

The factors associated to justify the physical partner violence among married women in Turkey

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Abstract

Background: Gender-based violence is widespread in Turkey, and the internalization of patriarchal values is an important barrier for women to develop resistance to such violence.

Aims: This study aims to assess the attitudes of married women in Turkey towards the justification of physical partner violence, and to examine the predictors for justifying such violence so that ways of resisting it can be identified.

Methods: The data for the study was taken from the 2013 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey. A sub-sample of 6,655 married women of reproductive age were included in the analysis. Binary logistic regression analysis was carried out.

Results: In this cross-sectional study, women with no formal education and women who had completed the primary level of education only were more likely to justify the use of physical violence against them (OR = 4.04, 95% CI = 1.96-8.36 and OR = 2.44, 95% CI = 1.24-4.79, respectively) compared to higher educated women. Women who had three or more children were more likely to justify the use of physical violence compared to women with two or fewer children (OR = 1.31, 95% CI = 1.10-1.56). Women who did not use the internet were 1.67 times more likely to justify the use of physical violence compared to women who use the internet (OR = 1.67, 95% CI = 1.27-2.20).

Discussion and conclusions: Although women who had fewer children, women who lived in an urban setting, and women in wealthy households justify partner physical violence less than women with more children, women living in a rural setting and women in poor households, the education, and profession of women's partners are critical factors, too. Education and internet access for women are crucial ways of developing strategies to resist partner violence. Such access helps to involve women in the public sphere, assists in the development of internet literacy, can change their way of thinking about violence, and open up the development of resistance strategies. [*Ethiop. J. Health Dev.* 2020; 34(4):277-285]

Keywords: Gender-based violence, physical partner violence, internet literacy, Turkey

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is recognized as a worldwide phenomenon and a violation of the human rights of women. Several international treaties, such as the Vienna Declaration (1993) and the Istanbul Convention (2011), have addressed the elimination of GBV. GBV is defined in the Istanbul Convention as “physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (1). GBV can take different forms, such as verbal, psychological, physical, sexual, and economic GBV, and includes controlling behavior. It is associated with a broad range of physical, sexual, and mental health issues, such as femicide, HIV/AIDS, depression, and suicide (2).

Women can experience violence in different relationships. Women are mostly faced with GBV in intimate relationships and marriage. Patriarchy and gender inequality are the main drivers of violence against women. Typically, in patriarchal family norms, women are expected to be subordinate to their partners and accept the control of men over women and the family (3). Under these circumstances, women's attitudes towards GBV are important. The internalization of gender roles and male superiority leads to a vicious circle, justifying GBV, reproducing

gender inequality, and preventing the development of resistance to GBV (4-6).

Studies from different countries aimed at understanding the attitudes of women towards GBV show that women often justify GBV against them in certain circumstances, such as when they disobey their husband, neglect their children, or go outside the home without telling their husband (6-10).

Patriarchal norms and gender discrimination play a central role in Turkey, among other countries. A national survey carried out in Turkey in 2014 showed that GBV perpetrated by husbands was still prevalent (36%) (11). According to the same survey, only 22% of women had information about the legislation to protect women from violence in the family, and women's application to protective social services was very limited. More recently, domestic violence has increased exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic (12,13).

This study aims to assess married women's attitudes towards justifying physical partner violence (PPV) in Turkey and to examine the predictors for justifying PPV so that women can develop strategies to resist it.

Methods

The data for this study were taken from 2013 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey (2013 TDHS), which

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contains the most recent available data for analysis (14). Hacettepe University Population Institute permitted us to extract data, specifically concerning the 'Woman's Questionnaire', which was used to collect demographic and health information from eligible women in selected households. In total, 9,764 women were interviewed using the Women's Questionnaire. However, given the context of our analysis, a sub-sample was selected, consisting of 6,655 currently married, reproductive-aged women.

In the Women's Questionnaire, respondents were asked whether PPV was justified under the following five circumstances: if the wife burns food; argues with her husband; neglects the children; refuses to have sex with her husband, and goes outside the home without telling her husband.

The possible responses to each of the five questions were 'yes' (if the respondent agreed); 'no' (if the respondent did not agree); and 'don't know' (if the respondent was uncertain). 'Don't know' responses were rare, therefore to create a binary response variable, 'no' and 'don't know' were grouped and considered as 'no'. Finally, from these dichotomous variables, a single dichotomous (yes/no) variable – 'PPV is justified in at least one of the above five circumstances' – was created. This variable is a proxy measure of women's perception of their status, and the response 'yes' indicates that a woman generally accepts that her husband has the right to control her behavior, including through PPV.

To predict women's attitudes towards justifying PPV, background explanatory variables retrieved from the 2013 TDHS dataset were women's current age, the highest level of educational attainment, women's current work status, native language, place of residence, geographical region, 2013 DHS wealth index (which was re-categorized from five to three categories, i.e. poor, middle, rich), duration of cohabitation, and the number of living children. Furthermore, partner-related characteristics, such as partner's highest level of educational attainment and type of occupation, were included in the analysis.

In Turkey, religious norms and exposure to mass media also affect an individual's behaviors and attitudes. Accordingly, variables such as offer *namaz* (praying five times a day), wearing a headscarf (*hijab*), watching television, and use of the internet were also considered in the analysis. All these variables were re-categorized so that those who practice these activities either regularly or sometimes were grouped as 'yes'; those who don't were grouped as 'no'.

Statistical analysis: The analysis was conducted using the SPSS version 16.0 'complex sample' procedure, which adjusts for sampling weight and accounts for sample design. Descriptive statistics using cross-tabulation were produced for basic sample characteristics. To provide a baseline association between women's attitudes regarding the justification of PPV and background explanatory variables, percentage distributions and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were generated. After checking for collinearity, multivariate analysis using binary logistic regression was carried out. The 'enter' method was used and odds ratios (ORs) with 95% CIs were calculated to determine the significance of associations between the outcome variable 'PPV is justified in at least one circumstance and background explanatory variables.

Results

In this cross-sectional nationally represented survey, data of 6,655 currently married, reproductive-aged women were used. The findings are presented in three parts.

Findings of the attitudes of women on justifying PPV:

It is evident from Figure 1 that, overall, 15% of women justify at least one of the reasons for which partners can perpetuate physical violence. Concerning the specific reasons, more respondents agreed that PPV is justified if a woman neglects her children (10.3%) or if a woman argues with her husband (6.9%) than if a woman burns food (1.3%).

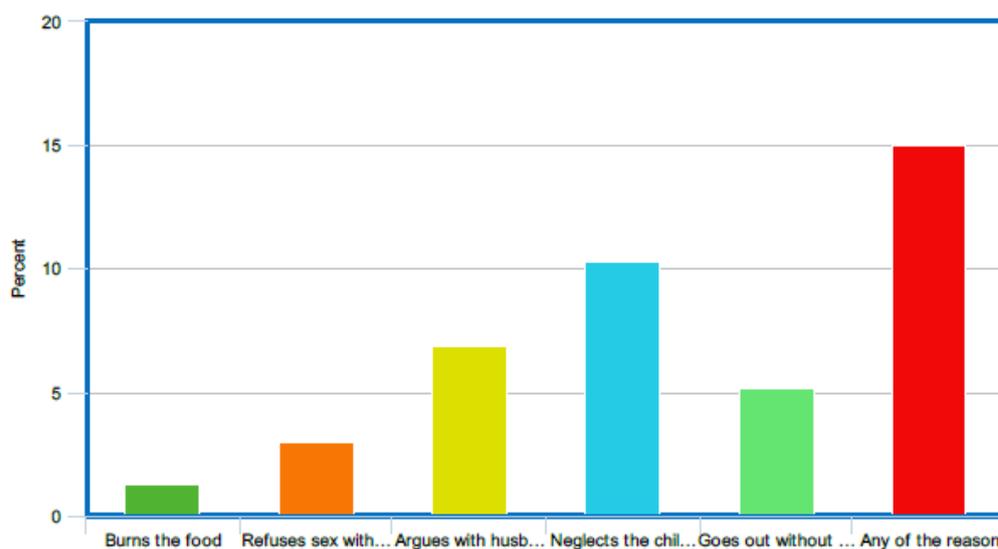


Figure 1: The percentage of women who justified PPV for each reason and any of the reasons

Respondents' characteristics and socio-demographic factors associated with PPV: Table 1 provides weighted frequency distributions of variables that are potentially related to attitudes towards PPV. The educational attainment and employment status of women were important indicators of socio-economic development, and it is evident from Table 1 that 46.1% of women had a primary level of education and 59.6% were employed at the time of the survey. Nearly 81% of the women were native Turkish speakers, and 80.3% were living in urban areas.

Among husbands' characteristics, only 2.6% had no

formal education, while 59.7% of women had a spouse who normally worked in services but was unemployed. We also found that nearly 63% of the women had been married for more than 10 years, and two-thirds of all women had two or fewer children (see Table 1).

Regarding exposure to media, 41.9% of women did not watch television and 62.4% did not use the internet. Regarding religious habits, 76.4% of women replied that they offer *namaz* either regularly or sometimes, and 69.3% of women cover their head with a scarf (*hijab*) either regularly or sometimes when they go out (see Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of women and their association with PPV (2013 TDHS)

Woman's characteristics	Frequency distribution		Justify PPV with at least one reason	
	N	%	%	95% CI
Age				
15-19	111	(1.7)	14.4	8.5-22.3
20-24	619	(9.3)	15.8	13.0-18.9
25-29	1,166	(17.5)	12.6	10.8-14.7
30-34	1,394	(21.0)	12.0	10.3-13.8
35-39	1,351	(20.3)	13.8	12.0-15.8
40-44	1,127	(16.9)	16.9	14.8-19.3
45-49	888	(13.3)	21.2	18.5-24.0
Education				
No	705	(10.6)	37.8	34.0-41.7
Primary	3,067	(46.1)	17.6	16.0-19.4
Secondary	2,097	(31.5)	8.1	6.8-9.6
Higher	787	(11.8)	2.4	1.4-4.1
Working status				
No	2,704	(40.6)	16.9	15.3-18.6
Yes	3,951	(59.4)	13.6	12.3-15.1
Mother tongue				
Turkish	5,371	(80.7)	12.0	11.1-13.1
Kurdish	1,075	(16.2)	28.1	25.1-31.3
Other	208	(3.1)	22.1	15.1-31.0
Household wealth status				
Lower	2,337	(35.1)	25.9	24.0-27.8
Middle	1,366	(20.5)	13.0	11.1-15.2
Upper	2,952	(44.4)	7.2	6.1-8.4
Place of residence				
Urban	5,341	(80.3)	12.1	10.9-13.4
Rural	1,314	(19.7)	26.4	23.9-29.1
Region				
West	2,864	(43.0)	12.0	10.3-13.9
South	856	(12.9)	18.1	14.9-21.9
Central	1,391	(20.9)	11.7	10.0-13.8
North	445	(6.7)	15.9	12.8-19.6
East	1,100	(16.5)	23.9	21.3-26.7
Years of cohabitation				
Fewer than 10 years	2,424	(36.4)	11.9	10.5-13.5
10-19	2,333	(35.1)	13.3	11.8-14.9
20 and more years	1,898	(28.5)	20.9	18.9-23.2
No. of living children				
Fewer than 3	4,446	(66.8)	11.0	10.0-12.0
3 or more	2,209	(33.2)	23.0	21.0-25.1
Husband's education				
No education	172	(2.6)	42.9	36.3-49.6
Primary	2,541	(38.2)	21.1	19.1-23.2
Secondary	2,822	(42.4)	11.7	10.4-13.2

Higher	1,108	(16.6)	4.4	3.3-5.9
Husband's occupation				
Agriculture	476	(7.2)	32.2	28.4-36.2
Industry	1,627	(24.4)	15.7	13.6-17.9
Service	3,971	(59.7)	11.9	10.8-13.2
Watch television				
No	2,786	(41.9)	13.8	12.3-15.4
Yes	3,861	(58.0)	15.8	14.4-17.3
Use the internet				
No	4,153	(62.4)	20.8	19.3-22.3
Yes	2,497	(37.5)	5.3	4.4-6.3
Wear a scarf				
No	2,036	(30.6)	6.5	5.3-8.1
Yes	4,610	(69.3)	18.7	17.4-20.1
Offer <i>namaz</i>				
No	1,557	(23.4)	11.2	9.7-12.9
Yes	5,083	(76.4)	16.1	14.9-17.4
Total*	6,655		15.0	13.9-16.1

* Since there are a few missing cases, in some variables the column totals do not equal the totals of the subgroups.

The percentages of women who believe PPV is justified for any reason were obtained by cross-tabulations. Results revealed that women were less likely to justify PPV for any reason if their native language is Turkish if they are in the upper wealth quintile if they live in an urban area, if they have completed secondary or a higher level of education, or if they are employed.

In contrast, women from the Eastern Region of the country, women with two or more living children, women with a partner who has no formal education, and those whose husbands work in the agricultural sector were more likely to justify PPV (Table 1). Furthermore, women who did not use the internet (20.8%) were more likely to agree compared to those who used the internet (5.3%). Women who offered *namaz* (16.1%) were more

likely to agree compared to those who did not offer *namaz* (11.2%). Additionally, women who covered their heads with a scarf when outside the home (18.7%) were more likely to agree than those who did not use a scarf (6.5%).

Results of logistic regression analysis: Using logistic regression analysis, the results showed that after controlling for background variables in the regression model, women's education, household wealth status, place of residence, number of living children, partner's educational level, partner's occupation, and use of the internet had a significant influence on women's likelihood of justifying PPV for any reason (see Table 2).

Table 2: Multiple logistic regression models of justifying PPV (2013 TDHS)

Woman's Characteristic	Odds ratio	95% CI
Age		
15-24	Ref.	
25-39	0.79	0.57-1.09
40-49	0.79	0.52-1.22
Education		
No education	4.04	1.96-8.36
Primary	2.44	1.24-4.79
Secondary	1.62	0.82-3.21
Higher	Ref.	
Working status		
No	0.94	0.77-1.18
Yes	Ref.	
Mother tongue		
Turkish	Ref.	
Kurdish	1.16	0.88-1.54
Other	1.39	0.82-2.37
Household wealth status		
Lower	1.53	1.17-2.00
Middle	1.11	0.84-1.46
Upper	Ref.	
Place of residence		
Urban	Ref.	
Rural	1.30	1.06-1.60
Region		
West	Ref.	
South	1.12	0.84-1.50
Central	0.83	0.63-1.10
North	0.94	0.69-1.28
East	0.90	0.68-1.18
Year of cohabitation		
Fewer than 10 years	Ref.	
10-19	0.88	0.69-1.13
20 and more years	1.27	0.91-1.77
No. of living children		
Fewer than 3	Ref.	
3 or more	1.31	1.10-1.56
Husband's education		
No education	2.37	1.43-3.94
Secondary	1.36	0.93-1.98
Higher	Ref.	
Husband's occupation		
Agriculture	1.40	1.10-1.78
Industry	1.10	0.91-1.33
Service	Ref.	
Watch television		
No	1.13	0.95-1.35
Yes	Ref.	
Use the internet		
No	1.67	1.27-2.20
Yes	Ref.	
Wear a scarf		
No	Ref.	
Yes	1.34	0.97-1.83
Offer namaz		
No	Ref.	
Yes	0.960	0.79-1.16

Ref. = Reference category

The education of women had a strong influence on the justification of PPV. Women with no formal education and women who had completed a primary level of education only were more likely to justify PPV (OR = 4.04, 95% CI = 1.96-8.36 and OR = 2.44, 95% CI = 1.24-4.79, respectively) compared to highly educated women. Women with a lower household wealth status were 1.53 times more likely to justify PPV compared to those with an upper household wealth status (OR = 1.53, 95% CI = 1.17-1.20). In contrast, the attitude towards PPV was not associated with the age of women or their working status (see Table 2).

Justification for PPV was significantly associated with place of residence. Rural women were more likely to justify PPV compared with urban women (OR = 1.3, 95% CI = 1.06-1.60). Unlike the place of residence, geographical region and native language were not associated with the justification for PPV. Attitudes towards PPV were found to be associated with the number of living children, in that women with three or more children were more likely to justify PPV compared with women who had two or fewer children (OR = 1.31, 95% CI = 1.1-1.56). However, cohabiting duration was found to be statistically insignificant.

Regarding husbands' characteristics, educational status and occupation were found to be associated with women's justification for PPV. Women living with a partner who had no education were significantly more likely to justify PPV (OR = 3.38, 95% CI = 1.43-3.95) than women living with highly educated partners. Furthermore, women whose partners worked in the agricultural sector were 1.4 times more likely to justify PPV for any of the reasons compared to women whose partners worked in services (OR = 1.40, 95% CI = 1.10-1.78).

Unlike bivariate analysis, the independent and significant associations of women who watch television, offer *namaz*, and wear scarves were insignificant after adjustment in multivariate analysis. On the other hand, the use of the internet retained its significant effect and it was found that after adjusting for other variables, women who did not use the internet were 1.67 times more likely to justify PPV compared to women who use the internet (OR = 1.67, 95% CI = 1.27-2.20).

Discussion

The justification of PPV by women is a crucial barrier to end gender inequality and PPV. As in many other countries, gender inequality and PPV are unresolved problems in Turkey despite some state-level interventions (15,16). Regarding the Gender Gap Report 2020, Turkey is ranked 130th out of 156 countries. (15). Furthermore, a recent national survey on gender-based violence shows that the prevalence of PPV has not decreased (11).

The main finding of this study is that 15% of women continue to justify at least one of the circumstances for PPV in Turkey. This finding means that this group accepts the right of the husband to control his wife's behavior, including through violence (17,18). Therefore,

determining and monitoring the level of justification for PPV among women and evaluating the associations between PPV justification and exposure to PPV is important to understand changes in attitudes, and to designing intervention programs in especially middle- and low-income countries, including Turkey (19).

As with Turkey, countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal were evaluated as the societies where the patriarchal structure was stronger and had a high proportion of positive attitudes towards PPV (20-22). In a study carried out in Bangladesh, around 32% of the participants reported that a husband hitting or beating his wife was justified in certain situations (23). An important finding of the World Values Survey was the association between religion and PPV (24).

In this study, the education of women, number of children, use of the internet, household wealth status, place of residence, husband's education level, and husband's occupation had a significant influence on women's likelihood of justifying PPV for any reason.

In other studies, the role of household wealth (25-28) and the number of children (8,29,30) were determined to be important factors associated with accepting PPV. Living in a rural setting is another associated factor in PPV acceptance, according to the present study. Similarly, in the 2011 Ethiopia DHS, it was found that rural women rejected PPV less than urban women (24.5% versus 54.1%) (30).

PPV was more common among men with low income, low educational attainment, and low occupational status (8,31). The current study revealed that women living with husbands who had no formal education were significantly more likely to justify PPV than women who lived with highly educated husbands. If men feel defensive of their masculinity, they tend to assert their dominance over women (32). Husbands who embraced a set of beliefs and attitudes in support of patriarchy in the domestic context were more likely to have assaulted their wives than husbands who did not espouse such beliefs and attitudes. Similarly, lower-income husbands, less-educated husbands, and husbands with low occupational status were significantly more likely to identify with an ideology of familial patriarchy, and to have beaten their wives (31).

In this study, we found that as education level decreased, the likelihood of justifying PPV for any reason increased. However, the education of women is a key strategy to challenge existing gender norms (33). Moreover, education creates many opportunities for women's economic independence, leadership positions, problem-solving approaches, decision-making, and combating the patriarchal structure (16). Women who were educated, and economically and socially empowered, were more resistant to PPV (23).

Other similar studies cohere with the current study in terms of showing that women with no formal education and women with up to a primary level of education were more likely to justify wife-beating (6,30,31,34). In *Ethiop. J. Health Dev.* 2020; 34(4)

studies conducted in Ghana and Nepal, the justification of PPV was higher among women with a low level of education (10,20). Similarly, results from the 2011 Ethiopia DHS showed that women with higher levels of education were 7.5 and 5.12 times more likely, respectively, to refuse wife-beating than those with no education in rural areas and those with no education in urban areas (30).

Another important finding of this study is the role of internet usage concerning the justification of PPV. This study showed that internet usage may be a new predictive variable for PPV. This is because women who did not use the internet were more likely to justify wife-beating compared to women who did use the internet.

One of the targets included in goal 5 of the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) is 'Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women' and the indicator of this target is 'Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex' (35). Technology has increased the growth of women having direct and easy access to information and has allowed their voices to be heard worldwide (36). In promoting equality and social inclusion, social media platforms plays a significant and essential role in social change (37). Many women still do not have access to this technology, particularly in developing nations, owing to the lack of infrastructure, the cost, and discriminatory social standards (38). The internet has expanded many additional possibilities to put gender equality and women's rights at the forefront of policy-making and media attention (39). Women can use different instruments on the internet to empower themselves. However, a few studies have evaluated the association between women's empowerment, digital media, and attitudes towards violence against women (40-43).

Age at first marriage is a significant demographic indicator of PPV because it is related to the onset of a woman's exposure to the risk of pregnancy (44). The 2013 TDHS documented that, among women aged 25-49, there was a difference of almost six years in the timing of entry into a marriage between those with no education and those who have at least a high school education (14). Accordingly, educational access should be equally given to females as a means to support women's empowerment (45). Knowledge about legal rights, as well as better education, would be a practicable solution for reducing PPV in communities, especially in low-income settings.

The study revealed that the age of women, women's working status, the duration of cohabitation, mother tongue, practicing *namaz*, and covering the head with a scarf were not related to the justification of PPV. However, some studies report that the age of women (5,46) and women's working status (6,8) are related to the justification of PPV. Interestingly, the geographical region was not related to the justification of wife-beating in the country. There is a need for further studies in the regional context to explain what the individual factors

are, as well as other factors in terms of violence against women.

In the current study, women who had more education and who had internet access justified violence less. Women whose husbands were more educated and more professional also justified violence less. Women who live in urban settings and wealthy households also resist justifying violence against them. Education and having fewer children can be predicted to change women's attitude towards violence, but women's involvement in the public sphere through the internet can change the way of their thinking about violence and open up the development of new strategies via internet literacy.

Limitations of this study

Although there are numerous drivers of PPV our analysis was limited to evidences the could be accessed from DHSs. As a result, association between gender inequality and PPV justification was not analysed.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Competing interests

All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript. No funding was received for this research.

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