# **WOMEN SURVIVORS’ PERSPECTIVES ON PERPETRATORS’ INVOLVEMENT IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTIONS**

*This study investigates Turkish women survivors’ lived experiences with perpetrator intervention processes in the United Kingdom (UK) by focusing on how their ex-husbands’ involvement in intervention efforts influenced their safety. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four Turkish women survivors. Two participants’ ex-husbands had attended therapeutic interventions for their violent and abusive behaviour. Two interviews were conducted with woman survivors whose ex-husbands had not involved in a specific intervention but got support from their relatives. Three key themes were emerged from the data: (1) obstacles to leaving a violent environment, (2) dilemma between the feelings of blame and being right, and (3) inadequate change during interventions. Participants reported their frustrations about waiting a log-period of time in leaving a violent environment as their divorce was often identified as a safety act. While participants were divorced during the time of the interviews were implemented, their relationship with their husbands had been continued due to their children. This article recognises Turkish women survivors’ perspectives and experiences around whether their ex-husbands actively involved in interventions by concentrating on how the men improved healthy and respectful relationship with their ex-wives. Thus, complex and sensitive experiences had been emerged within the participants’ migration status, class, gender, race and ethnicity.*

*Keywords: domestic violence, intervention, race, safety, survivors*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Domestic violence perpetrator programmes, therapeutic support and other intervention efforts are often beneficial for perpetrators to implement non-violent and positive behavioural patterns in their intimate relationships. Domestic violence perpetrator interventions attempt to provide safety for all family members by concentrating on the perpetrators’ behavioural change process. However, there are inconsistencies of the success among these interventions due to complex factors and characteristics of perpetrators of domestic violence. To have a better understanding of the effectiveness of these interventions, the survivors’ perspectives and experiences around their violent partners’ involvement in interventions can be valuable. Importantly, this study investigates Turkish women survivors’ perspectives about their ex-husband’s involvement in interventions in the UK by focusing on their safety and well-being. Importantly, it pays attention to how racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds impact on survivors’ help-seeking behaviour and safety.

The evidence around Turkish women survivors’ experiences in Europe within domestic violence literature was limited. However, some studies illustrate how survivors encounter difficulties in seeking help and being able to trust social justice system. For example, some studies found that Turkish women survivors did not feel safe or trust to report domestic violence in Germany (Benbow, 2015; İlkkaracan, 1996). Importantly, honour and shame were also associated with complex issues around reporting domestic violence in the Netherlands and Germany (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009). They also noted that the racial, ethnic, cultural and religious background was intersected with honour-based violence in Turkish communities in Germany. Importantly, Rostock and Berghahn (2008) paid attention to the importance of social policy makers’ efforts in understanding key issues of culture in reducing and ending domestic violence. They also suggested that social policy-makers should recognise honour-based violence in marginalised groups as a human right issue not a cultural practice.

Some scholars paid attention to patriarchal culture and honour dynamics in Turkish and Kurdish groups (Akpinar, 2003; Golge et al., 2016; Gursoy et al., 2016; İlkkaracan, 1996). For instance, Efe and Ayaz (2010) noted that adultery was important justification for intimate partner violence among some Turkish groups. Likewise, women survivors frequently encounter difficulties around seeking help through police stations and criminal justice systems because of justifications or acceptance of violence against women in many communities in Turkey (Golge et al., 2016; Kara, Ekici and Inankul, 2014). The similar findings were represented in police stations and mental health settings within European communities regarding survivors’ difficulties to accessing help (Childress, 2015; Larsen et al., 2012). As we can see both findings about patriarchal dynamics, both European and Turkish communities hold similar obstacles of survivors’ help seeking behaviour in relation to the male dominated cultures and justification of violent behaviour in police stations. This issue is common all culture and ethnic communities. Therefore, it is critical to explore Turkish women survivors’ experiences and viewpoints about their violent husbands’ or partners’ involvement in interventions process by focusing on survivors’ safety and well-being.

Although child safety is the most important priority of family members, leaving from a violent environment include many obstacles including the adverse experiences it could expose to the child (Tubbs and Williams, 2007). Moreover, Rhodes et al. (2010) describe when mothers wish to avoid calling the police to prevent their children from going through the court process, being placed in foster care or suffering trauma. According to Goolkasian (1986) and Vaddiparti and Varma (2009), a woman’s decision to stay is commonly a result of the perpetrators’ control and coercive behaviour. Morris and Gelsthorpe (2000) have pointed out that reporting violence to the police might be a last resort for many survivors. Thus, the literature documented that many interactions between a violent father and child increase harmful events and violence which will potentially negatively affect child development. If a mother attempts to leave her violent husband or partner, the violence is likely to escalate and the father may seek custody of the child to intimidate her (Hannah and Goldstein, 2010). Nevertheless, some mothers call the police when they perceive that the violence is negatively impacting their children (Rhodes *et al.*, 2010).

When women turn to the criminal justice system for restraining orders or called the police to counter intimate partner violence, they often find that the criminal justice system is responsive (Zeoli *et al.*, 2013). However, Zeoli et al. (2013) noted that when the criminal justice system did not support women, by denying a restraining order petition, they found that this increased the danger they faced from their partners. After separation, many mothers may want their ex-partners to be involved in their children’s lives and become better fathers. However, other mothers might not want their children to continue to have contact with their fathers (Areán and Davis, 2007). In both cases, custodial mothers and children appear to need to guide the process and be taken very seriously (Areán & Mederos, 2007). Therefore, when we acknowledge how difficult it is for survivors to flee from a violent environment, we can begin to understand how extreme the perpetrators’ abusive behaviour and other family circumstances have been. Despite these circumstances, Thiara and Roy (2010) found that 60% of the women had left a violent environment because they feared that a perpetrator would kill them or their children. This finding was based on the study of 200 women’s experiences commissioned by Women’s Aid in the UK.

Some studies focused on the survivors’ viewpoints on domestic violence perpetrator interventions to determine behavioural change outcomes (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Gregory & Erez, 2002). While the literature indicated the importance of domestic violence perpetrator intervention programmes for survivors’ safety, there is limited evidence around women survivors’ perspectives on the effectiveness of these programmes and the roles of criminal justice systems (Austin & Dankwort, 1999). This research concentrated on how Turkish women survivors perceive the ways in which their violent husbands had taken new actions to apply healthy and positive communication skills.

Mcginn et al., (2019) examined the survivors views and lived experiences about their ex-partners’ behavioural change process by focusing on how to improve domestic violence perpetrator programmes. They conducted interviews with 18 survivors of intimate partner violence whose partners completed perpetrator intervention programmes. While some participants stated ex-partners’ significant change behaviour, the structure and theoretical background of perpetrators interventions should be examined and long-terms treatments should be provided (Mcginn, Taylor and Mccolgan, 2019). There is a dearth of evidence around Turkish women survivors’ perspectives and experiences when their partners/husbands attend domestic violence perpetrator programmes or any therapeutic support for ending their abusive actions in the UK. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by presenting Turkish women survivors’ experiences.

### **METHOD**

Four interviews including two in person and two via telephone were conducted. These participants were described themselves as survivors who experienced domestic violence with their previous husbands. One man attended psychotherapy when his wife encouraged him to participate. One man also attended psychotherapy when the criminal justice system mandated him to attend. Two men also got support from older relatives to stop their abusive actions and mediate their intimate relationships. The interview questions were mostly open-ended questions about domestic violence history, the reasons for abuse and intervention processes. Also, interview questions concentrated on how their partners involved in interventions and took responsibility for finding alternative and healthy behaviour The interviews with women concentrated on three key parts: their views about their ex-husbands’ involvement in interventions, how they feel during the time their ex-husbands were in intervention by focusing on their safety, what were the experiences regarding their positions of motherhood and wife by focusing on their help-seeking behaviour in the UK.

While semi-structured interviews were implemented as the primary method, each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Two interviews were recorded in its entirety and two of them were taken notes during interviews. Two interviews were conducted in person and two were implemented via phone. Research questions were followed: how did Turkish women survivors seek help during domestic violence in the UK? How did participants feel about the men’s involvement in interventions? What was the level of safety the women felt during the time the men attended interventions?

**Table 1. Characteristics of the participants (Names are pseudonyms)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Age | Migration status | # of children | Time of marriage  | Type of interventions | Time period of intervention |
| Gul | 47 | UK citizenship  | 2 | 10 years | Family-based support | 2 years |
| Ece | 38 | UK citizenship | 2 | 4 years | Mandatory psychological therapy  | 1 year |
| Eda | 35 | UK citizenship | 1 | 8 years | Psychotherapy self-referred  | 2 weeks |
| Canan | 30 | UK citizenship | 1 | 5 years | Family-based support | 3 years |

As set out in Table 1, two of the women (Eda and Canan) moved to the UK for marriage purpose. On the other hand, Gul and Ece moved to the UK when they were children. Type of interventions were identified based on the participants’ descriptions. For example, two participants shared how they attempted to stop violent and abusive relationship by seeking help from older family members. This type of help was described as family-based support. One participant’s ex-husband was mandated to attend psychotherapy. Eda’s ex-husband participated in therapy sessions when she encouraged him and made efforts to find appropriate Turkish therapist.

The thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006) were used. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed. The trustworthiness of this research was ensured by triangulation and self-reflection. This research considered participants’ conflicts, pauses, overlaps and the body language to recognize their unspoken emotions, views and worries (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). These considerations and applying reflexivity are likely to increase the reliability of the data analysis and results.

## **RESULTS**

Three key themes were emerged from the data. These are (1) obstacle to leaving a violent environment, (2) dilemma between the feelings of blame and being right, and (3) inadequate change during interventions. These key themes are associated with women’s safety at home and well-being, women’s getting a job and the feelings of ambiguity about the men’s behavioural change. The majority of women held level of blame that was linked to the feeling of guilt. The feelings of blame themselves was related to experiencing stigma in the community. Importantly, women survivors’ lived experiences around how domestic violence perpetrators intervention efforts were linked to their safety and well-being. As many women survivors were also mothers, it was critical to analyse the mother survivors’ positions in leaving violent environment regarding children’s well-being. To have a better understanding of the women’s complex experiences around domestic violence interventions process, mother survivors’ seeking help process was critical. Therefore, it was investigated how women survivors experience their ex-husbands’ participation in domestic violence interventions by focusing on its influences of their well-being. However, all women identified their ex-husbands’ lack of change during interventions. When they did not feel safety regarding men’s behavioural change process, they made a decision to divorce for their safety and well-being. Racial, ethnic and cultural background were also important dimensions around help-seeking process.

## **Obstacles to leaving a violent environment**

Social pressure from family members and relatives was one of the key obstacles of fleeing from a violent environment. Importantly, women’s hope of their husbands’ behaviour change, the level of trust to the husband, lack of self-esteem, limited knowledge about women’s rights in the UK, and lack of information about available services for them were also important elements in leaving a violent environment. Challenges in leaving him based on the family members’ pressure were identified. As Gul said that:

 I could not leave if I did not recognise how this violent relationship damage my children. So, it was difficult for me to accept violent environment until that moment (recognising the consequences of violence on children’s lives).

Even though participants stayed in a violent environment for years, they also tried to gradually punish him or give such warnings to reduce and stop violence. For example, Eda mentioned that:

 After three years, everything was fell down [tüm ipler koptu]. There was no wife-husband relationship in my third year of this abusive marriage. To be honest, I had already stopped sexual relationship before divorce because I have punished him.

As seen the above quote, the participant emphasized how her marriage ended and she came to make a decision of leaving a violent environment. Similarly, Gul mentioned how his ex-husband was getting dangerous for not only herself but also her children:

 When my children witnessed domestic violence, I decided to divorce him. It was the most significant reason for divorce. I did not want to receive alimony from him as he was not able to afford it. This request made the divorce be easier and the criminal justice system did not refer him to go to any intervention programme; therefore, we quickly divorced.

Half of the participants felt fear of losing their children if they reported domestic violence. They were not aware of their legal rights in the UK. For example, Ece stated that:

 I was scared to report violence because of the fear of losing my children. Even though I moved to London when I was 16, I did not know my legal rights about domestic violence. I did not know where I should go and report to end violent relationship. After my health problems raised, the doctor referred me to the psychologist. During psychotherapy, I learned my rights and I reported violence. I was also fearful in terms of being in a foreign country.

As we can see the above quote, being aware of legal rights in a country hold different rules from their home country was very critical in reporting violence.

##  **Dilemma between the feelings of blame and being right**

The dilemma between the feelings around being blamed or being right was the one of the most important themes emerged from the data set. The majority of the women hardly recognised they were right to leave a violent environment. Although the majority of the women left their husband after a long period of time, they still felt some level of blame based on their words. During the interviews, they questioned themselves whether they were right about what they did or they had to do. This illustrates the strong stigma and how the relatives and community members forced them stay in a violent environment. In considering these feelings and community pressure around not leaving a violent home, they experienced the ambiguity of being totally right to seek support or divorce their husband. For example, Eda stated that:

 It [abusive relationship] had been taken for three years. I had thought about being divorced for three years. However, all people from his family members told me to be patient for the sake of my daughter. In that way, I had been patient for a year. In second year, my mom said that do not break your family; because she had raised me without my father. She told me that give him a chance regarding your daughter’s well-being.

The situation of leaving the husband was often perceived as selfish act in a patriarchal community since they think that women should stay even though the men act violently. When women and children leave the men or divorce situations happen, these issues frequently encouraged the men to attend interventions. During this intervention, half of the women reported their feelings of being blamed and limited self-esteem about their rights. The level of blame herself and not making sure that violent behaviour was about his responsibility impacted her leaving a violent environment.

While the men’s participation in interventions was beneficial in reducing violent behaviour, the women’s attendance in counselling services was also important for women’s well-being. In this research, the women did not attend regular therapy sessions and this lack of support impacted on their well-being in negative ways. For instance, one participant, Gul kept telling how she was not acting wrong or made any mistake. This narrative illustrates how she needed to be validated that she was not wrong and all was about him. Thus, class, migration status and social and cultural background were important themes in understanding her lack of knowledge and awareness about available services for her well-being. For example, Eda stated that:

 We went to the therapy together [Eda, her husband and daughter]. For example, I and my daughter spent some time at playground when he was in the therapy. My goal was to support him.

Importantly, Eda also shared her feelings around ambiguity about whether the problem was about him and his violence:

 If the therapist wanted me to attend the sessions, I would have attended, but he/she [the therapist] did not request such things. Therefore, the problem was about him.

The majority of participants shared how their safety was established when they left their ex-husbands. Many participants also stated how they feel guilty regarding their late leaving a violent environment. However, their final feelings about their ex-husband’s behavioural change process was not positive as they believed that their husbands did not change. This could be about staying in a violent home in a long-time.

* 1. **Insufficient change during interventions**

The majority women shared how they ended their marriage due to violence by divorcing. Regarding their ex-husbands’ involvement in intervention process was associated with their high rate of drop-outs and lack of complete change behaviour. For example, Eda stated that how her ex-husband dropped-out of the sessions:

 He blamed the therapist about how she did not understand his words. He only attended couple of session with my encouragement. However, he did not change at all in few sessions.

As we can see the above quote, the man did not consistent attending sessions. Moreover, the participants noted that how they lost trust to the men’s words regarding their behavioural change process. For example, Ece shared how her ex-husband kept telling how he changed but he was still unrespectful her choice of divorce:

 We divorced but he kept telling me how he changed and begged me to come back to him during his child visitations.

The majority of participants mentioned their feelings of hopelessness about their intimate relationship linked to their ex-husbands’ insufficient healthy and respectful behaviour during interventions. However, all participant noted that after they divorced their ex-husbands, the men did not act violently towards them:

 After we divorced, I never experienced violence from him again as he was getting accepted the situation and his wrong acts somehow.

Being divorced was associated with their feelings of safety. This safety situation was also related to the men’s participation in interventions as well as being divorced.

Whether being in in the UK was associated with positive experiences regarding opportunities was not consistent result among participants’ stories. For example, one participant stated how being in London was an advantage in receiving more support from social services and psychologists. Moreover, she highlighted how making decision of divorce in Turkey was much more hold cultural pressure from society. On the other hand, she noted that this pressure did not exist in London. Therefore, being in the UK helped her to take action and divorce. For instance, Gul noted that:

 As my main goal was to protect my children and their safety, the criminal justice systems and human rights gave me rights and solutions about domestic violence here (in the UK). They supported survivors more than in Turkey, because there is no societal pressure in divorce cases. I did not feel any pressure in London, but when I involved in Turkish communities, I felt a little pressure. However, I was also afraid of the calling police at the beginning of violent acts.

While the above quote illustrated how she benefitted from her position of being in the UK, one participant shared their negative experiences in social services and criminal justice system. As Ece stated:

 After I reported violence and went to the court, he started to tell more lie. He also stole money at the house. He started to much threat how to kill me if I divorce him. He never accepted the divorce and hoped to come together again. Being in London did not give me extra benefits. Domestic violence services’ lack of follow up my issue after divorce was frustrating. Moreover, during my seeking help in domestic violence unit was also awful as I experienced bad counselling as someone stated that I might lose my children in the process. However, my family was the most powerful support in recovering my psychological issues and getting new job.

As seen the above quote, she did not receive appropriate support from domestic violence unit and felt fearful about losing her children due to the counsellors’ words. However, we can see how her family support was helpful for them to recover their stressful and traumatic experiences. Police and social services were not the powerful support systems in ensuring her safety. According to the women survivors’ accounts, perpetrators often mentioned how they wanted to seek help but they did not take any action for behavioural change. For example, Ece mentioned:

 He received mandatory psychological support for 12 months. He probably needed to receive this support more time. In his support, he argued that he changed and convinced me back to him. During the contact with children, he tried to learn my new phone number. This issue influenced negatively my relationship with my children as he never acknowledged the divorce and he took many attempts to back to me. He constantly stated that how he changed and praise himself but I did not see any behaviour change.

Family-based support was unhelpful process and half of the participants stated how they tried to encourage their ex-husband to attend psychological support or any interventions. As Gul shared this issue:

 I wanted him to go to the psychologist and seek help for his violent behaviour. However, he did not accept to seek help at all. He did not acknowledge that he had a problem.

This issue of not accepting their violence as wrong acts was very common among perpetrators of domestic violence. When they fail to accept their problem, they did not take any actions which frequently resulted in divorce. Many women shared the divorce was the only choice for them to leave from a violent relationship.

## **DISCUSSION**

The majority of participants stated that a reduction in abuse did not mean that the abuse had permanently ceased regarding child contact or visitations. While being divorced was identified as providing safety space for them, they did not stop dealing with their ex-husband abusive actions due to their children contacted their fathers. On the other hand, a few participants shared how they started to safe after the divorce was accepted by their ex-husbands. Ongoing abuse, experiencing severe violent acts, recognising children’s vulnerable positions, getting aware of the consequences of violence, contacting with general practitioner, increasing their knowledge about women’s rights and feelings less pressure comparing to Turkey are identified as important conditions around help-seeking behaviour. Many researchers noted that marginalised ethnic survivors frequently experience extra obstacles in their help-seeking process (Burman and Chantler, 2005; Chronister and Aldarondo, 2012; Guruge and Humphreys, 2009; Lee, 2000; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002; Parmar et al., 2005; Sharma, 2001; Yoshihama and Mills, 2003). Schröttle and Ansorge (2009) also pointed out how women’s dependence on their partners or husbands and a tolerance of male violence impacted many survivors’ help-seeking behaviour in Germany.

Almost all participants mentioned that interventions were not helpful as their ex-husbands were not willing to take new actions or complete any domestic violence interventions. Moreover, many men thought that they did not have a problem. According to women’s accounts, he main reason for not regularly attending interventions was associated with not accepting their wrong acts. Therefore, many women shared their distrust about the men’s ending their abuse. They highlighted how this increased their unwillingness to return their ex-husbands. As discussed in the literature, the majority of women survivors’ partners has stopped their physical violence, but women survivors frequently faced psychological abuse such as the threat of physical act (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Edleson & Syers, 1990). Therefore, women’s safety included more complicated and sensitive issues regarding domestic violence perpetrators interventions.

Women’s awareness about legal rights about seeking help or reporting violence was critical finding in this study. Similarly, Austin and Dankwort, (1999) paid attention to how women’ knowledge about abuse as well as social services’ role of validating their feelings are critical to provide safety. Therefore, social services play a significant role in enhancing women survivors’ safety and offering information about domestic violence by concentrating on their trust to the services. In this sense, women survivors can be empowered by recognising their strengths in leaving violent environment by using their legal rights (Austin and Dankwort, 1999). Gregory and Erez, (2002) examined perspectives of women survivors whose partners have been attended battered intervention programs through court-ordered by focusing on how these programs impact on himself and family members. 33 in-depth interviews with women survivors were implemented in order to investigate their viewpoints and experiences during the time period their partners attended interventions and before and after they attended. (Gregory and Erez, 2002)

# **LIMITATIONS**

The sample size of this study was the major limitation as the obstacles around accessing women survivors from marginalized population was consistently reported in the literature. Importantly, many women survivors’ husbands or partners frequently fail to attend domestic violence interventions. Due to these reasons, the sample size included four women survivors from Turkish groups in the UK. Another limitation was about not recording all participants’ interviews due to their consent. However, taking notes and applying theoretical framework provided triangulation for credibility and validity of the data.

# **CONCLUSION**

The participants shared how they felt blamed and vulnerability in seeking help when the initial stage of domestic violence. Their previous husbands attempted to stop their violence by applying different approaches. For example, two of them tried to get help from relatives and two of them attended psychotherapy to stop their violence and reunion of their family. All of them included their own specific conditions, experiences and responses. However, the major common issue was about the ambiguity of safety that women felt when their ex-husband attended interventions as they shared how their children and this mutual situation were the most important issues to increase the conflict in terms of visitations. This study emphasises that how racial, ethnic, and cultural background impacted on women’s help-seeking behaviour as well as the men’s behavioural change process among Turkish groups in the UK. This finding can be applied other marginalised ethnic population in the cases of domestic violence.

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