Chapter 5

Unveiling the Portrayal of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the Media:
Insights From an Honor Culture

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) against women is a pervasive global issue. The media plays a significant role in shaping society's perceptions and understanding of IPV. This study focuses on the representation of femicide in Turkish newspapers, with a specific focus on the context of Turkey as an honor culture characterized by a distinct emphasis on female sexual purity and male dominance. Honor cultures often justify violence against women in the name of preserving honor. This research aims to investigate how newspapers depict honor-based IPV through quantitative analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, and frame analysis of femicide cases. The findings reveal that newspapers frame IPV within an honor culture by victim-blaming and justifying men's violent behavior. Additionally, news coverage often portrays honor-based IPV as isolated incidents, failing to recognize its reflection of the broader honor culture. These portrayals inadvertently perpetuate and legitimize IPV, discouraging women from seeking assistance and support.

INTRODUCTION

The analysis of violence against women in the media holds significant importance due to its broader societal implications beyond individual relationships. Through mass media, individuals are exposed to acts of violence and influenced by their portrayal (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). The media's reporting style

and presentation of violence play a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions of such acts. While the media is not the primary cause of violent behavior, it has the potential to impact people's attitudes and responses to violence against women, potentially exacerbating its effects and providing justifications for such behavior (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013). Therefore, alongside addressing the underlying causes of violence, it is crucial to examine its portrayal in the media to effectively combat this issue. Hence, this paper aims to investigate how violence against women is depicted in the media, with a specific focus on intimate partner violence (IPV) in Turkey. Turkey is characterized as an honor culture with a strong emphasis on patriarchy (Sakallı-Uğurlu & Akbaş, 2013) and has experienced a rise in the number of incidents of violence against women (the Digital Monument Counter, anitsayac.com). Given this context, this study will explore media representations of violence against women from an honor-based perspective.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is formally defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012; 2021) as behavior occurring within an intimate relationship that inflicts physical, sexual, or psychological harm, encompassing acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors. This definition applies to violence perpetrated by both current and former spouses and partners (apps.who.int).

According to the WHO, IPV against women is a pervasive global issue affecting individuals worldwide (2012, 2018). Their estimates indicate that 27% of women, aged 15 to 49 (referred to as the reproductive age group), who have ever been in a partnership, have experienced physical and/or sexual IPV at least once in their lives (2018). However, IPV against women is not confined solely to this particular age group; rather, it is prevalent across all age groups (Roberto et al., 2013). Turkey, specifically, exhibits alarmingly high rates of IPV against women. WHO records (2018) show that 32% of women in Turkey, aged 15 to 49, reported experiencing lifetime IPV (see also Boyacıoğlu, 2016; Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, 2015). Furthermore, these records indicate that Turkey has the highest rates of IPV in Europe.

This paper will specifically focus on physical violence instances committed by an intimate partner that results in death in Turkey. Research on Domestic Violence Against Women (VAW) conducted in Turkey reveals that 36% of women have been subjected to physical violence at least once in their lifetime (Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, 2015). Between the years 2010 and 2022, a total of 4,205 women in Turkey lost their lives due to various reasons, including jealousy, divorce requests, suspicion of infidelity, and disputes (the Digital Monument Counter, see anitsayac.com).

Numerous studies conducted globally and specifically in Turkey have aimed to identify the underlying causes of violence against women (e.g., Flood & Pease, 2009; Sakallı, 2001). Various factors have been associated with domestic violence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012), individual factors (such as substance abuse and acceptance of violence), relationship factors (including relationship conflict and male dominance), and community and societal factors (such as weak legal sanctions against IPV and gender-inequitable social norms) are considered causes and risk factors for IPV on a global scale (p. 4). Similarly, Boyacıoğlu (2016) summarized the factors associated with violence against women in Turkey, including demographic variables, personality traits, alcohol and substance use, childhood abuse, victim-blaming, attitudes toward divorce, lack of social support, low status of women in society, migration, media influences, sexism, and the presence of an honor culture. In this paper, we will specifically focus on honor driven IPV.

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