

ESRA BANU SIPAHI

Necmettin Erbakan University, TURKEY

ERHAN ÖRSELLI

Necmettin Erbakan University, TURKEY

WOMEN'S REFUGES AS A LIFEBOUY FOR WOMEN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN TURKEY

Abstract:

From past until today, women have been exposed to many different types of poverty, deprivation, desperation and violence. The most dramatic one from all those destructive effects are the domestic violence and abuse of women. The domestic violence is a fact, which is mostly ignored and overpassed in many societies. When the lower chances of economic survival for women are also taken into account within this framework, the feeling of frustration worsens the dilemma between poverty and domestic violence for them.

The solution search for this problem began in the last half of the twentieth century. Since then, the domestic violence is brought to the attention of mankind, regarded as violation of human rights and relevant legal and organizational arrangements have been made. One of these organizational arrangements is Women's Refuges. Today, these Women's Refuges have become an important part of the struggle strategies against domestic violence and women's poverty.

The idea of Women's Refuge arose primarily in Europe, and then spread all over the world beginning from 1970s. In Turkey, Women's Refuges started to serve in the 1990s. This study focuses on the existence of Women's Refuges in Turkey as a struggle strategy against domestic violence and poverty. The concept of violence against women and the evolution of Women's Refuges will be discussed from the beginning to the present. In this respect, the historical development process, the legal basis, organizational developments, implementations and the problems of Women's Refuges in Turkey will be analyzed.

Keywords:

Domestic violence, Women's Refuges, poverty

JEL Classification: J12, L39, H83

1. Introduction

Violence is a multi-dimensional problem which we may encounter in any area of our lives. There are many types of violence such as violence caused by terror, violence at work, violence in the media, violence at the hospitals or domestic violence. Probably among these violence types, the one with the deepest effects is domestic violence. The sufferers of domestic violence are mostly women and children. Especially in the male dominated societies, domestic violence is wide but disregarded and women are left alone in their struggle against domestic violence. When the limited economic resources of a woman are added to this situation, the sense of helplessness and disappointment caused by oppression worsen the situation she is in.

Despite its importance, the issue of domestic violence became a topic of discussion in the society only in the second half of the twentieth century. During this period, domestic violence was started to become defined as a human rights violation and making of the related legal and institutional arrangements also started. Women's refuges are the principal institutions established in this process. Today, women's refuges constitute a part of the countries' strategies in combatting violence against women. On the side of the women, refuges are just like a lifebuoy which save them from the turbulence they are in. This paper focuses on women's refuges which have widely become a tool in combatting domestic violence both in Turkey and in the world. General features of the establishment process of women's refuges, their services and their operation are discussed in this paper within the framework of the example of Turkey.

2. Domestic Violence against Women

Domestic Violence against women by an intimate male partner is now recognized throughout most of the world as a significant social problem. It has been identified by many countries, the United Nations and the European Union as an issue of human rights (Dobash& Dobash, 2004: 325).

Domestic violence can be defined as "a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure or wound someone. Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Domestic violence occurs in both opposite-sex and same sex relationships and can happen to intimate partners who are married, living together, or dating." (USDOJ, 2014).

Such violence principally depends on gender inequality and it is directed towards women mainly by men or male dominated culture. Studies show that, women are the ones who are mostly affected by domestic violence (İlkaracan, et al: 1996). During the first 30 years of their lives, women are more frequently exposed to violence. Pregnancy increases this risk. Especially pregnant adolescents are more exposed to violence (approximately 20%) than pregnant adults (approximately 15%). Women living separately from their husbands are at risk of being exposed to violence 3 times more than divorced women and 25 times more than married women (Yetim&Şahin, 2009: 49).

According to World Bank data, the amount of women in the world who lose their lives due to violence in the 15-44 age group, is more than the amounts of women who die because of cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and wars (World Bank, 1993). According to another research conducted by the UN, the rate of women exposed to violence during a period of their lives is for example 12% in China and rises up to 59% in Zambia. (United Nations, 2010). Research by the European Union shows that, one in five people has witnessed domestic violence in his/her family or in the families of friends (EC, 2010).

In Turkey, research conducted on the issue at different periods shows that violence against women is very wide in the country. The most visible form of violence is the killing of women. In the acts of violence against women, mostly firearms and sharp objects are used. Due to the statistics released by World Health Organization (WHO) in 2000, 57.9% percent of the women living in Turkey have been attacked by their boyfriends or husbands. This ratio was the highest in the world (Alpago, 2006: 35). It is likely that this ratio is higher in poor families. A related research was conducted in 1995 in the gecekondu (slum) of the capital city Ankara by Foundation for Women's Solidarity revealing that 97% of women were exposed to violence by their spouses (DGSW¹, 2001).

According to the results of the research conducted by DGSW in 2008 on the domestic violence against Women in Turkey, the ratio of women who have been exposed to physical violence by their spouses or by the person(s) they have been living with is 39%. The research also revealed that 15% of the married women in Turkey have been exposed to one or more than one assault types within the scope of sexual violence during their lifetimes. The ratio of women exposed to physical or sexual violence is 42%. The ratio of the women exposed to emotional violence is 44%. Among the participant women, 37% of them were prevented from working by their spouses or partners. One of the most important results of the study show that 49% of the women exposed to physical or sexual violence could not tell about the situation to someone else (DGSW, 2009).

3. The Evolution of Combating Violence against Women in the World and in Turkey

Resurgence of the women's movement of the late 1960's and 1970s in developed Western countries opened the issue of domestic violence against women to discussion in the social fora. Only for the last 30 years, it has internationally been regarded as a human rights violation. (Alpago, 2006: 31).

The first world conference on women, with the states as participants, was held in Mexico City in 1975. The World Plan of Action was adopted in the conference. This first conference organized by the UN was followed by the conferences in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995).

After the second conference held in Copenhagen, CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) came into force in 1981. CEDAW, signed by 185 countries, is the most comprehensive regulation regarding the status of women. The treaty which was signed by Turkey in 1985 requires participating states to eliminate any kind of discrimination against women, to take the

¹ Directorate General on the Status of Women (Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü)

necessary measures to ensure gender equality and to protect the women against discrimination.

At the World Conference on Human Rights held in Wien in 1993, the concept of 'women rights' entered into the UN documents on human rights. 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women lays down obligations for states about preventing and eliminating violence against women.

In Turkey, violence against women awareness started to grow in the 1980s and the establishment of related institutions started in 1990s. CEDAW, 6th Five-year Development Plan of Turkey and Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women required the establishment of a coordination unit to work on the issues of women. On April 20th 1990, Directorate General on the Status of Women was established as a unit planned to work within the organizational scheme of Prime Ministry. The Directorate worked under different ministries and with the latest arrangement dated 2011; it was restructured as one of the main service units of The Ministry of Family and Social Policies (DGSW, 2014). The Directorate works in the area of combating violence against women by implementing various projects and action plans.

The most important development in the area of policies on women showing the change of attitude in Turkey is the legal arrangements. Starting from the 2000s, the principle of gender equality was strengthened in legal documents beginning from the constitution. Legislation of the country, beginning with the basic legal documents such as Civil Law, Labor Law and Turkish Criminal Code were reformed with the aim of ensuring gender equality and ensuring zero tolerance to violence against women. In addition, Municipal Act of 2005 numbered 5393 requires that metropolitan municipalities and municipalities with a population of more than 50,000 should open houses for women and children welfare (DGSW, 2012: 13).

In 1998, the concept of 'domestic violence' was for the first time used in the text of legislation in Turkey with the Law numbered 4320 on the Protection of the Family which aims to prevent domestic violence. It was extended in scope in 2007. The Law numbered 6284 named as The Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women entered into force (DGSW, 2012: 13).

Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence which was approved by the European Council Committee of Ministers in Strasbourg on April 7, 2011 was ratified by Turkey on November 24, 2011 and entered into force on March 8, 2012. Turkey is the first state to ratify this important convention (DGSW, 2012: 13).

Besides these legal arrangements, many working commissions were established in Grand National Assembly of Turkey. In July 2006, Prime Ministry circular on the prevention of violence against women and customs/honor killings numbered 2006/17 was issued. Within the scope of the circular, Violence against Women Monitoring Committee was established under the coordination of the Directorate General with the participation of all relevant public institutions, universities and NGOs. The Committee gathers ones a year, evaluates the studies and developments in the field of violence against women and makes recommendations on the issue (DGSW, 2012: 15).

Public institutions such as Presidency of Religious Affairs, Turkish National Police, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Education and many other institutions conduct various complementary projects on the issue.

As it can be seen, it is not possible to combat the problem with centralized management. Besides centralized policies, beginning from the 1990s, number of the university centers for research on women, activities of the local governments targeting women and NGOs aiming to serve women in Turkey, began to increase. One of the most important working areas of these institutions is the establishment and services of women's refuges.

4. "Women's Refuge"

A women's refuge is an institution providing public service to the women exposed to domestic violence and their children. It serves as a boarding house for these women and children where they will be safe and secure and will be able to receive the services they need for a certain period of time (Karataş vd., 2008: 18). Women's refuges were invented as a solution to solve the problems of shelter and protection encountered during the fight against violence. They are also important in integrating the women and children who are victims of violence, to the society (Ömek, 2013: 40). Women's refuges work in close collaboration with emergency phone lines and women's counseling centers. They meet the needs of safe shelter, protection and environment for gaining strength and provide psychological, social and economic support (MIGM, 2010: 8).

The addresses of women's refuges where women exposed to violence and their children can stay for a certain period of time, are kept secret. A woman who stays and rest at this shelter decides what to do in the future. Women in the shelters with the common past of being exposed to violence, support each other. The primary mission of women's refuges is to provide safety and shelter. These houses mean more than a place to stay for women. They are safe havens which protect women from the violence caused by their spouses or families (Alpago, 2006: 51-52).

5. The Evolution of Women's Refuges in the World and in Turkey

Chiswick Women's Aid was founded in 1971 in the UK, as the first women's refuge (Açikel, 2009: 25). In the 1970s, women's refuges were opened in other European countries and also in the US, Canada and Australia, following the example of the UK (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:12). In this period in the Eastern European countries such as Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Poland and Russia, attention of the societies were directed to domestic violence and first institutional services started (Açikel, 2009: 28). The foundation of women's refuges in the developing countries mainly started in the 1980s.

In the example of Turkey, first initiatives regarding the foundation of women's refuges took place in the 1990s. First institutional services on this issue took place within the activities of Prime Ministry Directorate General on Social Services and Child Protection. In 1990, Family Counseling Bureaus and Family Counseling Centers were founded. In 1993, counseling centers started to work under the name of Community Centers. These counseling centers and "women's guesthouses" were the first official institutions dedicated to the issue (Açikel, 2009: 51). Women's refuges still serve as units of Directorate General on Social Services and Child Protection. The number of

the refuges which was just 8 in 2003 today reached 53 (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2011).

The first initiative of the local governments was the refuge opened by the Municipality of Bakırköy in Istanbul in 1990. Due to a chance in the method approaching the issue, this refuge was closed in 1992. In the same year another refuge was opened by the Municipality of Şişli and was also closed in 1994 due to the same reason (Karataş vd., 2008: 52). Despite the Municipal Act of 2005 numbered 5393 requiring municipalities to take action, only a small number of municipalities met these requirements. There are 25 women's refuges in Turkey run independently by municipalities.

In the Turkish society with the strong historical tradition of charity and establishing foundations, there used to be many institutions which helped women and children although they cannot be strictly put in the framework of a women's refuge according to today's definition. However, the number of refuges operated by NGOs and working in the same system applied in the UK, started to increase by the 1990s. The first women's refuge operated by an independent women's organization in Turkey, was founded in 1993 with the cooperation of Foundation for Women's Solidarity (FWS) and the Municipality of Altındağ in Ankara. In 1995, due to a change in the management, Municipality of Altındağ gave up supporting the project and the refuge was moved to the premises of the FWS. Because of economic problems, FWS ended the project in 1999. In 2003, FWS opened a new refuge in collaboration with the Municipality of Yenimahalle. Nevertheless, the refuge opened in February 2003 was closed in October 2003 due to a change in the management of the municipality. Foundation for Women's Solidarity has been operating Shelter for Trafficked Women since November 2005 (Karataş vd., 2008: 52). Other organizations working on the issue are Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation, Women's Solidarity Foundation, KAMER, Adana Metropolitan Municipality Women's Counselling Center and Women's Shelter, Van Women's Association and Kırkoruk Cooperative for Combating Violence against Women. Some of these organizations provide service as counseling centers, some of them offer shelter in the refuges they operate and some of them, besides these activities organize awareness raising campaigns targeting the society and training programs targeting service providers. In Turkey, there are 3 women's refuges belonging to this kind of organizations. In consequence, the number of refuges in Turkey has reached 81. Nevertheless, there are many cities in the country without women's refuges (Ömek, 2013: 45).

As it can be seen, there are different types of refuges existing simultaneously in Turkey such as the refuges founded, financed and operated by the government or local governments; refuges founded, financed and operated by women's organizations or refuges although operated by women's organizations receiving financial support from the government or local governments. However, these models are not based on an established system. Due to developments such as elections, change of administrators or ideological oppression against the independence of women's organizations, activities of the refuges can be interrupted.

6. The Operation of Women's Refuges

i. First Step: Referring the woman to the refuge: Main institutions that refer women to the refuges are police forces (police and gendarmerie), judicial authorities and

healthcare institutions. These institutions do not directly place the women in refuges. Placing occurs via women's counseling centers. Women's counseling centers are first step institutions where women exposed to violence receive professional counseling service. In these centers what kind of service a woman needs and whether she needs to stay in a women's refuge, are decided. Activities of the women's counseling centers are performed through county and city offices of the Directorate General on Social Services and Child Protection, offices of the municipalities and NGOs. Counselors in these centers evaluate the situation of the woman and decide whether she should be accepted to the refuge or not.² Centers usually serve during the working hours. Outside these times, women may call the phone line 183 and be referred to the refuge services (Karataş vd., 2008: 18).

ii. Working Principles of Women's Refuges and the Scope of the Services

The main purpose of the refuges is to help the women to gain strength by regaining self-confidence. Women who have been exposed to violence feel pain since they have obeyed the domination and violent behaviors of their spouses. That is why, it is important for them to receive help from a female professional. In other words, refuges should work with the system in which women help women (Mor Çatı, 2007:35; DSGW, 2008:59).

Women exposed to violence are not obliged prove it. Condemnation of any act of violence against women and an unbiased approach to the women, are the basic principles. Women have the right to decide independently about their own lives. Within this context, self-determination is a basic principle (DGSW, 2008:57). Women who stay at the refuges should give the decisions related to their lives by themselves. The main duty of the administrative staff and workers of the refuge is to strengthen the woman in order to help her to take the responsibility of her own and her children's lives and to live independently. In order to strengthen her economic situation, helping the woman to find a job and helping her to attend vocational courses are also within the scope of the refuge services (Açikel, 2009; 89-91). Confidentiality is fundamental in the working of the refuges. Their addresses, phone and fax numbers are kept confidential. That is why; women's counseling centers are the first step institutions in reaching the refuges.

Emergency phone lines and women's counseling centers are widely used by women's organizations and public institutions as institutional services in combatting violence. The women who are exposed to violence and who apply to the centers are informed on the institutions which may help her in solving the problem. Legal and psychological counseling is also provided (DGSW, 2008: 43). Within this scope, raising awareness on the issues such as questioning of the domination and control of the husband on wife, the role of the women in the society, gender patterns, and gender inequality in the society is important in developing practices of resistance against violence and in strengthening the women psychologically (Mor Çatı, 2007:56). Besides psychological support, women without health insurance receive free of charge medical services and are helped to apply for Green Card, if necessary.

Briefly, the services provided by the women's refuges in Turkey can be listed as following (MIGM, 2010): Medical, legal, psychological and psychiatric support, support

² Directorate General on Social Services and Child Protection do not have its own women's counseling centers. Application to the women's guesthouses of the Directorate should be made to the city and county offices of the Directorate.

in finding job and housing, facilities of kindergarten, sports and social activities, accompanying the woman in her visits to places such as hospital, court, upon her request (Directorate General on Social Services and Child Protection provides this service without request to the women below 18 years old who are staying at the guesthouses of the Directorate), group works (house meetings to talk on legal rights, gender, strategies in combatting violence, pregnancy health care and child care for the pregnant women; morning conversations; house meetings to discuss the rules and operation of the refuge, meetings to solve the issues which may arise among the women staying at the refuge, etc.), food, clothing, personal needs and interpretership services (Russian, Romanian, etc.).

Continuity is the principle in the women's refuges. The women staying at the refuges should receive the services without any interruption. In addition, due to the emergency of the situation of the women who are trying to escape from violence, refuges should be available 24 hours a day. Principely, women and children should be able to stay at the refuges until they feel safe and strong enough to start a life without violence (Mor Çatı, 2007:37). However number and capacity of the refuges are limited. In the refuges of the Directorate General on Social Services and Child Protection and municipalities, staying periods are limited. At first step, women are accepted to the refuges for 3 months. It can be extended for additional 3 months. In the refuges of the Directorate General on Social Services and Child Protection, these 6 months can be extended for 3 months upon the approval of the Directorate. On the other hand, there is no period of extension for the women staying at the refuges of municipalities (Erel, 2010). This situation puts the women who have already been exposed to physical, sexual and psychological violence, under pressure.

In order to provide the integration of women who leave the refuges to start their new lives, women's counseling centers provide monitoring and supporting services. Resources of the society should be used to help the woman to stand on her own legs (DSGW, 2008:85). In order to achieve this aim, Prime Ministry Circular numbered 2006/17 regulates interim housing allocation for these women.

In Lieu of Conclusion: An Evaluation of the Situation of Women's Refuges in Turkey

Domestic violence is at the head of the problems facing women around the world. Until today, international, national and local arrangements have been made to tackle the issue. The opening of women's refuges came up as a strategy in combatting violence and the refuges spread to the world. However, it would be wrong to take these refuges as places which only serve the women who were exposed to violence. Especially in Turkey, homeless women or women living in severe poverty are also accepted to the refuges. In addition, refugee women who have fled from the conflicts in their home countries may stay at the refuges with their children.

However, number and capacity of the refuges in Turkey are insufficient. The need for more refuges is especially visible in Eastern Anatolia, Southeastern Anatolia and Black Sea regions and in Istanbul. There are many women in Turkey living in intercity bus terminals, train stations, hospital gardens, mosque gardens and parks. When we add the Syrian refugee women to the picture, it is assumed that their number reaches tens of thousands. Inevitably, women living in the streets are exposed to sexual abuse, rape and physical violence. Some of them have one or more child accompanying them, some are pregnant. Since they were not able to stay in a refuge, they are left alone in the harsh conditions on the streets and due to the severity of

these conditions they begin to lose their mental health and this worsen their situation (Erel, 2010).

According to the Municipal Law in Turkey, metropolitan municipalities and others with more than 50,000 inhabitants are required to open refuges for women and children. The inexistence of the refuges in the municipalities should be regarded as dereliction of duty and these municipalities should be investigated.

On the other hand, it can be stated that awareness raising campaigns of the media institutions and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies achieved a considerable success. Both these awareness raising activities and the state and local government policies, positively affect the existence and development of women's refuges in Turkey. Nevertheless, women's refuges in Turkey are facing many problems that can be listed as follows:

- Physical and social conditions of the women's refuges are insufficient.
- Women's refuges have financial problems.
- Number and skills of the staff working in the women's refuges are inadequate.
- There are problems in the acceptance of handicapped women and foreign national to the refuges.
- There are problems in the coordination of the refuges.

Surely, more problems can be added to the list. Only physical, technical or financial strengthening of the refuges and allocating more experts will not be sufficient in solving the problems. Complementary institutions and mechanisms should be developed and should work together effectively. Moreover, the staying period of the woman should be able to be extended so that she can gain power physically, emotionally and economically to start a new life outside when she is ready.

References:

- Açikel, Seher (2009). *Kadına Yönelik Şiddetle Mücadelede Kadın Sığınmaevi Önlemi: Türkiye Örneği*, Ankara Univ. Institute of Social Sciences, Ankara: Master's Theses (Unpublished).
- Alpago, Ceyda (2006). *Kadına Yönelik Şiddet ve Kadın Sığınmaevleri Olgusu*, İstanbul Technical Univ. Graduate School of Science Engineering and Technology, İstanbul: Master's Theses (Unpublished).
- Dobash, R. Emerson and Dobash P. Russel (1992). *Women, Violence and Social Change*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Dobash, R. Emerson and Dobash P. Russel (2004). "Women's Violence to Men in Intimate Relationships Working on a Puzzle", *Brit. J. Criminol*, 44. 324–349
- European Commission (2010). *Domestic Violence Against Woman Report*, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_344_en.pdf.
- İçişleri Bakanlığı Mahalli İdareler Genel Müdürlüğü (2010). *Kadın Sığınma Evi Modelleri-Türkiye ve Çeşitli Ülke Uygulamaları*, Zehra Tosun, Aslıhan Bircu Öztürk (Ed.), Ankara.
- İlkkaracan, P., Gülçür L., and Arın, C., (1996). *Sıcak Yuva Masalı*, Metis Yayınları, İstanbul.

- Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (2001). *Kadınlara Karşı Her Türlü Ayrımcılığın Önlenmesi Sözleşmesi ve İhtiyari Protokol*, Ankara.
- Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (2009). *Türkiye’de Kadına Yönelik Aile İçi Şiddet Araştırması Özet Raporu*, Ankara.
- Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (2012). *Kadına Yönelik Şiddetle Mücadele Ulusal Eylem Planı 2012-2015*, Ankara.
- Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (2014). <http://www.kadininstatusu.gov.tr/tr/19067/Tarihce>.
- Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (DSGW) (2001). *Türkiye’de Kadın 2001*, TBMM Yayınları, Ankara.
- Karataş B, Derebent E, Yüzer S, Yiğit R. and Özcan A. (2005). “Kırsal Kesim Kökenli Kadınların Aile İçi Şiddete İlişkin Görüşleri”. [Electronic version]. Retrieved February 12, 2008. From http://cws.emu.edu.tr/en/conferences/2nd_int/pdf/karatas%20b.%20derebent%20e.%20yuzer%20s.%20yigit%20r.%20ozcan%20a..pdf.
- Ministry of Family and Social Policies (2012). *Kadına Yönelik Şiddetle Mücadele El Kitabı*, Ministry of Family and Social Policies Pub. Ankara.
- Mor Çatı Women’s Shelter Foundation (2007). *Şiddetten Uzakta Bir Sığınak Nasıl Kurulur? Nasıl Yürütülür?*, Mor Çatı Pub. İstanbul.
- United Nations (2010). *The World’s Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW2010pub.htm>.
- United Nations (2010). *UN Statistics Division*, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm>.
- United States Department of Justice (2014). <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/domviolence.htm>.
- World Bank (1993). *World Bank Study World Development Report: Investing in Health*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Yetim, Dilek and Şahin, Erkan Melih (2009). “Aile Hekimliğinde Kadına Yönelik Şiddete Yaklaşım”, *Aile Hekimliği Dergisi*, Vol. 2 (2).