

Ethnic background and alcohol use of the spouse emerge as major risk factors for domestic violence: An observational study from Turkey

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Abstract

Objective: To assess the prevalence and risk factors of domestic violence in a multi-cultural region of Turkey.

Methods: The cross-sectional study was conducted in Tepecik district of Izmir, Turkey, from February to June 2013, and comprised women aged 15 years or above. A 21-item questionnaire was used to collect data through interviews. The primary outcome variable was history of domestic violence.

Results: There were 602 subjects with a mean age of 42.8±14.3 years. The mean age of spouses was 45.5±13.4 and the mean marriage duration was 19.6±4.4 years. The prevalence of any kind of violence within the preceding month was reported by 355(59%) women. Alcohol use of spouse had an odds ratio of 2.7 compared with non-users (p=0.007). Compared with Turkish background, Kurds had a 3.2-fold risk of being exposed to violence within the preceding year (p=0.010).

Conclusion: Independent of other demographic factors, race and alcohol use of the spouse were important factors in domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Women health, Ethnic origin, Alcohol use. (JPMA 68: 1782; 2018)

Introduction

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), violence is defined as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation.¹

Domestic violence has been defined as threat to members of the family by using either physical or psychological force.² The typology of domestic violence can be further sub-grouped as forcing to have sexual intercourse or doing other activities, restriction from meeting family or friends, restraining from work or school, or insulting.³

Domestic violence is observed in all varieties of human societies independent of educational, religious, economic or cultural backgrounds.⁴ The proportion of ever-partnered women who had ever experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner in their lifetime, ranged from 15% to 71%, with most sites falling between 29% and 62%.¹ Also in Turkey, violence against women is relatively common with lifetime physical or sexual abuse reported by women as 41.9%.⁵

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Biological, psychological as well as social reasons have been blamed in the aetiology of domestic violence.⁶ The current study was planned to assess the prevalence and risk factors of domestic violence in a multi-cultural region of Turkey and to look for the distribution of risk factors in this specific population. Our primary hypothesis was that there is no difference in exposure to domestic violence concerning demographic factors.

Subjects and Methods

The cross-sectional study was conducted in the Tepecik district of Izmir, Turkey, from February to June 2013.

Women aged 15 years or above were included in the study. An address-based simple random sampling method was utilised. The list of families living in the district was obtained from the local governor (mukhtar). Two physicians, one male and one female, visited each address to ensure privacy and ease of responding. All women in the household meeting the inclusion criteria were invited to participate.

Sample size calculation was based on the main outcome variable which was history of domestic violence. We needed 298 cases to detect a difference in domestic violence history between five ethnic groups (degree of freedom= 4) with an alpha error of 5%, effect size of 0.25 (medium), and a power of 95%.⁷ After adjusting for cluster effect with a constant of 1.5, the sample size stood at 447.

The primary outcome variable of the study was "history of domestic violence". Other variables studied were

age, age of spouse, educational status of self and spouse, marital status, age at first marriage, duration of marriage, number of children, marriage type, employment status of self and spouse, smoking status of self and spouse, alcohol use of self and spouse, gambling habits of self and spouse, family type, and ethnic origin. Questions regarding marriage and spouse were only put to the married participants. Domestic violence exposure was assessed using a 9-item tool developed by the Turkish Ministry of Health.⁵ Validated for Turkish, this tool evaluates domestic violence among women aged 15 years and above within the preceding one year and within the preceding one month. It asks eight questions about short (1-month) and long-term (1-year) psychological, physical, economic, and sexual violence, plus one question about fear from household members. We used relevant WHO reference¹ in the development of the tool, which included English-Turkish and back-translation. Using these variables we calculated two additional variables: "any violence within the last one year" and "any violence within the last one month". The questionnaire was in Turkish language. Participants with language barrier were excluded.

Participants were approached in their houses. Data collection was performed via face-to-face interview using a pre-tested questionnaire with 27 items. Each data collection process lasted around 15 minutes. Interviewers were trained for this purpose.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Izmir Tepecik Research and Education Hospital Ethics Committee and verbal consent was taken from each participant before starting the interview.

Descriptive analyses were expressed as frequencies and percentages for categorical variables and mean \pm standard deviation (SD) for numerical variables. Bivariate comparisons were performed using the Student's t-test and Mann Whitney U test, when necessary. Chi square analysis was also done. A binary logistic regression model was used to test the combined effects of the studied variables on the presence of any violence exposure. All the independent variables were entered into the model using a stepwise conditional method. Significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Of the 687 subjects approached, 85(12.4%) were excluded for various reasons and the final sample stood at 602(87.5%) (Figure). The mean age of the participants was 42.8 ± 14.3 years. Mean age of spouses was 45.5 ± 13.4 .

Table-1: Descriptive features of participants.

		n	%
Educational status	Illiterate	95	15.8
	Literate	54	8.9
	Primary school	255	42.4
	Secondary school	73	12.1
	High school	86	14.3
Educational status of spouse	University	39	6.5
	Illiterate	24	4.2
	Literate	57	10.0
	Primary school	274	48.0
	Secondary school	82	14.3
Marital status	High school	96	16.8
	University	38	6.7
	Married	459	76.3
	Single	31	5.1
	Divorced	53	8.8
Marriage type	Widowed	59	9.8
	After self-acquaintance	281	49.0
	Arranged marriage	242	42.4
Family type	Elopement	49	8.6
	Core	472	78.4
	Extended	130	21.6
Employment status	Employed	239	39.7
	Unemployed	363	60.3
Employment of spouse	Employed	501	87.7
	Unemployed	70	12.3
Smoking status	Smoker	263	43.7
	Non-smoker	339	56.3
Smoking status of spouse	Smoker	342	59.9
	Non-smoker	229	40.1
Alcohol use	Drinker	46	7.6
	Not-Drinker	556	92.4
Alcohol use of spouse	Drinker	192	33.6
	Not-Drinker	379	66.4
Gambling habit	Yes	10	1.7
	No	592	98.3
Gambling habit of spouse	Yes	40	7.0
	No	531	93.0
Ethnic origin	Turkish	266	44.2
	Roman	220	36.6
	Kurdish	85	14.1
	Other	31	5.1

Mean marriage duration was 19.6 ± 4.4 years. Mean age of marriage was 21.2 ± 13.4 years, and the mean number of children was 2.3 ± 1.3 (Table-1).

One-year domestic violence prevalence ranged from 72(12%) sexual to 304(50.5%) psychological. The prevalence of any violence in the preceding one month was 355(59%) (Table-2).

There were significant differences between some categorical variables and exposure to violence

Table-2: Prevalence of domestic violence in the study population.

	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
In the last one year have you ever been outraged, undignified (psychological violence) by your husband or another family member?	304	50.5	298	49.5
If "yes", did it happen within the last one month?	84	14.0	518	86.0
In the last one-year have you ever been kicked, slapped, pounded, (physical violence) by your husband or a family member/s?	164	27.2	438	72.8
If "yes", did it happen within the last one month?	27	4.5	575	95.5
In the last one year have you ever been hindered from working or put in a distress economically position (economical violence) by your husband or a family member?	152	25.2	450	74.8
If "yes", did it happen within the last one month?	48	8.0	554	92.0
In the last one-year have you ever been unwillingly forced to sexual relationship (sexual violence) by your husband or a family member?	72	12.0	530	88.0
If "yes", did it happen within the last one month?	18	3.0	584	97.0
Any violence within last one-year	355	59.0	247	41.0
Any violence within last one-month	116	19.3	486	80.7
Do you fear of your husband or a family member?	122	20.3	480	79.7

Table-3: Mean values of different numerical variables compared with violence exposure within the preceding one year.

		Age	Age of spouse	Age at marriage	Marriage age	Number of children	Number of female children	Number of male children
Psychological violence								
Yes	Mean±SD	43.8±14.2	47.0±13.6	19.4±4.2	22.6±13.5	2.4±1.4	1.5±0.8	1.6±1.0
No	Mean±SD	41.8±14.3	43.8±13.0	19.6±4.6	19.9±13.1	2.3±1.1	1.6±0.7	1.6±0.8
	t, p	1.721, 0.086	2.721, 0.007	-0.625, 0.532	2.146, 0.032	-0.003, 0.998*	-0.080, 0.936	0.493, 0.622
Physical violence								
Yes	Mean±SD	44.6±14.4	46.0±13.9	18.8±4.0	21.6±13.5	2.4±1.4	1.5±0.8	1.6±0.9
No	Mean±SD	42.1±14.2	45.1±13.2	19.8±4.5	21.0±13.3	2.3±1.2	1.6±0.8	1.6±0.9
	t, p	1.865, 0.063	0.926, 0.366	-2.742, 0.006*	0.919, 0.678	0.991, 0.322	-0.144, 0.885	0.663, 0.507
Economical violence								
Yes	Mean±SD	44.7±13.8	46.3±13.0	18.8±3.5	22.2±12.6	2.3±1.2	1.5±0.7	1.5±0.9
No	Mean±SD	42.1±14.4	45.2±13.5	19.8±4.6	20.9±13.5	2.4±1.3	1.6±0.8	1.6±0.9
	t, p	1.944, 0.052	0.837, 0.403	-2.005, 0.045*	0.858, 0.391	-0.589, 0.556	-0.367, 0.714	-1.144, 0.254
Sexual violence								
Yes	Mean±SD	47.4±13.2	50.8±14.6	18.6±3.2	26.8±14.5	2.5±1.3	1.7±0.8	1.4±0.6
No	Mean±SD	42.2±14.3	44.7±13.1	19.6±4.5	20.6±13.0	2.3±1.3	1.5±0.8	1.6±0.9
	t, p	2.939, 0.003	3.333, 0.001	-1.348, 0.178*	2.974, 0.003	0.774, 0.439	1.424, 0.155	-1.153, 0.250
Any violence								
Yes	Mean±SD	43.6±14.0	46.7±13.4	19.2±4.1	22.4±13.3	2.4±1.3	1.5±0.8	1.6±1.0
No	Mean±SD	41.6±14.6	43.7±13.2	20.0±4.8	19.7±13.2	2.3±1.1	1.6±0.7	1.6±0.7
	t, p	1.749, 0.081	2.456, 0.014	-1.527, 0.127*	2.161, 0.031	0.631, 0.528	-0.147, 0.883	0.286, 0.775
Fear of household members								
Yes	Mean±SD	44.5±14.6	47.1±14.4	18.2±3.3	23.6±14.8	2.6±1.5	1.6±0.8	1.7±1.0
No	Mean±SD	42.3±14.2	45.0±13.1	19.9±4.6	20.7±12.9	2.3±1.2	1.5±0.8	1.6±0.9
	t, p	1.493, 0.136	1.401, 0.162	-3.544, <0.001*	1.806, 0.072	2.330, 0.020	0.378, 0.706	1.030, 0.304

* Mann Whitney U test.

SD: Standard deviation.

($p < 0.05$) (Table-3). According to the logistic regression model, alcohol use of the husband and ethnic origin were significant independent variables predicting any domestic violence with a Nagelkerke R square of 10.0% and an overall predictive

percentage of 62.6%. Alcohol use of the spouse had an OR of 2.7 compared with non-users ($p = 0.007$; 95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.3 - 5.5). Compared with Turkish background, Kurds had a 3.2 fold risk of being exposed to any violence within the preceding

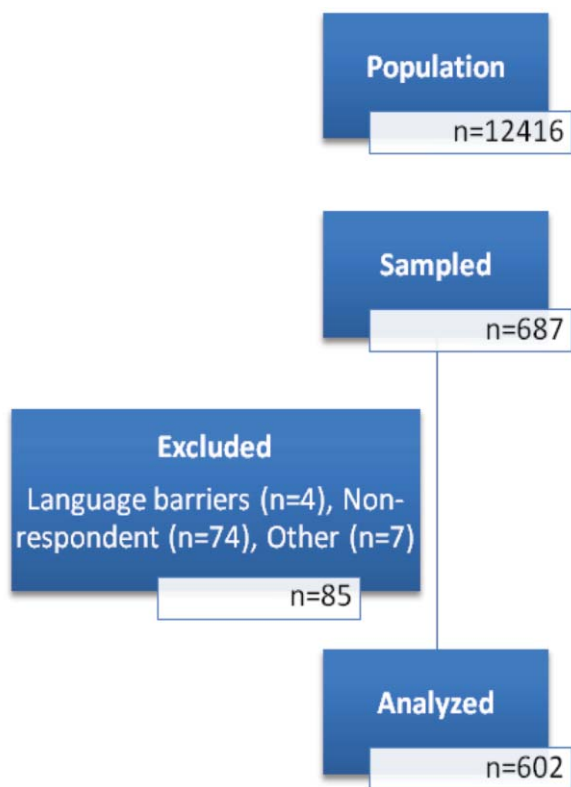


Figure: Study flow.

year ($p=0.010$; 95% CI: 1.3 - 7.8).

Discussion

Domestic violence in the studied population was relatively high, ranging from 47.4% to 75.3% among different ethnic groups. Although there are many factors significantly associated with domestic violence, alcohol use of the spouse and ethnic origin were the two independent factors affecting exposure in our sample.

Demographic findings of the studied sample are similar to those of the general adult women in Turkey.⁸ Concerning the ethnic origins of the participants, the proportion of Kurds and other ethnic backgrounds are similar to the general Turkish population. However, Roman population in the Tepecik district is denser than most other regions.⁹

It is reported that violence has an increasing trend in the Turkish community.¹⁰ Even violence to healthcare workers has become prevalent.¹¹ Researchers have developed scales to measure physician-related healthcare perceptions among Turks.¹²

We observed relatively high domestic violence figures in our sample. However, the world's scorecard in this field is not

brilliant either. One WHO study has revealed prevalence ranging from 15% to 71%.¹ Also, previous studies from Turkey have consistently shown high domestic violence figures in a range of 32.6% to 52%.¹³⁻¹⁵ Observing the rise in violence claims, the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies has adopted an action plan to stop domestic violence against women¹⁶ with its aim defined as "to take necessary actions by enabling collaboration of all partners involved to stop any violence against women". Still a study among women in an eastern province of Turkey in 2015 showed prevalence as high as 89%.¹⁷ However, the method of this measurement is through a different scale, which reminds one of the well-known importance of validated measurement tools.¹⁸

The effects of most of the studied independent variables on domestic violence have been investigated before. Among United States women, significant racial and ethnic differences were observed in association with intimate partner violence.¹⁹

Many studies have demonstrated that domestic violence is more common among married women.^{14,15,20,21} Divorced women have higher prevalence of domestic violence,⁵ which suggests that partner abuse is among the reasons for divorce. The reason why married women are more exposed to violence compared to singles is indicative of the fact that spouses are the principal source of violence.

It is a traditional knowledge that "domestic violence knows no boundaries". However, some populations are more prone to this malady than others. Raised educational levels make women less fearless, and so does economic independence.^{5,13} Also, substance abuse, including tobacco and alcohol use, is related to higher risks of practising violence.¹⁻³

The number of traditional extended families is decreasing with time.²² Still one of every five families in our sample was of extended type. Although we would expect that the wisdom and experience of extended family should be guarding against violence, this appears not to be the case. Also, literature has proposed a similar relationship.² Probably there are confounding factors such as education affecting this finding. Findings of the regression model, demonstrating that race and alcohol are the two main independent risk factors for domestic violence, supports this judgement.

Failing to take precautions on time to prevent domestic violence may result in damage to the whole society.²³ To achieve international goals against domestic violence, a multinational and inter-sectoral collaboration is vital. Informing and educating services for avoiding domestic violence must be planned and implemented. The gap between societies with regard to educational status, economic independence and women rights must narrow

down.

The method of data collection was a limitation of the current study. Responses might have changed if we had conducted data collection confidentially without the presence of other household members. However, we should only expect higher rates of domestic violence in response to direct questioning.²⁴ Another issue to mention is the time gap between data collection and manuscript preparation, which was due to health problems of the primary author.

As hypothesised, demographic factors were found to play a significant role in domestic violence. However, most important to note are the effects of race and alcohol use, which independent from other variables interfere with the outcome. Although alcohol use is a well-known risk factor for domestic violence, race should be taken into consideration as well in the efforts to combat this never vanishing ailment. Domestic violence does not know any boundaries and it seems not to be declining despite all the efforts given by official and civil initiatives.

Conclusion

Independent of other demographic factors, race and alcohol use of the spouse were found to be important factors in domestic violence, which is a still highly prevalent health problem in Turkey.

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