? During which years of marriage are femicides most commonly committed? What are

the educational backgrounds and occupations of those who commit femicides? Do children witness these crimes, and how are the murders committed? The terms used in the research represent different stages of the divorce process: pre-divorce refers to the initiation of divorce proceedings by one of the spouses, during the divorce represents the official divorce process, and post-divorce refers to the period after the official divorce is finalized. Divorce process encompasses all these stages, including filing a divorce petition, initiating a lawsuit, and ongoing court proceedings, formalizing the divorce.

## **Method**

In this study, the document analysis model, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Documents are among the secondary data sources in qualitative research. In the analysis of document data, three different approaches are employed namely description, analysis, and interpretation (Patton, 2015; Kumbetoglu, 2019). The "analysis" method was used in the analysis of document data in this research.

To collect data for the study, news articles published on the official websites of Sozcu, Hurriyet, and Milliyet newspapers between 2016 and 2020 (all 12 months of 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and the first 2 months of 2020) were searched using the keyword "divorce and femicide" in March 2020. The retrieved articles were categorized based on the pre-divorce, during the divorce, and post-divorce stages and were analyzed and interpreted through document analysis. The newspapers whose articles were examined were selected based on the list of the most read newspapers according to the newspaper circulation report on the Journalists' Association's official website. The articles from different newspapers were carefully examined for any duplications, and if the same article was found in multiple newspapers, it was only included in the findings of one newspaper while excluded from the findings of the other newspapers. Within this scope, a total of 113 news articles were analyzed.

The research data were collected in March 2020; thus, the newspaper articles of the first 2 months of 2020 were included in the analysis. After data collection, the analysis process was initiated. As the research was based on newspaper articles, the limitations of the study are the lack of desired information in the articles and conflicting statements about the same news in different newspapers. While some data were common in all newspaper articles, certain data were present in some articles but not in others. The common data were presented in tabular form in the findings section, while other data were presented in the form of thematic context. The non-common data in all articles are also considered as one limitation of the research. These include the number of years couples remained married, educational backgrounds, professions, and ages of both men and women. A document analysis form prepared before the research was utilized during the document analysis process. The questions included in this form are as follows:

1. At which stages of the divorce process were femicides/femicide attempts committed, and which stage witnessed the highest number of murders?
2. Is there an increase in femicides/femicide attempts over the years?
3. In which locations were femicides/femicide attempts committed?
4. In which city were femicides/femicide attempts most prevalent?
5. What are the factors contributing to femicides/femicide attempts?
6. How many years have the couples been married when the murders occurred or were attempted?
7. Do children witness the murder process?
8. What is the method of committing the murders?

## **Findings**

In this section, findings related to news articles covering femicides during the divorce process and obtained from the archives of Sozcu, Hurriyet, and Milliyet newspapers between 2016 and 2020 are presented.

Table 1. Number of news articles according to the newspapers

Newspaper	Number of news articles	%
Sozcu	30	24.81
Hurriyet	64	48.12
Milliyet	39	29.32
Total	133	100

Table 1 presents the number of news articles obtained with the keyword "divorce and femicide" between 2016 and 2020 in Sozcu, Hurriyet, and Milliyet newspapers. According to the table, it is observed that Hürriyet newspaper published the highest number of news articles on divorce and femicides/femicide attempts, with 64 articles (48.12%).

Table 2. Number of news articles by year

Years	Number of news articles (n)	%
2020 (First 2 months)	4	%3.00
2019	58	%43.60
2018	37	%27.81
2017	27	%20.30
2016	7	%5.26
Total	133	%100

Table 2 shows that the news articles related to "divorce and femicide/femicide attempts" have been increasing each year. The most news regarding divorce and femicide or attempted femicide was recorded in 2019 (58 articles, 43.60%).

Table 3. Time of femicides/femicide attempts according to the divorce process

Divorce Process	Femicide/Femicide Attempt
Pre-divorce	17 %12.78
During the divorce	108 %81.20
Post-divorce	8 %6.01

Table 3 displays the number of femicides/femicide attempts that occurred during each stage of the divorce process. Out of 133 femicides/femicide attempts, 17 (12.78%) took place before the divorce, 108 (81.20%) during the divorce process, and 8 (6.01%) occurred after the divorce. It is observed that the majority of femicides/femicide attempts occurred during the divorce process.

Table 4. Number of femicides/femicide attempts according to the cities where they occurred

City	Number of News Articles	%
Istanbul	45	%33.83
Adana	8	%6.01
Gaziantep	7	%5.26
Other cities	73	%54.88
Total	133	%100

According to Table 4, it has been determined that femicides/femicide attempts during the divorce process occurred at the highest rate in Istanbul with 45 news reports (33.83%), followed by Adana with 8 reports (6.01%), and Gaziantep with 7 reports (5.26%). Additionally, Sozcu newspaper covered other femicides related to divorce in various cities, including Konya (1), Bursa (1), Sanliurfa (1), Malatya (1), Tekirdag (1), Nigde (1), Balikesir (1), Igdir (1), Aydın (1), Kutahya (1), Hatay (1), Eskisehir (1), Izmir (2), Kocaeli (1), and Mersin (1). Hürriyet newspaper also reported other femicides related to divorce in different cities, including Erzurum (2), Sakarya (1), Bolu (1), Antalya (2), Bursa (5), Yozgat (1), Kütahya (1), Hatay (1), Afyon (1), Malatya (3), Konya (1), Ankara (2), Diyarbakır (2), Samsun (2), Mersin (2), Kayseri (3), Çanakkale (1), Kahramanmaraş (1), Edirne (1), Kocaeli (3), Aydın (2), Denizli (1), Sivas (1), Mugla (1), İzmir (4), Aksaray (1), Mersin (3), Nigde (3), and Çorum (1). Furthermore, Milliyet newspaper covered other femicides related to divorce in various cities, including Trabzon (1), Elâzığ (1), Aydın (1), Kırklareli (1), Eskisehir (1), Samsun (3), İzmir (1), Aksaray (1), Antalya (2), Amasya (1), Konya (3), Ankara (2), Bolu (1), Kocaeli (1), Çorum (1), Manisa (2), Bursa (1), Kars (1), and Cankırı (1).

Table 5 shows that femicide/femicide attempt incidents during the divorce process occurred in four different locations: home, street, vehicle, and workplace. Among these, it was determined that femicide/femicide attempts most commonly occurred at home. Here, "home" represents the place where the woman used to live with her husband, the place where she started living separately from her husband, or her parental family's home. The concept of "street" includes 1 hospital, 3 parks, and 1 parking lot in addition to public streets. "Vehicle" represents taxis, cars, and automobiles. "Workplace" can be the place where the woman herself works, or it can be the workplace of her friend or her parental family. Through the examination of newspaper articles in the

research, various themes related to the reasons behind femicide during the divorce process have been identified, in addition to the numerical findings provided above.

Table 5. Location of femicide/femicide attempt during the divorce process

Location	Number of News Articles (n)	%
Home	60	%45.11
Street	49	%36.84
Vehicle	12	%9.02
Workplace	12	%9.02
Total	133	%100

### **Theme 1: Failure to Close the Husband-Wife Subsystem**

Men are unable to accept divorce and exhibit behaviors such as persistent stalking, verbal and physical harassment, violence, placing listening devices in the home, threatening or attempting to kill the spouse and her relatives both in public places, workplace, and at home. Out of the 113 murders, 108 occurred during the official divorce process. Murders can happen immediately after the divorce case is filed or even after ongoing divorce proceedings that have been continuing for 2-3 years.

Some murders are planned as a result of stalking, while others occur after the husband goes to reconcile with his wife, but she refuses to reconcile, leading to an argument and eventually the murder. In their statements after the murder, men generally claim not to remember the moment of the crime. Their statements often include phrases like "She rejected my offer to reconcile.", "She insulted me.", "I lost control.", and "I can't remember what happened." Murders are not only directed at women who want a divorce but can also target a woman's family member, friend, or new partner if she has one during the divorce process. If the woman has a new partner, there is a high chance that he may also fall victim to the murder.

In some cases, the husband first kills his wife, then the children, and finally himself. During the murder, men are observed to lose control, and they do not just stab or shoot their wives once but multiple times. In rare cases, other methods such as strangling with a chain or burning with an iron are also used during the murder. After killing their spouse during the divorce process, men may also treat the deceased body in different ways. Even having a child together does not prevent these murders. Sometimes, the murder happens in front of the child. In one news report, a husband attempted to kill his wife in the hospital right after she gave birth to their third child during the divorce process, but the murder was prevented by the intervention of security.

In another case, a couple who were still married had been living separately and not communicating due to their incompatibility for many years. When the woman filed for divorce after 8 years of not seeing or living with her husband, he killed her. This theme demonstrates that in marriages, the husband-wife subsystem cannot be closed in a healthy manner.

### **Theme 2: Legal Inadequacies**

Many women file multiple criminal complaints against their husbands who eventually kill them. They submit numerous petitions and obtain restraining orders. However, sometimes even the restraining order does not prove effective, as the husband finds a way to bypass it and commit the murder on the very day it expires. Women who have been victims of attempted murder often complain about the prolonged process of obtaining restraining orders and the fact that, despite having obtained such orders against their spouses during the divorce process, their husbands can still attempt to kill them.

In some cases, the involvement of neighbors during the attempted murder has saved the woman's life. However, in others, both the woman and the neighbor trying to protect her have been killed. Strikingly, in all these cases, the perpetrator received a sentence for the attempted murder, but that did not prevent him from making a second attempt and succeeding in killing his wife.

According to the news reports, before the murder, women often report verbal and physical harassment or violence by their husbands to the prosecution, expressing their fear of being killed by them. Reporting to the

prosecution can result in three outcomes: no punishment, obtaining a restraining order, or a lengthy legal process leading to a late issuance of the restraining order. In some cases, husbands who were arrested when the police arrived at the scene after domestic violence were later released following the investigation. The news reports show that despite women filing complaints with the prosecution, they are still killed. In one news report, it is observed that the woman had submitted a total of 53 petitions to the prosecutor's office about her husband before she died during the divorce process.

In the divorce process, the court may prolong the proceedings. In another case, during the divorce process, a father, who wanted to find out the whereabouts of his wife from his daughter, shot his daughter 38 times when she refused to disclose her mother's location. In this case, the woman had requested the court to finalize the divorce process and end the marriage after her husband had killed their daughters. However, the court required the presence of the husband for the divorce to be finalized, and therefore, they had to wait for his release or trial process. In another case, it is seen that a husband is on leave from prison and killed his wife, who was in the process of divorce.

Furthermore, during the review of newspaper articles, it was found that important data such as data on how long they were married at the time of the murder, the education level or occupation of the perpetrators, and the condition of children during the murder were not consistently present in the news, making it difficult to gather reliable information. Despite this limitation, the following findings were derived from the available data.

### **Theme 3: Duration of Marriage in Years**

Another factor that does not seem to have a preventive effect on the murders is the number of years the couples have been married. Murders can occur during the divorce process regardless of whether the couple has been married for 3-4 years or for 20 or more years. Since the news articles do not specify the exact number of years the couples have been married, a definitive correlation between the number of years married and the occurrence of murders during the divorce process cannot be established.

### **Theme 4: Education/Occupation**

Since not all news articles provide information about the profession of the men, a general interpretation regarding the relationship between their education level and committing the murders cannot be made. However, among the cases where the profession is mentioned, individuals with both low and high education levels and status, such as police officers and doctors, have been found to be perpetrators of murdering their wives during the divorce process. Similarly, since the news articles do not specify the profession of the murdered women, it is not possible to make any comments on how the woman's education level or profession posed a risk during the divorce process.

### **Theme 5: Children's Witnessing the Murder**

According to newspaper articles, there are cases where the children of spouses going through the divorce process were present during the murder and witnessed the incident. These children are subsequently placed under the protection of the Ministry of Family and Social Services and are forced to continue their lives with the memory of witnessing the murder, the loss of their mother, and the fact that their father is a murderer. They have to carry this burden for the rest of their lives or continue their lives with the family of the father who committed the murder.

### **Theme 6: How the Murders are Committed**

Another finding obtained from the analysis of newspaper articles is that these murders are committed in a brutal manner. Men brutally kill their spouses during the divorce process by shooting them multiple times with firearms, using sharp objects, strangling, burning, physically assaulting, and torturing them.

## **Discussion**

In our country, the number of divorces has been increasing every year, especially in recent years, while the marriage rates have been declining (Şirin, 2013; Öksüzler Cabılar & Yılmaz, 2022; TÜİK, 2022). The essential question to be asked here is "how many couples can divorce in a healthy manner?" In other words, after the divorce, how many people can look at their ex-spouse as "someone I once shared my life with" or "the mother/father of my child," instead of displaying hostile attitudes? The answer to these questions is that individuals often fail to "properly close the husband-wife subsystem" during the divorce process. This inability not only prevents a healthy divorce but also leads to extreme consequences, including murder.

In this research, 133 news articles related to "divorce and femicide" in the most read national newspapers, *Sozcu*, *Hurriyet*, and *Milliyet*, between the years 2016-2019 and 2020 (first two months) were analyzed. According to the research findings, women are being killed in all stages of the divorce process: before the divorce when they want to get divorced, during the formal divorce process, and after the legal divorce. Moreover, the number of women killed during the divorce process is increasing each year, parallel to the rising divorce rates in Turkey, indicating a concerning trend of increasing homicides related to the divorce process.

When examined in terms of the divorce process, it is observed that most of the femicides/femicide attempts occur during the divorce stage, when the woman formalizes her desire for divorce. Literature reviews indicate that research on femicides considers all the reasons comprehensively to understand the underlying factors. Yegen's (2014) study, which evaluated femicides based on newspaper articles, identified 11 reasons for femicides, with jealousy and divorce being the top two. According to the study by Sallan Gul and Altındal (2015), there are seven reasons for femicides, and divorce ranks at the top with a significant rate of 83%. In the research conducted by Gunes and Yıldırım (2019), divorce is the leading reason with a rate of 28% among the ten reasons for femicides. Similarly, in the study by Seven et al. (2015), divorce or the desire for divorce ranks first among the nine reasons cited for femicides/femicide attempts. Webster et al. (2003) suggest that separation can be directly related to the woman being killed by her husband. When the findings in the literature and in this study are reviewed, it becomes apparent that men have difficulty accepting divorce. Instead of accepting divorce, some men choose to murder their spouses and face imprisonment. Although the role of divorce in femicides has been highlighted by researchers, there is a notable lack of in-depth studies investigating femicides and divorce within a shared context.

When we examine the number of femicides/femicide attempts committed during the stages of pre-divorce (17), during the divorce (108), and post-divorce (8), it is evident that the number of femicides during the divorce is significantly higher than the other two stages. The during the divorce stage includes official divorce process. The woman officially initiates the divorce, which poses a higher risk of femicides compared to the pre-divorce stage where the divorce is only mentioned as a request and the post-divorce stage when the divorce is finalized officially. The most critical period is when the woman formalizes the divorce request. In a news report, it was noted that a man murdered his wife after living separately for 8 years with no contact, when she filed for divorce. This indicates that living apart does not pose a problem for men, but when a woman seeks to formalize the separation through divorce, she becomes a victim of femicide.

As a result, men seem to be unwilling to accept divorce even if they live separately. In the literature, divorce has been identified as one of the reasons for female homicides, but as in our study, no detailed analysis focusing on female homicides during the divorce process has been found. The fact that a woman is killed simply for expressing her desire for divorce without even formalizing it (17) highlights the horrifyingly close relationship between divorce and femicides. According to Can and Aksu (2016), women can experience violence and, even worse, be killed solely for expressing their wish to divorce. Brownridge (2006) states that men may perceive their spouse's divorce request as a threat to their authority. They may struggle to accept the idea of divorce, resorting to violence to maintain control over their partner. It is believed that the reasons behind men's negative reactions towards divorce and their perception of it as a loss of authority are rooted in patriarchal values, which have been influential in numerous societal events.

It is observed that the highest number of femicides/femicide attempts occur in Istanbul. This finding is supported by the literature. According to the research conducted by Seven et al. (2015), which examined female homicides reported in newspaper articles, Istanbul is the city where female homicides are most frequently committed. Yıldırım's (2018) research evaluating femicides that occurred over the last decade also confirms that Istanbul is the city with the highest number of femicides. This is believed to be influenced by Istanbul's cosmopolitan structure, bringing together people from various cultures and different cities of Turkey, as well as being the most populous city in Turkey.

In some countries, there are programs designed to facilitate healthy communication and parenting relationships between former spouses after divorce. These practices teach couples how communication and parenting should be after divorce. Research data shows that when ex-spouses learn to communicate with respect, listen to each other, and value each other's words, they find it easier to overcome the post-divorce period and adapt more successfully to their new lives (Taylor, 2010). Individuals who let go of hostile feelings towards their ex-spouse and forgive them tend to have a more positive outlook on new partners after divorce (Cook et al., 2012). Moreover, letting go of negative feelings towards the ex-spouse accelerates the post-divorce emotional well-being (Rye et al., 2004). One of the most important techniques used to bring about change in any situation is reframing. An existing problem is redefined to change the family's perspective on the issue and provide a new meaning (Unal, 2013). In this study, it was observed that men's perspectives on divorce and their perceptions of divorce need to be reframed. At the very least, for the well-being and healthy development of children born from the marriage, they need to make joint parenting decisions and establish a healthy relationship and communication.

Another noteworthy finding from the analysis of newspaper articles is the brutal nature of these murders. Men, during the divorce process, commit extremely inhumane acts against their partners such as suffocation, shooting multiple times with a gun, dismemberment, and burning, which violate human dignity. This pattern is almost present in all cases. Very few women escape from being brutally murdered. This indicates that divorce creates a profound and seemingly insurmountable crisis between the couples. The concept of divorce causes men to become filled with anger and hatred towards their once cohabiting partners, leading to traditional and still unmitigated attitudes like "either you are mine or you're dead". According to Yıldırım's (2018) research, women are killed using methods such as firearms, sharp objects, strangulation, beating, and torture. The fact that men murder their spouses, with whom they once shared their lives, in such a savage manner is a clear indication of how negatively divorce is perceived by some men.

In the research, it has been observed that there are legal inadequacies in cases of female homicides during the divorce process. Women often state that obtaining a restraining order takes a long time, which is believed to increase the risk of being killed. Despite obtaining a restraining order, women can still be murdered. The failure to take necessary measures despite women expressing their fear of being killed by their spouses in their complaints to the prosecutor's office is considered a legal inadequacy. Men who had failed in their initial attempts to kill their spouses, after serving their sentences, made a second attempt to murder their former partners during the divorce process, and sadly, they succeeded in doing so. The penalties given after the first murder attempts are evaluated as attempted murder, and it is observed that the murder was prevented through the intervention of neighbors or the police. However, it is disregarded from a legal perspective that if there were no environmental factors, the man would not have abandoned the murder attempt, and he would have carried it out. As a result, it can be stated that penalties lack a deterrent effect.

The research indicates that both couples married for 3-4 years and those married for 20 years can be killed during the divorce process. However, due to the lack of sufficient data on the number of years the couples remained married in the news articles, it is not possible to make definitive conclusions. In the literature, divorces are more commonly observed within the first five years of marriage (Yıldırım, 2004). Therefore, it is believed that the risk of women being killed is higher during the early years of marriage.

In the research, since the occupations of both men and women were not provided in all the news articles, a definitive conclusion cannot be drawn regarding the relationship between education, occupation and committing murder for men during the divorce process, or the relationship between education, occupation and becoming a victim of murder for women. However, the comparison of the news articles where the woman's socio-economic status is known shows that having an independent profession that ensures economic independence for women is perceived as a threat by men to their authority and increases the likelihood of women experiencing violence. When a woman is not economically free, it becomes more difficult for her to challenge the authority of the man, and the man does not see the woman as a rival, leading to a decrease in the likelihood of violence. According to the literature, economically independent women with a good social status have less hesitation about divorce.

Men perceive a woman's economic independence and her ability to easily divorce as a threat to their authority, which makes women more susceptible to violence after divorce (Brownridge, 2006). However, there are also studies in the literature that contradict this idea. One study on divorced academics indicated that women reported experiencing less violence and less exclusion by their extended families after divorce (Uğur, 2014). Therefore, in the context of post-divorce violence, women's employment status, along with their economic independence, plays a crucial role. Women who achieve economic independence through high-status



professions in society experience less physical and emotional violence and are less affected by social exclusion after divorce.

Divorce and the committed murders also have an impact on children. The communication between family members greatly influences the mental health of children. The love and compassion shown by parents to each other and to their children play a crucial role in establishing trust and peace within the child. Growing up in a family where love, respect, tolerance, and understanding are fundamental ensures the well-being of children's mental health (Essizoglu et al., 2012). Divorce, on the other hand, means that children lose the family environment they were a part of and the benefits that environment provided to them. If a healthy divorce can be achieved, where the spousal subsystem is closed and the parent-child subsystem is continued, the children will be least affected by their parents' separation. More importantly, they will continue to receive the parental support they need for their psychosocial development and overall well-being. Therefore, it is essential to seek and implement ways to continue the parent-child subsystem in the best possible way.

According to the literature, the presence of children can be both a risk factor and a protective factor for post-separation violence. The mother gaining custody can provoke anger in some men and potentially lead to violence, whereas fathers who are concerned about losing their visitation rights may refrain from resorting to violence (Brownridge, 2006).

After making the decision to divorce, some women who return to their families' homes are advised by their relatives to reconcile with their spouses for the sake of the child and are sent back to their husbands. These reunions for the child can lead to violence against the woman (Can & Aksu, 2016). However, it is better for the child to live with a single parent than to live with both parents in an environment of constant violence and fighting. Sending their daughters back to their spouses who have subjected them to violence reflects patriarchal gender roles, disregarding the well-being of their grandchildren.

Women who divorce their partners due to experiencing violence are concerned about the safety, well-being, and welfare of their children after the divorce. Being separated from a violent spouse causes women to fear experiencing violence again and worry about their children's needs (Hardesty & Chung, 2006). This is because for over one-third of women who leave violent relationships, ending the abusive relationship does not mean an end to violence against them (Fleury et al., 2000).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of newspaper articles published between 2016 and 2020, concerning femicides and femicide attempts during the divorce process, it is evident that the number of women killed during the divorce process increased each year. When examining at which stage of the divorce process women were killed the most, it was concluded that the highest number of femicides occurred during the divorce stage, specifically when women made their divorce intentions official. It has been observed that Istanbul is the city where femicides are most frequently committed, and women killed by their spouses are victims of extremely brutal and vicious murders.

When the reasons for men killing their spouses during the divorce process are examined, it is seen that the main cause of these murders is the "ex-partner syndrome," which results from their inability to accept the divorce and separation from their spouses and to close the marital subsystem in a healthy manner. The research results indicate that legal inadequacies also play a significant role in femicides.

The research results indicate that women face various problems throughout all stages of the divorce process, including being killed. However, it is believed that these issues can be addressed and resolved through necessary precautions, measures, and effective policies. In this context, the recommendations proposed by researchers are as follows:

These murders committed due to reasons such as wanting a divorce, being in the process of divorce, or having already divorced highlight the necessity of counseling services during the divorce process. The primary goal of family counseling is not to dissuade individuals from their divorce decisions but to change the meaning they attribute to divorce, make the process easier for them, and minimize potential risks that may arise from the difficulty of accepting divorce. During the divorce process, couples often struggle to establish healthy communication and find it challenging to reach a common ground, often resorting to conflict-ridden communication. According to the research, the recommendations and attitudes of extended families are also

found to be inadequate due to factors such as being related to the individuals going through the process and the society's still lingering negative views towards divorce. For all these reasons, it becomes essential to provide professional support during the divorce stage for couples to go through a healthy divorce and, more importantly, to survive.

During the divorce process, the existing structure of the family changes, and a new one is formed. Therefore, the efforts, dedication, and sensitivity shown during marriage should also be displayed during divorce. Just as the care shown during the marriage stage is effective in establishing the family structure healthily, a smooth and problem-free divorce process also helps couples create their post-divorce structure in a healthy way and adapt to the new situation.

If couples are assigned a counselor from the moment they file for divorce, the counselor can learn about the perspectives of couples and the meaning they attach to the divorce process. By reframing their perspectives through counseling, the meaning they attribute to divorce can be changed, and the anger towards the former spouse can be prevented. In this way, potential murders can be prevented.

For the well-being of the children after the divorce, counseling services are also necessary before the divorce. Through counseling, couples can become aware that the divorce not only affects them but also their children and be reminded that they are not just spouses but also parents with responsibilities. Even though the marital subsystem ends with divorce, the parental duties (parent-child subsystem) continue. If couples cannot go through a healthy divorce process, evidenced by the research findings, it not only negatively affects them but also their children, leading to the breakdown of the parental subsystem.

Finally, in our country where divorce rates are increasing, if couples are not provided with counseling services to facilitate consensus during the divorce process, or if such services are not made mandatory, the escalating divorce rates will continue to be accompanied by an increase in murders committed during the divorce process, as indicated by research findings. These findings demonstrate that the majority of female homicides or attempted homicides occur during the divorce phase, precisely when individuals formalize their decision to divorce. This situation cannot be resolved solely by increasing legal penalties and sanctions against men who commit violence against their partners. This is because when examining the research findings, it is observed that even individuals who have received restraining orders or have been imprisoned still go on to kill their partners after these measures have ended. This counseling service can be initiated with Istanbul being selected as a pilot city, considering that it is the location where the most number of female homicides/femicide attempts occur during the divorce process.

When we examine the practices of the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) regarding the divorce process, we can see that there is a counseling service specifically focused on the "Family and Divorce Process Counseling Service". However, this counseling service is provided only when individuals apply voluntarily. The conclusion we reached from the research is that social services should make counseling services mandatory during the divorce process as part of preventive interventions (MoFSS, 2022).

This research attempted to demonstrate the impact of divorce on female murders. Our recommendation for future research is to conduct interviews with men who have killed their spouses during the divorce process to delve deeper into the reasons, psychology, and perspectives underlying their inability to accept divorce. This would provide valuable insights for the development of the content of the proposed counseling service.

## **Scientific Ethics Declaration**

The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

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