

## **Social Profile of Women in Women's Shelters**

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of the study is to determine the socio demographic features of women, who stay in women's shelters. The study was conducted with 150 women, who stay at a women's shelter. In this study conducted using the survey method, a questionnaire developed by the researchers and consisted of 21 questions was utilized. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and chi-square test. The women that participated in the study had a mean age of 30. 54% were married and the mean age of first marriage was 19.04. 34% of the women eloped and 22.7% had a companionate marriage. It was determined that 81.3% had no profession, 84.3% had an income of below TL 1.000, 78.7% were the victims of violence by their partners. Also a statistically significant relationship was determined between women's exposure to violence and the degree of violence exposed with the alcohol and substance abuse of their partners.*

**Keywords:** Women's shelter, violence, alcohol and substance abuse

### **1. Introduction**

Efforts to eradicate violence against women in the world and in Turkey continue swiftly. Women's shelters founded as a result of these efforts are of significant value in the care and rehabilitation of women in cases of violence against women. It was the aim of several international proclamations, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to produce policies to prevent violence against women, to establish and empower application and follow up mechanisms. These documents could be listed as follows: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1981; UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993; UN Resolution: Elimination of Domestic Violence Against Women, (2003); World Women's Conferences; Council of Europe Resolutions; and Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Women's shelters were founded to serve the women subject to physical abuse and without security of life (Karataş, Şener and Otaran, 2008: 51). According to Dobash and Dobash (1992: 60 Cited by Açikel, 2009: 24), the shelters provide a physical space for women, where they could escape violence temporarily, stay safe and make decisions about their lives. Furthermore, communicating with other victims of violence helps them to overcome the feeling of isolation and the perception of being the only woman that has a violent partner. Violence against women prevails in increasing numbers in Turkey as well as the world. Women's shelters, established against violence against women, are far from meeting the demand created by the increasing violence. Thus, this study aims to highlight the social profiles of the women that stay in women's shelters and the violence they were subjected to.

### **The Establishment of Women's Shelters in the World and in Turkey**

Women's shelters were first established in Europe in the 1990's to help solve psycho-social and economic problems of women that were subjects of physical, emotional, sexual and economic violence and to provide boarding accommodations where they could stay alone or with their children if any (Karataş, Şener and Otaran, 2008). An investigation on the history of women's shelters in the world would demonstrate that the first shelter for the victims of violence against women was opened in the United Kingdom in 1972. The name of this shelter opened by Erin Pizzey was Chiswick Women's Refuge. After the first women's shelter was open in the United Kingdom, efforts of local groups were carried over to the national level and women's shelters were opened across the country. In 1975, 35 different organizations providing aid to women victims of violence were confederated under the auspice of National Women's Aid Federation, which became one of the most significant organizations that fight against violence against women. The objective of this federation was to provide safe accommodations and support for child and women victims of violence, to provide temporary lodging and to make the evidence of the dimensions of domestic violence available for the public (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Yıldırım, 1996; Hague and Malos, 2005; Erbaydar, 2012).

After it became apparent that women's shelters occupied a significant space against violence, numerous shelters opened across the Europe, USA and Canada. Two opened in Boston, Massachusetts and St. Paul; Minnesota in the US, and one in Canada in 1973. The first women's shelter in Germany was opened in Berlin in 1974, in France in Paris in 1976, in Norway in Oslo in 1977 and in Switzerland, in Zurich in 1977 (Erbaydar, 2012; Yıldırım, 1996). In addition to shelters, information centers, emergency phone numbers and women's bureaus were established in several countries (Yıldırım, 1996). An analysis of the developments in Turkey on the subject would demonstrate that the establishment of women's shelters was the primary target and the struggle of the women's movement. In the process that started with the Women's Solidarity against Beating movement in 1987, Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation was established in 1990 in Istanbul and Women's Solidarity Foundation was established in 1991 in Ankara. The first women's shelter opened by the women's movement was established in Ankara in 1993 by Women's Solidarity Foundation. First women's shelter in Istanbul was established by Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation in 1995. The first state run women's shelter in Turkey was established by Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHÇEK) in 1990 (Karataş, Şener and Otaran, 2008).

The initial regulation on women's shelters in Turkey was legislated with an amendment in code 2828 (SHÇEK Law) and with the statutory decree no: 572, and established these as social services institutions. Later on, the regulations on the establishment of women's shelters under the organization of SHÇEK, "The Statute on the Establishment and Operations of Women's Shelters," took effect on March 16, 1991. Furthermore, with a decree circulated on March 1, 1990, Family Counseling Bureaus and Family Counseling Centers were opened. These were reregulated in 1993 and were transformed into Community Centers. The bylaw on the shelters organized by SHÇEK was regulated again on July 12, 1998 and renamed as "Regulation for Women's Shelters Organized under Social Services and Child Protection Agency." Recently, with the establishment of Ministry of Family and Social Policies, a new bylaw was decreed by this ministry in 2013. "Regulations on the Establishment and Operation of Women's Shelters," no: 28519, published in the Official Gazette on January 5, 2013, determined the procedures and principles for the establishment, operation, the types and the quality of the services, monitoring, cooperation among the institutions and the duties and the responsibilities of the staff of women's shelters organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the local governments, provincial private administrations and non-governmental organizations.

In this regulation, women's shelters were defined as boarding social service institutions established under the variations of the name women's shelter where women, who are subject to physical, emotional, sexual, economic and verbal abuse or violence could stay with their children if they have one and their needs are provided for, for their protection from violence and for resolving their psycho-social and economic problems (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, Regulation on the Establishment and Operation of the Women's Shelter, 2013). The beneficiaries of the shelter services are defined as "all women that are subject to violence or in danger of being subject to violence and their accompanying children are accepted in the shelter without any discrimination" in the regulations. However, in the regulations it was noted that women that has alcohol and substance addiction, could not perform self-care, in need of different service models, with cognitive and mental disorders would be placed in suitable social services organizations.

Addresses and phone numbers of women's shelters are kept private due to the Article 17 of the regulations. According to this article, the address and phone number of the institution is held private and it is not allowed to put signs depicting the institution on the building or any opening ceremonies in the building. It was also depicted that names of the women, children or the staff could not be mentioned and previously agreed upon codes would be used if necessary Ministry of Family and Social Policies, Regulation on the Establishment and Operation of the Women's Shelter, 2013). In addition, Article 19 regulates the services that would be provided in the shelter. Thus, the shelters should, either directly or through related organizations, provide services of security, counseling, guidance, psychological support, legal advice, medical support, temporary financial aid, employment services, childcare, occupational training, group work, scholarship for children, social, artistic and sports activities.

Between the years of 1995 and 2004, nine shelters were open in only 3 major cities in Turkey. Legislation passed during the EU accession process, the Local Government Code no: 5393 of 2005, made it a requirement that every municipality with a population of over 50,000 should establish at least one women's shelter. Later on, the legislation no:6363, amending the Local Government Code 5393, made it necessary for municipalities with a population of over 100,000 to establish at least one women's shelter in the municipality. As of October 22, 2013, there are 90 women's shelters with a capacity of 2411 operated by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies; 32 women's shelters with a capacity of 779 operated by local governments; and 2 women's shelters with a capacity of 30 operated by non-governmental organizations in Turkey (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, The Presidency of Strategy Development, 2013). As mentioned above, women's shelters are organized within the framework of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and local governments. By regulations, the privacy of the women's shelters are protected at the highest level to provide security for the inhabitants of these shelters, therefore making it almost impossible to gather information about the women serviced by these institutions. Thus, in the study, the files of the women serviced in a women's shelter were scanned and defined descriptively.

## **2. Method**

### **Population and the Sample**

The population of the study designed in "cross-sectional and relational screening model" consisted of women applied to a women's shelter. In this particular shelter, 150 women have accepted to stay until the date when the study was conducted. The data was collected by scanning the files and documents of the women accepted ( $n = 150$ ). Document review is a significant data collection method when the researcher does not have direct access to individuals or institutions that are related to the research subject. Women's shelters are usually populated by individual victims of violence. Certain women's locations are kept as a secret due to threats to their lives. Thus, direct collection of information from the individuals was not possible due the principles of security of life and secrecy. Document review is defined as "the systematic examination of existing records or documents as a data source" in the literature (Karasar, 2003). In other words, document review includes the analysis of written documents that contain information about the fact or facts that are the target of the research. Document review is an inevitable data collection technique for any study (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2002). One of the benefits of document review is that it does not cause the problem of "the reactivity of the participants of the study," which is experienced frequently on interviews and observations (Karasar, 2003). The population of the study consisted of all women accepted in women's shelter that the study was conducted at. No sampling was preferred and the files of all women accepted to the shelter were reviewed.

### **Data Collection Tools**

A questionnaire was designed by the researchers to gather the information in a systematic manner in the study. The information obtained from the files was entered in the questionnaire. Questionnaire included detailed questions determining demographical and personal information about the participants.

### **Process**

Filling the forms utilized in the study and data collection lasted for approximately 3 months. Collected data was entered into the SPSS statistics software. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics was implemented to determine the frequency distribution and percentages of the data. Furthermore, the analysis of "alcohol and substance abuse" and "violence and the degree of violence" was conducted using chi-square test.

### 3. Findings

In this section, socio-demographical characteristics of the participants and their families and findings on domestic violence will be presented. 150 women that were accepted in the women's shelter participated in the study. Mean age of women was 30 (Sd. 9.43) and the youngest woman was 16, and the eldest was 59. Women got married when they were 12 the earliest and when they were 38 the latest and mean age of marriage was 19 (Sd.:4.38). Average length of marriage was 10 years (Sd.:6.96).

**Table 1: Findings about Women**

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Single	3	2,0
Engaged	1	,7
Married	81	54,0
Not divorce but living separately	8	5,3
Divorced	37	24,7
Widow/Widower	5	3,3
Living together	15	10,0
<b>Number of Marriages</b>		
First	101	67,3
Second	20	13,3
Third	6	4,0
Do not respond	23	15,3
<b>How married</b>		
Prearranged	34	22,7
Getting along with	30	20,0
Kin marriage	19	12,7
Eloped	51	34,0
Dowry payment	12	8,0
Do not respond	4	2,7
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Illiterate	20	13,3
Know how to read and write	21	14,0
Primary school	69	46,0
Elementary school	23	15,3
High school	14	9,3
College	1	,7
Faculty	2	1,3
<b>Working Status</b>		
Working	18	12,0
Not working	132	88,0

54% of the participating women were married, 24.7% were divorced; this was the first marriage for 67.3%; 34% eloped, 22.7% had prearranged marriages; 46% were primary school graduates, 13.3% were illiterate; 88% did not have a current job (See Table 1).

**Table 2: Findings about Families of Women**

<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
1	30	20,0
2	68	45,3
3	40	26,7
4	12	8,0
<b>Number of Siblings</b>		
1-3	37	24,7
4-6	70	46,7
7-9	35	23,3
10+	7	4,7
<b>Working Status of Husband</b>		
Working	89	59,3
Not working	58	38,7
<b>Economical Status of the Family</b>		
0-250 TL	54	36,0
250-750 TL	32	21,3
750-1000 TL	39	26,0
1000 TL+	25	16,7
<b>Educational Status of Husband</b>		
Illiterate	2	1,3
Know how to read and write	12	8,0
Primary school	82	54,7
Elementary school	29	19,3
High school	18	12,0
College	2	1,3
Faculty	2	1,3
Do not respond	3	2,0

The analysis of the data about the families of the participating women would demonstrate that 45.3% of the women had 2 children, 46.7% had 4 – 6 siblings, 38.8% had an unemployed partner, 54.7% had a primary school graduate partner, and 57.3% had incomes lower than the minimum wage (See Table 2).

**Table 3: Findings about Domestic Violence and Use of Alcohol and Substance**

<b>Exposure to Violence of Women</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	118	78,7
No	32	21,3
<b>Degree of the Violence</b>		
Light	10	6,7
Moderate	33	22,0
Severe	42	28,0
Extreme	32	21,3
Do not respond	32	21,3
<b>Being Aware of the Women's Family about Violence</b>		
Yes	71	47,3
No	43	28,7
Missing	36	24,0
<b>Response of Women's Family towards Violence</b>		
They do not accept	55	36,7
They accept	12	8,0
Other (disrupt the marriage, not to know)	9	6,0
Missing	74	49,3
<b>Exposure to Violence of Women by Other Members of the Family</b>		
Yes	34	22,7
No	116	77,3
<b>Use of Alcohol and Drug in the Women's House</b>		
Yes	101	67,3
No	49	32,7

Table 3 displays the data on domestic violence that the women were subjected to and their substance abuse. It was determined that 78.7% of the women that participated in the study and were staying at the women's shelter were victims of violence. 28% of the women were exposed to severe violence, while 21.3% were subjected to extreme violence. It was also determined in the study that 28.7% of the women did not tell their family about the violence they were subjected to. Furthermore, 22.7% of the women were subjected to violence by other family members as well. Alcohol and substance abuse in the domicile data demonstrated that 67.3% of women shared their homes with individuals who drank alcohol and were addicted to substances. In the study, the relationships between women's exposure to violence and the degree of this violence, and certain variables were scrutinized. The results are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

**Table 4: Exposure to Violence of Women According to Alcohol and Substance Use**

Alcohol and Substance Use	Exposure to Violence of Women						$\chi^2$	P
	Yes		No		Total			
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Yes	90	89.1	11	10.9	101	100	20,089	.000*
No	28	57.1	21	42.9	49	100		

\* p<0.05

Table 4 demonstrates that 89.1% of the women that shared the house with individuals that used alcohol and drugs and 57.1% of the women without an individual that used alcohol and drugs were subjected to violence. Chi-square analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between alcohol and substance abuse in the household and exposure to violence of women (p<0.05). In other words, alcohol and substance abuse result in more exposure to violence of women.

**Table 5: Degree of the Violence of Women According to Alcohol and Substance Use**

Alcohol and Substance Use	Degree of the Violence						$\chi^2$	P
	Light-Moderate		Severe-Extreme		Total			
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Yes	26	29.2	60	70.8	86	100	9,092	.003*
No	17	60.7	11	39.3	28	100		

\* p<0.05

Table 5 demonstrates that 70.8% of the women that shared the house with individuals that used alcohol and drugs and 39.3% of the women without an individual that used alcohol and drugs were subjected to severe-extreme violence. Chi-square analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between alcohol and substance abuse in the household and the degree of violence exposed to for women (p<0.05). Thus, alcohol and substance abuse increases the degree of violence that women were subjected to. Furthermore, there was no statistically significant relationship between the woman's age of marriage, economic status of the family, educational background of the partner and violence.

#### 4. Discussion

Social profile of women that stay in women's shelter was attempted to be determined in this study and the study group of the research consisted of 150 women that stayed at a particular women's shelter. Data collected from the personal files of the women demonstrated that women's shelter inhabitants had lower socio-economic status, educational level and were subjected to serious violence. It was determined in the study that most of the women that stayed in the women's shelter did not have wage-earning jobs and monthly earnings of the families of more than half (57.3%) were below the minimum wage. Other studies conducted at women's shelters reported that women had low income and low economic standing as well (Damka, 2009; Prime Ministry General Directorate on the Status of Women, Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey, 2009). In another study by Öztürk (2014), it was stated that 52% of women that stayed in a women's shelter were homemakers dependent on the income of their partners.

The findings of the study determined that vast majority of women that stayed in the women's shelter (78.7%) were subjected to violence and almost half (49.3%) were subjected to severe or extreme violence. Similar to this finding, in the studies by Yıldırım (1996), Sezgin (2007), Özkan (2009) and Öztürk (2014), it was reported that women that stayed in a women's shelter were subjected to different types (physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, economic) of violence. Also it was indicated that 22.7% of the women participated in the study were subjected to violence by members of their family as well. In a study by Damka (2009), it was found that 18.3% of women subjected to violence were also subjected to violence by their fathers in the family environment and the level of guilt due to trauma was high among women that were subjected to physical, verbal and sexual violence together. Also in another study it was reported that women that stayed in women's shelter were subjected to violence by their "mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law" most frequently apart from their partners while married and by their fathers, mothers and siblings before getting married (Sezgin, 2007).

It was observed that most of the women that participated in the study shared the information about the violence they were exposed to with their families; however 28.7% did not tell anything about the violence to their families. Sezgin (2007) reported that 75% of the women mentioned the violence by their husbands to their families. However in the "Domestic Violence Against Women in Turkey" study conducted by the General Directorate on the Status of Women (KGSM) demonstrated that 49% of the women, who were subjected to physical or sexual violence by their partners, did not share it with anyone (Prime Ministry General Directorate on the Status of Women, Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey, 2009). Also, it was reported that women that were subjected to violence generally did not share it with their families, almost all did not apply to official institutions or non-governmental organizations (Prime Ministry General Directorate on the Status of Women, Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey, 2009), and a significant portion of women did not seek any help at all (Yıldırım, 1996; Damka, 2009).

No significant relationship was found in the study between exposure to violence and the age of marriage of woman, economic status of the family and educational background of the partner. There are different findings on these variables in the literature. It was observed that most of the women subjected to violence were married at a very young age (Prime Ministry General Directorate on the Status of Women, Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey, 2009). In a study by Sezgin (2007), women stated that economic troubles were the primary reason (66%) for the violence they were subjected to by their partners. Finally, a significant relationship was found between alcohol and substance abuse by the partner, and the degree of violence that the women were subjected to. Parallel to this finding, Damka (2009) reported that, among the reasons of violence against women, the rate for alcohol and substance abuse was 16.2% and substance abuse was also frequent among the family members (father, sibling/siblings) of women who were subjected to violence.

In the study conducted to determine the social profile of women that stay in women's shelters, there were certain limitations. The first of these limitations was the fact that it was conducted using only the information obtained from the files. It is not always possible to conduct a research in women's shelters due to the principle of secrecy and the sensitive situations of the women. Thus, the method of gathering the information via the information available in the files was preferred. The second limitation was the improper organization of these files. Thus, certain answers were missing from the files and could not be obtained. In this study that includes information on the characteristics of the women that receive services from women's shelters, it was observed that most of these women did not have wage-earning jobs, they were dependent on their partners economically, they kept their silence during the negative experiences they had, and especially women that had partners who abuse alcohol and drugs were exposed to violence more than others. Thus, education of the women should be prioritized; they should be supported to obtain occupational skills to sustain a living and social policies should be developed to fulfill that goal. The results of the study demonstrated that development of applications for identification, protection and empowerment of girls that are subjected to violence in their families would help women to defend themselves better in their marriage.

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