

Solidarity Issues in Gender-Based Violence against Women in Turkey

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Abstract

Gender-based violence against women is analyzed in this study in the context of its relation with solidarity patterns which enable the protection of family as an institution. The study argues that solidarity patterns which enable the protection of family as an institution through the violation of women's human rights are one of the dynamics of gender-based violence against women. The theoretical purpose of the study is to evaluate the concept of solidarity from a critical point of view in terms of the violation of the basic human rights and freedoms. The practical purpose of the study is to find out under which circumstances the solidarity patterns lead to gender-based violence against women. The findings obtained from the research in a women's shelter indicate that the solidarity patterns which lead to gender-based violence against women are constructed by bundles of relationships, including even women who are the victims of gender-based violence.

Keywords: Gender, Violence, Women, Family, Solidarity.

1. Introduction

Today in Turkey, gender-based violence (GBV) against women has reached such a serious level that even those who generally ignore the women's human rights cannot disregard it. Almost daily cases of femicide are the most concrete evidence of the current situation of GBV against women in Turkey. In fact, in parallel to the increasing number of cases of GBV against women, efforts to combat and to eliminate it have also increased, especially in recent years. In this context, new policies are established, new laws are implemented, lots of conferences, workshops, congresses etc. are held, lots of researches are conducted, lots of books and articles are written and published, at universities new programs on gender, and women's studies are opened and so on. However, remarkable results indicating that GBV against women is getting decrease have not been reached yet. On the contrary, unofficial statistics reveal that there is an increase in the number of femicide cases, ultimate form of violence against women (<https://kadincinayetlerinindurduracagiz.net/kategori/veriler?sayfa=1>).

So, the present situation can be explained like this: On the one hand, there is an increasing struggle to combat and to eliminate GBV against women, on the other hand there is an increasing number of cases of GBV against women. Then, it seems, there is a paradox here. How this paradox can be explained in a rational manner? What are the gaps between the studies on GBV against women and reality? How these gaps can be filled to find permanent and sustainable solutions for elimination of GBV against women? At this point, in order to find reasonable answers to these questions it might be useful to review the results of the previous researches on violence against women from a different point of view. In this context, some common results obtained from different researches on violence against women are summarized below:

- Men hold the power within the family as a reflection of patriarchal power relations in society. So, force/violence used by men against family members is legitimate in the event that it is considered necessary to do so (Rittersberger-Tılıç, 1998).
- Honor of family legitimizes the violence against women. Accordingly, a woman's "dishonorable behaviors" are not accepted and are shamed and blamed even by other women. Therefore, violence against women for their "dishonorable behaviors" is regarded as legitimate (Rittersberger-Tılıç, 1998; Başbakanlık Aile Araştırma Kurumu [AAK], 1995).

- Women victims of domestic violence generally try to keep their family together rather than move away. In some events, women victims of violence believe that they are responsible for the violence they suffer. Moreover, they accept and internalized violence and learn to live with it (İçli, 1994; AAK 1995; Rittersberger-Tılıç, 1998, Gülçür, 1999).
- In accordance with traditional gender roles, family members and relatives of women victims of violence persuade them to keep their family together (AAK 1995; Yıldırım, 1998; Gülçür, 1999; Başbakanlık Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü [KSGM], 2009).
- In accordance with a traditional common belief, violence within the family should be kept secret from outsiders (İçli, 1994; AAK, 1995; Rittersberger-Tılıç, 1998; Gülçür, 1999).
- Women victims of violence generally do not report the violence against them to the police. In some cases, battered women who called the police withdraw their complaints because of various reasons. Moreover, in most cases relevant institutions and officials responsible for the prevention of violence against women are unwilling to help the battered women. Instead, they persuade them to return their homes. (İstanbul Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Ceza Hukuku ve Kriminolojik Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi, 2003; Yıldırım, 1998; Gülçür, 1999; Sallan Gül, 2011).

Research results summarized above indicate some mechanisms, directly or indirectly, which lead to the production and/or reproduction of GBV against women. Accordingly, violation of family honor because of “dishonorable behaviors” of women can be a direct legitimate ground for GBV against women. Besides, encouragement of women victims of GBV by their relatives to stay at their homes and keep their family together can be an indirect legitimate ground for the reproduction of GBV against women. Then, for the argument of this study, these results can be explained at the same time as solidarity patterns which enable the protection of family through the production and reproduction of traditional family values leading to the violation of women’s human rights. So what is solidarity? How a concept which is almost always is used for explaining the situations related with harmony and unity rather than conflict and dispute can be used to explain the causes and effects of GBV against women?

2. The Concept of Solidarity as a Theoretical Background

The concept of solidarity, from a first impression, is associated with harmony, cooperativeness, and unity in every situation and for every person. In fact, solidarity is generally defined as a social cohesion and a cooperation and collective action for a particular purpose of a group (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1979). According to this definition, it can be said that no group can exist without solidarity relationships among its members and moreover solidarity has positive effects for both the group members and the group itself.

In line with these explanations on solidarity, it can be argued that so-called honor killing is an example of solidarity shown among the family members and relatives of the victim. The reason is that so-called honor killing is carried out through a decision taken jointly by the victim’s family members and relatives aiming to punish the victim for her/his “dishonorable behaviors” and to restore family’s honor. In this sense, cooperation and consensus among the family members and relatives are typical solidarity patterns which have positive effects for the family to the extent that the aim is achieved.

However, can it be possible to argue that this kind of solidarity has positive consequences in every situation and for every person? The answer of this question is definitely NO at least for those who believe that the basic human rights and freedoms are inalienable. Thus, it is thought that the concept of solidarity is not so innocent and therefore it should be analyzed from a critical point of view in studies on GBV against women in terms of the violation of women’s human rights.

3. Method

Since the common definition of the concept of solidarity firstly brings positive implications to mind it could be difficult to establish the relationship between GBV against women and the solidarity patterns which enable the protection of the family. Therefore, in this study the qualitative data analysis was used in order not to be misled by outward observation and in order to reach the reality hidden by “*deeper structures and forces that may lie unseen beneath the surface*” (Neuman, 2006). Accordingly, in this study, by using qualitative research method techniques, it was aimed to reach the unseen realities of the relationships between GBV against women and the solidarity patterns which enable the protection of the family as an institution.

Moreover, in the process of data analysis, the principle indicates that “*data analysis means a search for patterns in data—recurrent behaviors, objects, phases, or, ideas*” (Neuman, 2006) was taken into consideration. Thus, in this research solidarity patterns, in the form of recurrent ideas, behaviors and actions which enable the protection of family through the violation of women’s human rights were mainly searched. The data were collected through qualitative field research, in-depth semi structured interviews with 32 women staying in Çankaya Municipality Women’s Shelter. The real names of the interviewees were not given. Instead, nicknames were used. The interviewees were accepted as “*active participants whose insights, feelings, and cooperation were essential parts of a discussion process that reveals subjective meanings*” (Neuman, 2006). Accordingly, some interview questions were reviewed and updated during the field research in accordance with the specific evaluations of the women victims of violence related to their violence experiences. Thus, each interview and the field research itself was “*a joint production of*” (Neuman, 2006) the researcher and the interviewees.

4. Results

The interview questions were classified for data analysis in two main categories as violence and family. The subcategories of under the main category of violence were classified respectively as the definition, justification, and internalization of violence. The definition of family, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchal bargaining, patriarchal terrorism and coercive control, and learned helplessness were the subcategories of the main category of family. In this paper, some of the research results are summarized under three following categories:

4.1. Solidarity patterns produced by the family members and/or relatives of the women victims of gender-based violence

The interviewees were asked the reactions and attitudes of their family members and relatives to the violence they suffered. According to the answers, at least one family member or relative of the almost all the women victims of GBV persuades them not to leave from their home and keep their family together. One of the main reasons is that women have children. It means they are mothers. In addition, mothers should tolerate even the violence they suffer for the wellbeing of their children. Oya¹, 31 years old, with one child, describes shortly how her close relatives persuaded her not to leave her husband:

“... *Be patient, bear with him, endure the violence, you have a child...*” Rana, 34 years old, with four children, also tells how she was tried to convince not to leave her home by her family members and relatives:

“... *Tolerate him for the sake of your children. Wait until your daughters become brides and your sons complete their education...*” Sinem, 24 years old, with two children, describes a similar experience:

“... *My mother said, be patient my daughter, you have two children, be patient...*”

Another reason of trying to persuade the battered women to tolerate the violence and not to leave from their homes is based on some typical traditional values. That is a married woman first and above all is a wife rather than an independent individual. Therefore, the right place of a married woman is her husband’s home. And she must stay there even she is subjected to violence by her husband. Gönül, 28 years old, with one child, tells how her relatives tried to keep her family together:

“... *Let’s save this family, there is a child, there is a home, let’s save it and, let’s give his wife back to him...*”

Ela, 23 years old, with two children, explains how her mother and aunt did not pay attention to the violence she suffered from her husband and persuaded her to keep her family together:

“... *Firstly, I told my aunt, and she said, it is not so important, we are also beaten, what is the problem? Do whatever he wants. I said, no, I am not his slave. In addition, my aunt said, you will be [his slave], he is your husband, if he beats you even he kills you. Then I told my mother, and my mother said, it is not important, your father also beats me...*” Meltem, 31 years old, with two children, has similar experience with her sisters and brothers:

“... *My brothers and my sisters too, said, you went there [husband’s home] with your wedding dress and you will return with your shroud, this suits us...*”

The above explanations indicate that, convincing or forcing women victims of GBV by their family members and/or relatives not to leave their husbands and keep their family together lead to reproduction of violence against women.

¹ The names are not real.

However, the explanations also indicate that convincing or forcing battered women not to leave their husbands and keep their family together strengthens the traditional family values in the form of solidarity patterns which on the one hand enable the protection of the family but on the other hand reproduce violence against women. Accordingly, repetitive expressions like “*be patient*”, “*endure the violence*”, “*tolerate him for the sake of your children*”, “*let’s save the family*”, “*you went there with your wedding dress and you will return with your shroud*”, “*we are also beaten, what is the problem*” are considered as solidarity patterns which enable the protection of family through the violation of women’s human rights.

4.2. Solidarity patterns produced by the police responsible for prevention of gender-based violence against women

The interviewees were also asked the attitudes of the police when they call for help. According to the answers, 28 women out of 30 called the police for help at least once. The 20 women who called the police said some of the police officers have an attitude that GBV against women is a part of family relationships. Ece, 19 years old, with one child, explains her experience with the police:

“... I went to the police station. Most of the police officers there knew my husband. They asked me how I could endure him. But there was an old one. He said, you are a married woman, you should endure him. Today’s women leave their husbands for even just a slap...” Deniz, 34 years old, with two children explains the attitudes of the police toward her:

“... One day police officers came to our house for routine control. They asked me if I had any problem with my husband. I said no. In that time, my husband got better a little bit. One of the police officers said, what will you do if he does not get better? Do you have any financial power? No. So you should endure him...” Burçin, 23 years old, with one child, tells how the police officers tried to convince her to forgive her husband:

“... I didn’t go to the police station near our house. Because all the police officers there knew my husband and I was afraid that they called him. I went to another police station. The police officers in that police station said me to forgive my husband. They said, forgive your husband, you have a child... These kinds of events could occur in every marriage... The police officers tried to convince me to forgive my husband a lot of times and I was tired to say them no... I was so surprised and I thought whether if I relied on them or not...” Çiğdem, 22 years old, has also similar experience with the police:

“... I went to police. They said, you are a family, you are young, and you can solve your problems yourselves, return to your home... This is a small town and it would be better not to be heard your problems from the others...”

According to the law in force, “Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women,” the police as law enforcers, are authorized and are responsible for the prevention of violence against women. However, this research results indicate that in most cases the attitudes of the police toward the women victims of GBV do not comply with the provisions of the law in question. Unfortunately, the data obtained from the field research cannot directly explain why the police don’t take the necessary measures stated in the law in force to prevent the GBV against women. Nevertheless, within the framework of the explanations of the women victims of violence, it can be said that the police generally enforce the law in order to protect the family, as stated in the first part of the name of the Law rather than to take measures, which are clearly mentioned in the provisions of the law, to eliminate GBV against women.

Thus, in case the Law in question is enforced by the police to encourage the women victims of GBV to return to their homes where they suffer violence and to keep their family together, traditional family values which lead to violence against women are reproduced by solidarity patterns. Accordingly, repetitive expressions such as “*today’s women leave their husbands for even just a slap*”, “*you should endure him*”, “*forgive your husband, you have a child*”, “*these kinds of events could occur in every marriage*”, “*return to your home*”, “*it would be better not to be heard your problems from the others*” can be accepted as solidarity patterns which enable the protection of family through the violation of women’s human rights.

4.3. Solidarity patterns produced by the women victims of gender-based violence

The interviewees were asked if they think that they somehow deserve the violence to which they have been subjected. The answers were classified and evaluated in two groups:

1) According to the answers 18 women out of 31 at least sometimes think that they deserve the violence. Bade, 37 years old, with one child, explains how she tried to find fault with herself as an excuse for husband's violence:

"... At first, I always asked myself if I was guilty. Did he use violence against me because of my fault? I asked myself if I deserved it..." Rana, 34 years old, with four children, tells how she forced herself to find an excuse for her husband's violence:

"... At first, I thought that I was guilty, because I loved him. I thought maybe he was angry about something. His financial situation was not good, so maybe he was worried about it. Maybe I was guilty, maybe I made him angry ..." Gamze, 31 years old, with two children, explains how she legitimizes her husband's violence in an event that she thinks she is guilty:

"... I keep my silence if I know that I am guilty. I say, OK! I am guilty in this event. I say, I deserve it [violence]. And I keep my silence..." Banu, 28 years old, with two children, tells how she justified her husband's violence in certain cases:

"... He didn't like my parents. He didn't allow me to call my mother. Therefore, I usually called my mother without notice to him. One day when I was talking with my mother, he saw me and he beat me. I thought I deserved it. Because although he didn't want me to call my mother, I called her without notice to him ..."

Just like some of the other research results on violence against women, the results of this study also show that in certain cases violence against women is somehow justified even by the women victims of GBV. In addition, this justification provides a basis for production and reproduction of violence against women. It is also well known that there are some social, cultural, and economic reasons such as traditional family values, concern for children, financial dependence, behind the justification of violence by the battered women. However, whatever the reasons behind the justification of GBV against women the repetitive expressions such as *"I thought I deserved it [violence], "I keep my silence" "maybe I was guilty", "maybe I made him angry"* enable at the same time the protection of family by fostering traditional family values in the form of solidarity patterns which ultimately lead to violence against women.

2) According to the answers, 13 women out of 31 never think that they deserve the violence. However, there are some contradictions in their explanations. For example, the explanations of 10 women who said they never find themselves guilty for the violence they suffer give also an impression that in some cases women may deserve the violence. For example Ezgi, 44 years old, with four children, explains why she did not find herself guilty for the violence, she was subjected:

"... I never justified his violence. We [Ezgi and her co-wife] were perfect. At home we made everything perfectly. But we were nothing to him..." Gonca, 28 years old, with three children, also tells why she didn't think that she deserved the violence:

"... I never found myself guilty. I never thought like that. Because I did everything properly..."

Accordingly, although the women, who never find themselves guilty for the violence they suffer, carry out all their responsibilities in accordance with the requirements of the traditional gender roles, they suffer from violence. In addition, they find it unacceptable rather than the violence against women in general. Hence, it is thought that the explanations of the women who say they never think that they deserve the violence are not completely different from the explanations of those who sometimes think that they deserve it. Thus, it can be argued that the expressions such as *"I never justified violence, because at home we made everything perfectly", "I never find myself guilty, because I did everything properly"* enable the protection of the family as an institution by fostering the traditional family values which lead to GBV against women. In fact, the answers given to another question related to the justification of GBV against women verify the above evaluation on the attitudes of the interviewees toward the GBV against women. The interviewees were also asked their opinions about the women who behave "dishonorably" toward their husbands and their families. 8 women out of 24 stated, for example, if a woman cheats on her husband, this is an unacceptable "dishonorable" behavior and she deserves the violence in anyway. That is, she should be beaten at least. Gönül, 28 years old, with one child, explains in which cases violence against women is justified:

"... I am angry with that woman. If her husband doesn't beat her, she doesn't have any right to behave like this. I think she should be beaten, she should be beaten. There are a lot of women who cannot find a warm home..." Duygu, 26 years old, with two children, also agrees with Gönül:

“... She deserves the violence. Why she cheats on her husband? If I were her husband, I would have been beaten her. If I were her husband, I would have kicked seven bells out of her. If I were her husband, I would have kicked her to the curb. Why she cheats on her husband? She deserves the violence. She should be punished any way...” Pinar, 24 years old, with three children, explains why a woman who cheats on her husband deserves the violence:

“... She deserves the violence. I explain the reason. If she cheats on her husband although he is nice to her, although he doesn't beat her, although he is a perfect husband, she deserves the violence. As a woman, I can say that she deserves the violence. This is my opinion. I know that beating is not good. In that case, she deserves the violence. I think like this, it is not necessary to lie...”

The above explanations of the interviewees indicate that in certain cases GBV against women is justified even by the battered women. That is, it is not true that GBV against women is considered as unacceptable anyway by the women victims of GBV. Rather they think that women desire the violence for their “dishonorable behaviors” toward their husbands. Accordingly, repetitive expressions such as “*she deserve the violence*”, “*she should be beaten*”, “*she should be punished anyway*” can be accepted as solidarity patterns which enable the protection of the family by fostering traditional family values which lead to the reproduction of GBV against women.

5. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, GBV against women is one of the hot issues of women studies. In addition, in spite of all the efforts to eliminate GBV against women, the problem continues to increase. Of course, it is not easy to find only one and universal answer why the efforts to eliminate GBV against women give no results. Actually, it is not true that all the efforts to stop GBV against women give no results. Rather, within the limits of this research results, it can be said that the dynamics which lead, directly or indirectly, to GBV against women are more effective than the combat mechanisms used for the elimination of it. Accordingly, in Turkey, some of the traditional family values are one of the important dynamics which constitute a legitimate ground for the production or reproduction of GBV against women. Nevertheless, the policies established for the elimination of GBV against women are mainly focused on the protection of family without questioning its traditional values. In fact, the name of the law for the elimination of violence against women is “Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women”.

At this point, it can be argued that today in Turkey the struggle for the elimination of GBV against women is generally conducted within the limits of protection of family in accordance with the name of the law on violence against women. Moreover, it is also argued that family-oriented policies established for the elimination of GBV against women might help to foster traditional family values which lead to production or reproduction of GBV against women. For example, the identity of motherhood may become a very important obstacle in front of the women victims of GBV. Because, based on the traditional family values they are persuaded and/or forced by their family members and/or their relatives and even by the police not to leave their homes where they are subjected to violence for the sake of their children. In other words, since the women in family are accepted firstly as wife and mother rather than an independent individual, violence against them is considered as tolerable for the wellbeing of their children and for the protection of their family. In addition, this understanding opens a legitimate ground for the reproduction of GBV against women.

Based on the research results of this study it is thought that solidarity patterns, which enable the protection of family play an important role in production, reproduction, and also circulation of traditional family values which lead to GBV against women. The concept of solidarity, as a first impression, is associated with unity rather than dispute in every situation and for every person. And this impression constitutes an obstacle to analyze it from a critical point of view. However, solidarity, like in the cases of so-called honor killing, doesn't always have positive consequences in every situation and for every person, from the perspective of human rights and freedoms. In fact the possible negative consequences of solidarity is explained like this: “*Although the absence of solidarity is more often regarded as problematic than is its presence, nevertheless there are standpoints from which solidarity appears to pose a threat to individuals' autonomy, creativity and scope for being different*” (Crow, 2002). Therefore, as a conclusion, it is thought that the evaluation of the concept of solidarity from a critical point of view especially in the process of the questioning traditional family values can provide useful contributions for the permanent solutions to the GBV against women. For this purpose, Giddens's concept of “damaged solidarities” (Giddens, 1994) is suggested to be used in order to emphasize the negative consequences of the traditional family values which lead to GBV against women.

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GBV against women is one of the most important issues of women studies. However, it is quite difficult to conduct a field research on GBV against women. The reason is that, although GBV against women is a universal social problem, it is also directly related to the private life. Therefore, it is understandable that those who are the victims of GBV are unwilling to tell their violence experiences. Nevertheless, the data to be obtained from the women victims of GBV are strongly needed in order to find permanent solutions to the problem. Hence the author is very thankful to the women victims of GBV who stayed in Çankaya Municipality Women's Shelter during the field research and who accepted to be part of this study for their invaluable contributions. The author knows very well that this study could not have been accomplished without their contributions. The author is also thankful to the authorities and all the staff of Çankaya Municipality Women's Shelter for giving great importance to this study and for showing hospitality to the author.

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