

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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## The characteristics of intimate partner violence cases

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## Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is an important public health problem. In this cross-sectional and descriptive study, it was aimed to evaluate the characteristics of IPV victims, their partners, and the violence and to discuss the protective measures. With this regard, a questionnaire was conducted on IPV victims aged 18 and over. In the questionnaire; the socio-demographic characteristics of the cases, their attitudes towards violence, the characteristics of the violence, and their partners were evaluated. Of 41 (2.0%) of the 2038 cases referred to Forensic Medicine Department in 2019 applied due to IPV. Two (5.9%) males and 32 (94.1%) females agreed to participate in the study. The participants were aged between 23-59 years old. They were mostly subjected to physical (97.1%) and emotional (70.6%) violence; 20.6% also experienced violence from their family members. Fifteen cases of partners had a history of exposure to domestic violence. The main thing for IPV is to prevent violence from occurring. For this purpose, determining risk factors are important. History of domestic violence and female sex were important risk factors in this study. In cases where violence cannot be prevented, psychological assessment and support should be provided after the victimization, and training on gender equity should be provided.

**Keywords:** Violence, risk factors, gender equity

## Introduction

Violence is an important problem that can be seen in different forms and levels and threatens the physical and mental health of people from all walks of society [1, 2]. It is possible to group violence under three main headings: interpersonal violence, collective violence, and violence against the one's self [3].

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is included in the classification of interpersonal violence and is defined as the most common type of violence worldwide [4, 5]. In the 1970s, IPV, which was handled as a female victim, expanded over time with the view that the roles of the abuser and victims were not gender-specific, and in this direction, the term "intimate partner violence" was introduced [6]. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized that IPV is a term that includes formal relationships (marriage) and

informal relationships (dating relationship, sexual relations outside marriage) in 2013 [7]. Therefore, with the definition of IPV, it is accepted that violence can be in any kind of personal close relationship regardless of sexual orientation, marital status or gender [6].

Although the concept of IPV is meant that victims can be of both sexes, studies show that most of the victims are women [8]. And, IPV types are physical, psychological, sexual, economic, cyber and combinations of these violence types [9]. Depending on the violence applied, there may be consequences from simple injuries to death. When it is evaluated in terms of age, it manifests itself as dating violence in the adolescent period, and it appears as domestic violence against women in the following periods [4, 10].

This study aimed to reveal the characteristics of IPV victims, their partners, and the violence and also to discuss preventive measures.

## Materials and Methods

In this cross-sectional, descriptive study; a questionnaire was applied face to face with volunteers who exposed to intimate partner (spouse, ex-wife, fiancée, lover, or person interviewed for dating) violence and who are 18 and over that were directed to Ege

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University Faculty of Medicine Department of Forensic Medicine by judicial authorities in 2019.

In the questionnaire; the age, sex, occupation, education level, income, marital status, place of residence, medical history, the characteristics of the violence, and the past history of domestic violence, if any exists, the characteristics of that violence were evaluated. Before the survey, the purpose and the content of the survey and types of violence were explained to all participants.

The data were presented as frequencies and percentages, and the IBM SPSS Statistics software v22.0 (IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.) was used for all statistical analyses. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Local Ethics Committee of Ege University approved the study (Decision no:18-111.1T/11, date:03.12.2018).

## Results

Of 2038 forensic cases who applied to Forensic Medicine Department in 2019, 41 (2.0%) were the victims of IPV. Seven (6 females, 1 male) of 41 victims did not want to participate in the study. Two (5.9%) males and 32 females (94.1%) participated in this study.

The mean age was  $37.06 \pm 10.02$  years (range, 23-59 years). The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics of victims of IPV

| Victims                                 | n                            | %     |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| Education status                        | Primary school               | 11    |
|                                         | Middle School                | 10    |
|                                         | High school                  | 7     |
|                                         | University                   | 6     |
| Profession                              | Housewife                    | 17    |
|                                         | Student                      | 4     |
|                                         | Business owner               | 3     |
|                                         | Self-employment              | 3     |
|                                         | Worker                       | 2     |
|                                         | Teacher                      | 2     |
|                                         | Officer                      | 2     |
|                                         | Retired                      | 1     |
| Place of Residence                      | District                     | 17    |
|                                         | Town center                  | 16    |
|                                         | Village                      | 1     |
| Marital status                          | First marriage               | 20    |
|                                         | Second marriage              | 8     |
|                                         | Divorced                     | 4     |
|                                         | Single                       | 2     |
| People living together                  | Husband and children, if any | 11    |
|                                         | With extended family         | 10    |
|                                         | Child / children             | 8     |
|                                         | Alone                        | 5     |
| Number of children from the perpetrator | No children                  | 16    |
|                                         | 1 child                      | 6     |
|                                         | 2 children                   | 10    |
|                                         | 3 children                   | 2     |
| Monthly income *                        | 1410±1874 TL (205.8±273.5\$) | 34    |
|                                         |                              | 100.0 |

\* Seventeen of the participants (50.0%) stated that they do not have a monthly income

Of 50.0% (n=17) of the participants voluntarily got married, 32.4% (n=11) in an arranged marriage, 2.9% (n=1) were forced to marry. Five (14.7%) individuals were exposed to violence from their non-marital (fiancée/lover) partners. The mean age of still-married people was  $26.52 \pm 8.30$  years (range, 14-52 years). The mean year of marriage was  $9.62 \pm 9.04$  years (range, 1-32 years).

When participants were asked whether they have a chronic disease or not; 21 (61.8%) individuals had no disease, five (14.7%) had endocrine diseases, four (11.8%) had respiratory system diseases, two (5.9%) had rheumatologic diseases, one (2.9%) had an oncological disease, one (2.9%) had a migraine and hydatid cyst. Eleven (32.4%) cases also had depression/anxiety and used medication.

In all IPV cases, physical violence was the only reason for the application to the Forensic Medicine Department, and the most common injury type was blunt trauma (n=28; 82.4%). The characteristics of the violence that were the reason for the application and the characteristics of the perpetrators who committed this violence are shown in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

When the past history of domestic violence of the cases was asked, nine (26.4%) cases had a history of violence that required hospital admission, seven (20.6%) cases also experienced violence from family members and six (17.6%) cases stated that others experienced violence in the family. The characteristics of the cases' past history of domestic violence are shown in Table 4.

**Table 2.** The characteristics of the violence that were the application reason

| Characteristics of violence that were reason for application |                                                                            | n  | %     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|
| Type of violence                                             | Physical violence                                                          | 34 | 100.0 |
| Injury type                                                  | Blunt trauma                                                               | 28 | 82.4  |
|                                                              | Blunt trauma + Stabbing                                                    | 4  | 11.8  |
|                                                              | Stab injury                                                                | 1  | 2.9   |
|                                                              | Gunshot wound                                                              | 1  | 2.9   |
| Beginning of the violence                                    | Post verbal violence                                                       | 24 | 70.6  |
|                                                              | Post jealousy                                                              | 3  | 8.8   |
|                                                              | After wanting to leave                                                     | 3  | 8.8   |
|                                                              | Without any reason                                                         | 3  | 8.8   |
|                                                              | After drinking alcohol                                                     | 1  | 2.9   |
| Injury results in;                                           | Not minor and cannot be cured by a simple medical treatment                | 15 | 44.1  |
|                                                              | Minor and can be cured by a simple medical treatment                       | 11 | 32.4  |
|                                                              | Bone fracture                                                              | 4  | 11.8  |
|                                                              | A permanent scar on her/his face                                           | 2  | 5.9   |
|                                                              | A situation that endangers her life                                        | 1  | 2.9   |
|                                                              | permanent impairment of the functioning of any one of the senses or organs | 1  | 2.9   |
| Psychiatric consultation results (n=19)                      | There is a disorder that fulfills the psychiatric diagnostic criteria      | 9  | 26.5  |
|                                                              | Not applying to psychiatry                                                 | 6  | 17.6  |
|                                                              | There isn't any disorder that fulfills the psychiatric diagnostic criteria | 4  | 11.8  |
| Medical procedures in hospital admission                     | Medical therapy                                                            | 14 | 41.2  |
|                                                              | Cast-splints                                                               | 3  | 8.8   |
|                                                              | the suturing                                                               | 3  | 8.8   |
|                                                              | Psychiatric treatment                                                      | 2  | 5.9   |
|                                                              | Nasal reduction                                                            | 1  | 2.9   |
|                                                              | Eye prosthesis and aesthetic operations                                    | 1  | 2.9   |
|                                                              | No medical procedure was applied                                           | 10 | 29.5  |

**Table 3.** The characteristics of the perpetrators

| The perpetrators            |                                 | n                                  | %     |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Sex                         | Male                            | 32                                 | 94.1  |
|                             | Female                          | 2                                  | 5.9   |
| Age                         | Minimum                         | 24                                 |       |
|                             | Maximum                         | 65                                 |       |
|                             | Mean                            | 40.59±9.78                         |       |
| Professions                 | Self-employment                 | 15                                 | 44.1  |
|                             | Not working                     | 5                                  | 14.7  |
|                             | Officer                         | 3                                  | 8.8   |
|                             | Security guard                  | 3                                  | 8.8   |
|                             | Retired                         | 2                                  | 5.9   |
|                             | Worker                          | 2                                  | 5.9   |
|                             | Blacksmith                      | 1                                  | 2.9   |
|                             | Accountant                      | 1                                  | 2.9   |
|                             | Police                          | 1                                  | 2.9   |
|                             | Student                         | 1                                  | 2.9   |
| Monthly income *            |                                 | 3137,81±3901,89 TL (458.1±569.6\$) | 100.0 |
| Alcohol intake              | Yes                             | 21                                 | 61.8  |
|                             | No                              | 13                                 | 28.2  |
| Frequency of alcohol intake | 1 glass per day                 | 8                                  | 23.5  |
|                             | 1 glass per week                | 3                                  | 8.8   |
|                             | 1 glass per month               | 3                                  | 8.8   |
|                             | 5 or more glasses a day         | 3                                  | 8.8   |
|                             | 2 glasses a day                 | 2                                  | 5.9   |
|                             | 3 glasses a day                 | 2                                  | 5.9   |
| Criminal history            | Fight – assault                 | 10                                 | 29.4  |
|                             | Fraud                           | 5                                  | 14.7  |
|                             | Failure to fulfill the debt     | 1                                  | 2.9   |
|                             | Don't know why                  | 1                                  | 2.9   |
|                             | No                              | 17                                 | 50.0  |
| Domestic violence history   | Economic                        | 7                                  | 20.6  |
|                             | Psychological+Physical+Economic | 5                                  | 14.7  |
|                             | She/he does not know            | 9                                  | 26.5  |
|                             | Emotional                       | 2                                  | 5.9   |
|                             | Economic + Physical             | 1                                  | 2.9   |
|                             | No                              | 10                                 | 29.4  |

\* Six perpetrators without monthly income were determined. Two victims stated that they did not know their partner's income

**Table 4.** The characteristics of the participants' past history of domestic violence

| Past history of domestic violence                       |                  |                               | n | %     |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---|-------|
| Violence except partner (n=7)                           | Perpetrators     | Father                        | 3 | 42.8  |
|                                                         |                  | Mother-in-law + sister-in-law | 2 | 28.6  |
|                                                         |                  | Father-in-law                 | 1 | 14.3  |
|                                                         |                  | Mother + Father + Brother     | 1 | 14.3  |
| Other persons subjected to violence in the family (n=6) | Type of violence | Physical                      | 7 | 100.0 |
|                                                         |                  | Child                         | 4 | 66.7  |
|                                                         |                  | Mother                        | 2 | 33.3  |
| Violence requiring hospital admission (n=9)             | Perpetrators     | Partner                       | 9 | 100.0 |
|                                                         | Frequency        | More than once                | 5 | 55.6  |
|                                                         |                  | One time                      | 4 | 44.4  |
|                                                         | Type of violence | Physical Violence             | 9 | 100.0 |
|                                                         |                  | Physical + Sexual violence    | 3 | 33.3  |

The participants have been most frequently exposed to physical violence (n=33; 97.1%) by their intimate partners so far and 23 cases applied to the judicial authorities for the implementation of

legal measures. The characteristics of the IPV that the participants have been exposed up to now are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** The characteristics of the IPV that the subjects have been exposed up to now

| Partner violence              |                           | n  | %    |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|----|------|
| Types *                       | Physical                  | 33 | 97.1 |
|                               | Emotional                 | 24 | 70.6 |
|                               | Economic                  | 20 | 58.8 |
|                               | Cyber                     | 10 | 29.4 |
|                               | Sexual                    | 8  | 23.5 |
| Frequency                     | One-time                  | 9  | 26.5 |
|                               | Everyday                  | 1  | 2.9  |
|                               | Once a week               | 8  | 23.5 |
|                               | Once in a month           | 4  | 11.8 |
|                               | Every 2-3 months          | 3  | 8.8  |
|                               | Once a year               | 5  | 14.7 |
|                               | Rarely                    | 4  | 11.8 |
| After the violence            | Application to the police | 27 | 79.5 |
|                               | Leave home                | 5  | 14.7 |
|                               | Admission to the hospital | 1  | 2.9  |
|                               | Nothing                   | 1  | 2.9  |
| Legal measures applied (n=23) | Removal                   | 15 | 65.3 |
|                               | Protection                | 3  | 13.0 |
|                               | Protection and removal    | 3  | 13.0 |
|                               | Not applied any measure   | 2  | 8.7  |

\* More than one answer could be given to this question

No statistically significant relation was between the types of IPV that the participants have been exposed to so far and their marital status, education level, income level, place of residence, having children, having a chronic disease, and using medication for depression and anxiety ( $p>0.05$ ). Also, there was no significant relationship between frequency of violence and marriage style, being married or not, length of marriage ( $p>0.05$ ).

The participants without a history of violence (from their partners or family members) were less exposed to sexual IPV significantly ( $p<0.05$ ). No statistically significant relationship was between other types of violence exposure and past history of violence ( $p>0.05$ ).

## Discussion

Although IPV is generally against women, victims and perpetrators can be both sexes. In an IPV study, 80% of the victims were women and 20% were men [11]. In the present study, the majority of the individuals (94.1%) were women. Unlike this study, in a study conducted in the United States, lifelong prevalence rates of IPV were similar for men (28.5%) and women (35.6%) [12]. These studies show that while IPV is a problem of female victimization,

it is a global problem that poses a threat to both sexes.

In this study, the average age of the participants was  $37.06\pm 10.02$ . In a study on women victims of IPV in Turkey, the average age was  $31.68\pm 7.15$  [13]. The studies indicate that victims of IPV are mostly young adults.

Lacey et al. showed that low income and education levels were important risk factors for IPV victims in terms of physical violence [14]. Besides, in some studies in Turkey, women with low education levels and who graduated from primary school were more exposed to IPV [15-17]. In contrast, Askin et al. indicated that the rate of exposure to physical IPV increased as the level of education increased [18]. In present study, illiterate individual is not found but approximately 1/3 of IPV victims graduated primary school and the level of education increased; there was a decreasing rate in the frequency of IPV. Although there are some studies with different results, it is indicated that individuals who have a low level of education have experienced violence more.

In Turkey, the lack of job opportunities, which is one of the factors that cause women to be dependent on men economically, is a situation that harms the prevention of IPV against women [18].

In this study, 22 (64.7%) of the IPV victims stated that they did not work and 17 of them did not have a monthly income, and the average monthly income was  $1410 \pm 1874$  TL ( $205.8 \pm 273.5$  \$). In another Turkish study with IPV women victims in 2016, the average income level of the victims was  $1195.30 \pm 798.53$  TL ( $174.4 \pm 116.5$  \$) [13]. Having an irregular job/income, low-income levels are among the risk factors of violence for the victim.

In a study comparing the marital relationship characteristics of those who were exposed to IPV and those who did not; determined that perpetrators were younger, the last marriage period was shorter and they married more with bride kidnapping or arranged marriage [19]. Also, in some Turkish studies, marriage with the arranged marriage method significantly increased the frequency of physical violence and physical violence was less common in couples with longer marriage periods [16, 20]. However, in an Indian study, as the duration of marriage increased, the rate of violence increased, too [21]. In this present study, more than half of the participants (58.8%) had married at least once, and the average marriage duration was  $9.62 \pm 9.04$  years. Besides, unlike the literature, more than 50% of IPV victims, who have married at least once until now, have married willingly. In line with these findings, in the present study, the condition of marrying unwillingly was not determined as a risk factor in terms of exposure to IPV. Also, there was no significant relationship between the types of marriage, whether they have been still married, the duration of the marriage, and the frequency of violence. The low number of participants in this study may be an effective factor in not establishing a relationship between the frequency of violence and marriage-related variables.

In the studies conducted with 92.4% of women victims of IPV in the women's shelter and with 88.68% of victims of IPV in Manisa were subjected to physical violence [13, 22]. Similar to the present study, the participants were exposed to physical violence mostly with 97.1%. This situation has been associated with that physical violence is the most common type of IPV that has resorted to judicial authorities.

In this study, the percentage of emotional violence exposure (70.6%) was similar (73.4%) to the study in the women's shelter [13]. This shows that even if the cases apply to the judicial authorities with physical IPV, it should not be forgotten that there may also be victimization of emotional IPV.

In a study in Turkey in 2009, 1.89% of the victims were exposed to economic IPV [22]. However, in the present study, the percentage of economic violence was 58.8%. Compared to the time when the studies were conducted, the rate of individuals experiencing economic IPV and their awareness about this type of violence may have increased in the past 10 years. In another study in 2016, the rate of being victims of economic violence is 58.2%, which is thought to support the increase in awareness and exposure to economic IPV over the years [13].

In the present study, cyber IPV was also questioned. In Domestic Violence Study against Women conducted in Turkey in 2014, 27% of women suffered persistent pursuit at least once, and the persistent form of stalking involving threats is most often applied by the spouse or former partner [23]. In this present study, 29.4% of the participants were exposed to cyber violence. Although there is no application to the judicial authority due to the victimization of

cyber IPV, this high rate suggests that cyber IPV is also an issue to be taken precaution and evaluated. Besides, awareness should be increased to prevent cyber violence because it is a less-known form of violence compared to other types of violence.

Referring to studies in Turkey, the percentage of sexual IPV in the general population was between 6.3-15.03% [2, 19]. Kutuk et al. observed that the percentage of sexual IPV was 24.53%. Similar to this study, the percentage of sexual IPV was 23.5% in the present study. An important finding of present study is that those without a history of violence (from their partners or family members) were less exposed to sexual IPV significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ). This is similar to a study which indicated that individuals who experienced violence in their family, exposure to IPV more than others in the future [24].

In a study performed in the Central Anatolian region, IPV was without a reason with 49.3%, and then the most common reasons were jealousy (20.9%) and after alcohol intake (10.5%) [25]. In present study in the West Anatolian region, IPV was without a reason with 8.8% and stated reasons were jealousy (8.8%) and after alcohol intake (2.9%). These proportional differences may result from cultural differences between the regions of Turkey.

IPV has been linked to many serious health problems in the near and long term [26]. In the present study, the participants were mostly diagnosed with depression (32.3%), and they used medication for depression before the violence that was the reason for the application to our Department. Tel et al. determined that women who were subjected to IPV had more mental or physical illnesses [25]. This shows that psychiatric findings are important for identifying risky groups, preventing violence, and following IPV victims.

In a review study, the experience of IPV of both men and women poses risks for mental health outcomes; there are many studies where post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety occur after IPV [27]. It was emphasized that having a psychiatric disease increases the frequency of experiencing violence, and at the same time, exposure to violence triggers the development of psychiatric disorders in women [28]. In present study, psychiatry consultations were requested, and 26.4% ( $n=9$ ) of the participants had a disorder that met the psychiatric diagnostic criteria based on the violent event. In a study in 2009, 59.43% of victims of domestic violence had a psychopathological finding [22]. Also, Tav et al. showed that 77.4% of IPV victims were diagnosed with depression [29]. The lower percentage in present study may be due to cases ( $n=6$ ) that did not apply to the psychiatry outpatient clinic despite having psychiatric complaints. Also, it was not clear whether violence caused illness or illness caused violence due to reasons such as some cases are victims of violence more than once and evaluation of some cases is too long after the violence.

Physical findings after violence can create a scale ranging from simple injuries to death [30]. Partner violence was reported by the WHO as the third-highest cause of death between the ages of 15-44 [7]. In present study, the presence of life threats was determined in only one case, and this is similar to another Forensic Medicine Department study [22]. In that study, 36.84% of IPV victims injured not mild enough to be resolved with a simple medical intervention, one case also had a scar on the face, and 6 victims had bone breakage in their body [22]. Those findings are similar

to present study. These similarities show that the injuries due to IPV have severe consequences and IPV is a very important health problem.

In a Turkish study, 30% of IPV of women victims had left their homes at least once as a result of violence and a large majority of victims (89%) have not applied to the relevant institutions or organizations [23]. Among the very low rate of applications, the highest number of applications was made to the police and 29% of them resulted in the reconciliation of the woman with her partner [23]. In the present study, 79.4% of the victims applied to the police after the violence, and approximately 50% of perpetrators were given a precautionary suspension. The reasons why these percentages were higher in this study were considered as the reports of IPV victims have been requested by the judicial authorities and in some of them, the reason for the application is not the first violence they experienced.

It was determined that 76.4% of perpetrators worked. This is similar to the findings in another Turkish study (86.6%) [25]. It was also observed that the number of unemployed people was higher in victims and the average income was quite low compared to their partners. So, low family income should be among the risk factors for IPV.

Alcohol abuse of perpetrators is highly and significantly associated with IPV [31, 32]. Also, personality traits, exposure to violence in childhood are shown as risk factors associated with IPV [21]. In the present study, 61.8% of the partners had alcohol intake. Besides, the fact that 50% of the perpetrators are in an incident that causes them to go to the police station except for the last violent incident, and about half of them being exposed to domestic violence as a child were considered as risk factors that should be examined in terms of perpetrators.

## Conclusion

IPV is an important health problem, especially for women. It is essential to prevent violence before occurring. Therefore, it is important to identify risk factors and risk groups. From the perspective of the victims; the majority of them are primary and secondary school graduates, the majority of them are housewives and not working, and their monthly income is lower than the monthly income of the partners are important risk factors. Therefore, it is seen as important protective measures to give more weight to policies across the state for girls to read and continue reading and to provide economic independence to women, and to increase job opportunities, considering that most of them are not working.

From the perspective of the perpetrators; having a history of domestic violence, criminal history, and alcohol intake are important risk factors. Comprehensive studies about the perpetrators and determining the measures to be taken are other important risk factors.

In cases where the occurrence of violence cannot be prevented, their psychological assessments and psychological support should not be forgotten in addition to the treatment of their physical injuries. Also, inform about the types of violence, how to get help and support after the violence, raising awareness of people about

their legal rights, and giving training on gender equality starting from the pre-school period are considered as important steps to be taken in this regard.

## Conflict of interests

*The authors declare that they have no competing interests.*

## Financial Disclosure

*All authors declare no financial support.*

## Ethical approval

*Local Ethics Committee of Ege University approved the study (Decision no:18-111.1T/11, date:03.12.2018).*

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